

1901

HMS Pembroke

January 1st

The first day of the 20th century. The weather was not as it should have been, but cold, bleak and rainy. I had to leave by the first train this morning to return to 'Pembroke' and so my introduction to the new epoch was not very cheering.

January 19th

Illness of Queen Victoria. Startling news appeared in the papers concerning HM the Queen. It is reported that she is suffering from nervous prostration and is very seriously ill, which news has caused considerable alarm throughout the world. At her advanced age, such an illness is critical.

January 20th

Queen Victoria. The news of the Queen's illness is not encouraging, and people are going as far as to say that there is no hope of her recovery, but the most sanguine trust that her strong contribution may prevail. The Royal Family has been summoned to Osborne House and the Emperor William of Germany arrived in London this morning having given up his bicentennial coronation ceremonies in order to visit his beloved grandmother, an act which has considerably raised him in the estimation of the British people.

January 21st

Queen Victoria. The intelligence in the morning papers sent a pang through every heart of the Empire. The Queen is said to be beyond hope, and everyone anxiously awaits news of the inevitable. Captain MacLeod, who is an ADC, received a telegram in the forenoon from Osborne, announcing that Her Majesty was 'sinking fast'. The word was passed through the depot and cast a general gloom over everything. The effect on the bluejackets was very marked for there is not a more loyal set of men to be found, and they looked upon the Queen with the greatest veneration. It was the evening that we should hear that she had passed away, but there was a slight rally and although there is no hope of recovery, she regained consciousness and was able to communicate with the Royal Family.



Post-mortem portrait of Queen Victoria on her deathbed

January 22nd

Death of Queen Victoria. The morning telegrams announced that there is absolutely no hope for the recovery of Her Majesty, and the end was to be shortly expected. Everyone was much shocked at this intelligence, although nothing else could be hoped for. The illness of the Queen, however, came on so very suddenly, and she has always been so free from ill health that it was hard to realise that at last she was near death. Soon after we had sat down to dinner I was called out to see a defaulter, being officer of the day, and then I was told the sad news had been received that Queen Victoria was no more. The end came at about 6:25 PM and was painless and peaceful. I announced the painful tidings to the Mess President, and for the first time in over 63 years, the health of Her Majesty was not drunk. The universal grief expressed in all was most noticeable. People all seemed to personally know the Queen, although many had never seen her, and her loss is felt in the same manner as that of a near relative. Already thousands of telegrams from every corner of the world have been received expressing profound sympathy, and all the foreign nations and the unanimous in agreeing that not only Great Britain but the world have sustained an irreparable loss. It seems hard to realise that the great Victorian era is now at an end.

God save the King

January 23rd

Dismal appearance of London. It was stated in the papers that the Proclamation of King Edward VII would be read in various parts of London today, and so I decided to go to town to hear it read at Saint James'. Everybody and everything looked very mournful and people were already in mourning. Flags half mast, shutters up in the shops, deep mourning lines in the papers, etc; there is no lack of manifestation of the nation's grief. Upon arrival in London I found that a crowd had already gathered opposite St. James' and so took up my stand there. We were all doomed to disappointment for after a long tedious wait for three hours we heard the proclamation would not be read till tomorrow.

However, I had a glimpse of the new King as he drove into the palace, having come from Osborne this morning. There was a feeble cheer as he passed, but the crowd was most decorous and sympathetic. The King has decided to style himself King Edward VII, the name of Albert he has decided to forgo so that his father's name may remain 'Albert the Good'. His title seems to have given much satisfaction. Returned to Chatham for dinner and drank the King's health afterwards for the first time.

January 26th

Reading of the Proclamation. In the afternoon, the Proclamation was read in the Marketplace, Warwick, by the Mayor (Alderman Glover). A dais was placed in the north corner of the square on which the Corporation was gathered. The 6th Regiment District Band was also in attendance. There was a good crowd of people considering the state of weather, which was most incredibly wet. A great many came from Leamington. After cheers for the King, the crowd dispersed.

January 27th

Stamp collection. Attended service at Saint Mary's, Warwick, which was rather mournful. The Canon preached an excellent sermon on the late Queen, and after the service the Deadmarch in Saul was played on the new organ and sounded magnificent. After lunch, Oliver and I went to Bert's house and cracked a bottle of port to drink success to the King. We also went over stamps together in which I have lately taken a vast interest. I managed today to secure from John, a collection of old stamps collected by my second cousin Miss Mary Tibbits, some of which seem valuable.

February 1st

The funeral of HM Queen Victoria – Spithead. The first part of the funeral of the late Queen took place today, the remains being removed from Osborne House to Portsmouth. The above plan shows the fleet moored and also the positions of the foreign ships which took part in the sad ceremony. The coffin was conveyed by the Royal Yacht 'Alberta', which was escorted by the Portsmouth Flotilla of Destroyers. Minute guns were fired by each ship during the progress of the procession. The spectacle, according to all accounts, was most impressive and imposing, and the weather fine. It seems very appropriate that the 'Mistress of the Seas' should be escorted to her last resting place by the representative ships of her vast fleet. The 'Alberta' with the royal coffin on board remains at Portsmouth for tonight, together with the 'Victoria and Albert' in which are the Royal family.



The Alberta with the bier entering Portsmouth Harbour



'A prohibition on photography has meant that images of this special train are very rare, which makes this glass plate exposure particularly valuable. It thought to have been taken at Carshalton'. Taken from [the Dorking Museum](#)

February 2nd

Funeral of Queen Victoria - London.

Officers of both Services were allotted a position in the Mall (St James's Park) in front of the lines of the sentries, from which to view the procession and so, having turned out in full dress, I took up my position at 9:15, vast crowds having already assembled. There were many hundreds of officers present both of army and Navy and also Volunteers, Militia, Yeomanry, etc. and it was interesting to note the various uniforms.

Unfortunately, however, the day being bitterly cold, the soldiers received orders to wear their greatcoats and so the effect was thereby marred. We were ordered to take great coats, but there was no order about wearing them, and therefore no naval officer did so, neither did the seaman taking part in the procession. We had a long and tedious wait of about two hours before the process was formed and ready to start, but there were many incidents to distract the attention. Lord Roberts appeared occasionally and was cheered quietly, but suppressed it by waving his baton. Some men caused intense amusements by attempting to climb trees in order to get a better view. Some were successful, but others performed the most extraordinary antics in their efforts to obtain a foothold. At last the order was given for the procession to start, the coffin having been conveyed from Portsmouth to Victoria, where I arrived shortly before 11:00 AM. The head of the procession was in Saint James' Street owing to its enormous length, and so I

did not see the front part of it, which included the Warwick Yeomanry who were, I am told, looking very smart. Immediately the procession started there was a great hush in the crowd, followed by dead silence and the behaviour of the millions of people assembled was a thing never to be forgotten. The Bluejackets were immediately in front of the coffin and were marked much admired. They certainly marched splendidly. Nearly everyone was visibly affected as the gun carriage with the dead Queen passed. It was drawn by cream coloured ponies trapped with gold and scarlet. The gun carriage with a board over the gun on which the coffin rested was painted khaki and fitted with rubber tyres. It was beautifully simple. The coffin was covered with a magnificent white silk pall embroidered with the royal arms on which was laid the crown, orb and sceptre. After it came the King, German emperor, etc. (see programme) followed by the other European potentates. I had a magnificent, magnificent view of it all being in the front row of the officers and was quite close to the King when he passed. When the procession had gone by, the word passed by someone for the officers to follow behind, and so about 500 of us did so. The majority of these, I think, thought that it would be the easiest way of getting to their homes, clubs, etc; the troops having orders to keep the route until half an hour after the procession was passed. Many therefore broke off in Piccadilly but I, in common with others thought best to follow on, especially as it was a thing of a lifetime. This we did and I walked through the whole route and to Paddington Station. Or action was criticised afterwards by some, but I maintain that we were quite right.

[Insert of procession]

The dignity of the precession, however, could not have been enhanced by our appearance, for there was no sort of order kept, and many of the public got mixed up with us. I shall never forget the sight, in passing the streets. The dense masses in the streets and the houses and the absolute quietness of it all. It only showed with what reverence the British public regarded the Queen. As I was passing up Edgware Road I saw Arthur *[note – brother]* who was astonished to see me walking behind and had good reason to be. Upon arrival at Paddington the troops made a gangway for us and no objection was raised towards us going into the station. We drew up along the edge of the platform, alongside of which was standing the royal train. Here took place the most impressive part of the ceremony, viz the removal of the coffin to the train and its departure. The King, German Emperor and Duke of Connaught stood immediately in front of us and to the strains of the Dead March, which was magnificently played, the coffin was lifted into the train by guardsmen. A special carriage had been prepared by the GWR in which was a compartment with a raised cupola painted purple. After the Royal mourners had taken their seats, the train left without making a sound for Windsor. On arrival here (we learnt afterwards) a most extraordinary and somewhat painful event happened. A team of horses had been in readiness for some time to draw the gun carriage with the coffin. Owing to want of forethought in not exercising them,

they became restive and cold, so that when they were harnessed to the carriage, one of them in particular became so furious that it was thought at one time that the coffin would have been capsized. There was much consternation, and it was at length suggested that the horses should be removed and the guard of bluejackets substituted. Drag ropes were soon found and improvised and the bluejackets, proud of the great privilege which fell so singularly upon them, hauled their late Queen up to the Castle. It seems so appropriate that this should be the ending of the great funeral. The Navy, the strength of the country, escorted the 'Mistress of the Seas' both from her home across to Portsmouth and to her home at Windsor. The whole arrangements, with the exception of the last incident, were gone through without a hitch, but it appears that there was some fault at Windsor, for the seamen who drew the coffin never had a morsel of food from the time they left Portsmouth in the early morning until their return late in the evening. In London, in spite of the enormous number of troops engaged in the streets, the commissariat arrangements were most satisfactory. There being no cabs, I had to walk back to Margaret Street from Paddington Station, and appeared to excite some notice in the crowd who, I suppose, do not often see a naval officer in the streets in full dress. I heard several remarks passed such as 'Admiral', 'Andy Man', '4.7 gun' etc, which were rather amusing.



The Funeral Cortège being pulled by the sailors, pauses for a moment just past The Guildhall on its way to Park Street, the Long Walk, and up through the castle grounds to St George's Chapel. 2nd February 1901.

February 4th

Internment. The remains of HM the Queen were finally deposited today in the mausoleum at Frogmore, alongside those of her lamented husband, Albert the Good.

February 5th

Appointment to HMS Rattler. In the forenoon I was presented with a telegram by an orderly, which turned out to be from Wonham (Secretary's Clerk), who is in the Admiral's Office in Sheerness, congratulating me on my appointment to command of the gunboat 'Rattler'. I was intensely surprised and overjoyed at my good fortune, and I could hardly believe that it was true. Having been in the depot for five months, I had begun to think that I was forgotten. I am extremely lucky to get a command at my seniority and I am the most junior lieutenant who has ever been given one of these ships, having only just completed seven years.

February 6th

Leave. Having obtained leave on the strength of my appointment, I went home today to get a little time before going away. They were all very much pleased at home about my appointment, but were rather concerned when they heard that the 'Rattler' is commissioning for three years on the African station.

February 11th

Leaving home. I decided that I would leave home today as I have much to do, but it was with great reluctance that I could make up my mind to do it. I arranged to go after tea and was going to leave the house without anyone's knowledge to avoid the wrench of parting. However, it did not come off, but Lucy very sensibly went out to tea, which was the best thing she could do. Leaving home at the best of times is a painful thing to go through, but especially so in the present instance, for I do not expect to see my dear Mother again judging from her present condition. But I managed to get through it somehow. Ida came to the station with me, which was most brave of her considering the state of her feelings.

February 13th

Left HMS Pembroke

HMS Rattler

14th February

Commission HMS Rattler. Broke the pendant at 9:00 AM and hoisted the colours and thus put the ship in commission. The crew arrived about 9:30 and were told off for their

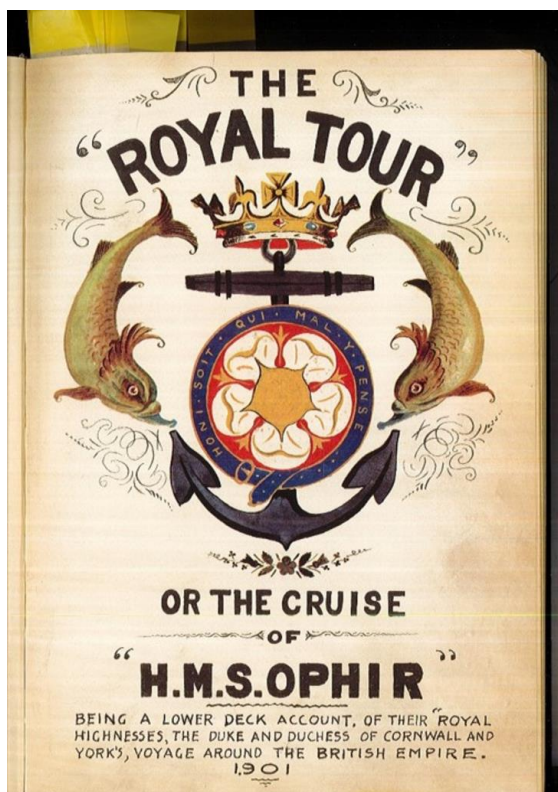
stations etc. They are drawn chiefly from the 'Pembroke', but the stokers and marines are from Devonport.

February 19th

Sails. Took in provisions and bent sails today. This took rather a long time, as most of the men had never had anything to do with sails before, in these days of mastless ships. However they worked well, and on the whole I seem to have a very fair ship's company.

February 28th

HMS Ophir - Depart Sheerness. The 'Ophir' arrived this morning. She has been requisitioned by the Admiralty from the Orient Line for the conveyance of Their Royal Highnesses The Duke and Duchess of Cornwall [*note - afterwards King George V and Queen Mary*], who are going in her to the colonies and especially Australia, to cement the bond of friendship with the Mother Country, and to open the new Australian Commonwealth. At 10:00 AM we slipped from the buoy and proceeded out of harbour, severing our connection with the old country for at least three years if all goes well.



Title page hand-drawn in pen-and-ink by the author, Harry Price, The Royal Tour or the Cruise of HMS Ophir

March 2nd to 8th

Plymouth. The morning brought no signs of improvement in the weather, in fact it was rapidly becoming worse and we were pounding against a southwest gale with a very

nasty sea and a falling barometer. As we were making very little headway and nearly had our boats carried away by a sea, I reluctantly decided to run into Plymouth.

March 9th to 15th

Passage to Las Palmas

March 15th to 19th

At Las Palmas

March 19th to 23rd

Passage to Saint Vincent, Cape Verde Islands

March 23rd

Arrived at Porto Grand Harbour. Anchored in Porto Grand Harbour at 2:00 PM. The town is not at all prepossessing as there is hardly a speck of green and the roads are of sand. The inhabitants are of Portuguese nationality but seem a mixed breed of various negro tribes with a tinge of European blood. The coaling industry seems to be the only thing that keeps the place going and the various firms are British.

March 27th to 31st

Passage to Sierra Leone

March 31st

Arrived Freetown - Church. Anchored off Freetown at 8:00. In the evening, I went to church at the 'Grammar School' which is being used whilst the Cathedral is being repaired. It was curious to see an entirely black congregation, including clergymen and choir. The vanity of the 'coloured' ladies is prodigious, and their dresses marvellous. The 'coloured' gentleman, too, were mostly turned out in seedy old frock or tail coats and tall hats of the most antique pattern, but from their demeanour evidently flattered themselves that they were in the height of fashion. The ordinary 'white man' is content to go about in flannels being the only rig in which it is possible to exist in such a climate. He is therefore despised by the 'immaculate n*****'.

April 2nd

Orders for West Coast. I was told that my ship would have to remain at Sierra Leone till further orders, instead of going to the Cape, in consequence of the 'Dwarf' having run ashore in the Gambia River, necessitating her being docked. I did not know whether to consider this good or bad news for it seems to me that we may just as well do our time up this coast whilst we are all fit and well.

April 8th

Tornado. In the afternoon we experienced our first introduction to a tornado. These are peculiar to the West Coast and come on at the beginning and end of the rainy season. The first indication of their approach is a heavy black cloud which increases rapidly in size and assumes the form of an arch with a fringe of white cloud. After about half an hour the wind bursts with uncommon fury and lasting for about half an hour, causes much damage if unprepared. This is usually accompanied by intense lightning, which is almost continuous, and heavy peals of thunder, then a deluge lasting sometimes three hours. They are very weird and a little alarming and necessitate furling awnings etc.

April 27th to May 5th

Passage to Lagos

May 4th

Mail. To our intense disappointment, the mail steamer arrived bringing no mail for us. Although I made arrangements for them to be sent before leaving Sierra Leone, they have not turned up. This makes nearly two months without a proper mail.

May 6th

European mode of living. The European's mode of living here is curious and although I believe a good way, did not suit me. They have tea at 6:30 AM with perhaps an egg or so, then nothing until breakfast at 11:30 AM, which is a heavy meal. Afternoon tea is about 3:00 PM and dinner about 7:30 PM. They are mostly 'early birds', generally retiring about 10:00 PM.

May 14th

German trade. Finally caught a German steamer to the ship. I had a tedious wait in her before she left as they had cargo to take in. It is surprising what a large trade the German's have here. In fact they seem to do all the business whilst our people look on. It is the same all along the coast. The British firms seem most apathetic about it all.

May 14th to 15th

Passage to Zuitah [*note – it is not clear where this is as there is no record of Zuitah!*]

May 15th

Destructive climate. On examining some of my tinned provisions I found several tins already bad, which does not speak well for the A&N stores but this climate ruins everything. My clothes which I had up for an airing were also mildewed and spoiled, especially the uniforms.

May 17th

Passage to Accra. Arrived to Accra in the evening and soon after anchoring began our customary rolling which makes life so miserable on this ill-favoured West Coast.

[note - the following 2 letters, dated 14th of March 1960 and 3rd of May 1960 respectively, were tucked into the front cover of Volume 6, obviously by my father, CTB Tibbits, the son of the author and the father of the editor (and the grandfather of the subeditor!).]

Sir, I saw your photo in tonight's Evening News and I'm very anxious to know if you were related to Admiral Tibbits? I had the honour of serving with the Lieutenant Tibbits (Chas), who was captain of HMS Rattler, 1900 to 1903, an old white windjammer. 701 tons and served in the South African War too. Our Skipper was a good Christian and was great on discipline, besides being a great sailor. The crew were very great sailors, many could not read or write, quite a difference to the modern type. I was a CPO (victualing) on the Rattler and was getting 3 shillings per day, but I was often ordered aloft to furl and set sails when half of the crew were down with yellow Jack and some of the crew helped to burn the cholera victims in Durban. We were often without bread, meat and veg for months at a time, no refrigerators in those days. Excuse me sir in writing you I could tell you lots of funny and weird stories of our three-year commission. I am 82, still going strong thank God, but I feel lost without your dear wife who passed away six months ago. Sorry to trouble you,

yours faithfully,

FA Rendel.

Dear Captain Tibbits

I was extremely delighted to hear from you, and was also grateful to your cousin in forwarding my letter of inquiries concerning my dear old captain of the Rattler 'Charlie Tibs' as he was affectionately referred to by his crew. I paid him a visit in the Docks when he was Captain of the Dockyard, but as it happened, it was one of his busy days. we just said good morning and that was all. I've got a lot to tell you if you come this way but please send me a PC beforehand because I'm often out and shouldn't like to miss you. Now just a word about the crew of his ship. They were tough, strong, very patriotic for Queen and country though very ignorant at times and quite a lot couldn't read and write and some of the seamen who'd previously served in the ship on the China Station were shanghaied to serve in her for another period (doing six years in all). We were the healthiest crew on the station because C Tibs always kept us busy we thought at times he was very harsh but believe me he knew what was best for us and woe betide the wrongdoers. He was also very strict but just, a God fearing gentlemen. I often attended

lodge meetings with him. I hope you can understand my writing, my hand is very wobbly. God bless you and yours. Excuse short scribble.

Yours very sincerely,

FA Rendle

End volume VI – Start of volume VII

May 22nd

Mould and fever. Today, I had all the ships company clothing up for inspection and airing. It is a very sorry thing to see what havoc this damp climate plays with all their things. Mould permeates everything and a great deal would not fit to be seen. In the evening, I had a touch of fever which bothered me a little as I thought I was in for the attack of malaria which I knew so well. However, I was alright in the morning after dosing myself with quinine.

May 25th to June 10th

Cruising coast of Gold Coast colony. Visited Quittah, Cape Coast Castle, Sekondi, Dix Cove, Axim, Half Assinee, Atterboe and Axim [*note - Ghana*] before returning to Freetown, Sierra Leone on 10th June

June 10th

Arrive Sierra Leone – mail – a niece – Bert's engagement. Our long lost mail came on board in the morning. I found many letters for me, some dating back to March. It is very unsatisfactory receiving them all together, for most of the papers will be unread. The most interesting news I had announced the arrival of a niece, John's wife, having been successful in this. Also, that Bert is engaged to Miss Lucy Harman, on which he is to be congratulated.

June 19th

My 29th birthday

June 25th

Punishment. One of the men gave trouble today. He was in charge of the gig as coxn, and went ashore for fresh beef in the morning. He disappeared, leaving the boat to fate, and was eventually brought onboard hopelessly drunk in the forenoon. I was obliged to make an example of such a serious offence and awarded 28 day's hard labour, though it seems the heavy punishment was really the reverse, the man (Best, able seaman) laying himself open to three months. This case and one other of a marine who refused

to carry out his punishment (to whom I awarded 14 days cells) are the only serious offences I have had to deal with so far, I am thankful to say.

July 3rd

Orders to proceed. About midday I was surprised to receive a signal from Commander Elliot to go on board the 'Beagle' at once. I found on arrival that he had received by telegraph, orders to proceed to Ascension and Saint Helena and for us to go to Saint Paul de Luanda, calling at the principal coast ports on our way there. I was not at all sorry to be able to leave Sierra Leone at last and everyone on board seemed pleased, for in the rainy season it is no fun, and the health of the men does not improve. At present there are 12 cases of fever.

July 4th

Departed Freetown. By 4:00 PM we were underway with very little regret at leaving. There are now about 15 cases of fever, some of whom are getting better. There being no definite dates in my sailing orders and apparently no hurry, I am going to make use of sail.

July 12th

At Cape Coast Castle

July 13th to 16th

At Accra

July 17th

Tunny. In the afternoon another fish was hauled onboard, a 'tunny' of 47 lbs. That tunny is one of the mackerel family and this fish was a 'long finned tunny' which is fairly common between the Bay of Biscay and the Cape of Good Hope. The one we caught was about 2.5 feet in length. This fish was a beautiful colour when hauled onboard. The back was dark blue, the centre part having a green stripe and another blue stripe on the belly each side. The fins were about a foot long, tipped with yellow streak as also was the tail. It is a very full blooded fish and is better for eating if the blood is allowed to run out otherwise it is like beef when cooked.

July 18th to 23rd

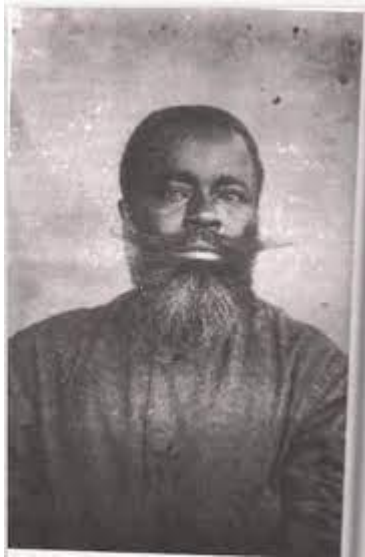
At Lagos

July 25th to 31st

At Bonny River (Niger Coast Protectorate)

July 26th

Jumbo's village - leopard. Received news that a chief of Bonny called Herbert Jumbo had captured a leopard near his village about 7 miles up the creek and was going to kill it this afternoon and he would be pleased for us to see it. On landing at the village we were met by Jumbo himself, who treated us very civilly. He is a short man with a thick black beard and was dressed in a European coat, smoking cap and native cloak presenting a curious appearance. He spoke English perfectly, and I find that he was in England for some years, where he received his education. We proceeded to the trap in which the leopard was caught. It consisted of a number of stakes driven in the ground, slanting inward thus closing the top. One end was entirely closed, the other fitted with a sliding door. When the trap is set a live goat is tethered at the far end, the door is raised and kept in position by a rope, which passes through the trap in such manner that the leopard must push it aside in endeavouring to secure the goat; the door then falls and the animal is safe inside. We found the trap surrounded by a group of natives most of them quite nude. A gun was produced and after some difficulty in effecting aim, Jumbo shot the leopard through the head. It was not before four cartridges had been expended, however, that the beast was killed. He was then dragged out and one could see what magnificent animal he was. The skin was beautifully marked, and he was a fine specimen, measuring 4 foot 6 inches from the nose to the base of the tail. Amidst some ceremony it was taken to the village, and there placed on the tomb of the late Oko Jumbo, Herbert's father, there being some special 'ju-ju' attached to this proceeding. The tomb of Oko Jumbo is of great splendour, and its presence in such incongruous surroundings astonishes me. It consists of a granite column inscribed at the base, round which is coping of granite surmounted by handsome iron railings. In the photo, the leopard will be seen on the rounded surface of the tomb. As far as I could ascertain, it will be left on the tomb for the night and cut up the following morning with skin being kept by the chief. He, Jumbo, treated us very kindly and I was vastly interested in the man and his surroundings. The creek being absolutely dry, we had to march through the mud and by way of a maze of bush paths back to the boat. After cordial farewells, we pulled back to Bonny arriving for dinner at the mess.



Chief Herbert Fubarawari Oko Jumbo (although this might be Herbert's father Oko!)

August 6th to 23rd

At Saint Paul de Luanda, Angola

August 9th

Baobab tree. The baobab grows to an enormous thickness here and is very numerous. I saw one huge tree having a trunk of, I should think, quite 30 metres in circumference. It is a native of West Africa but has been introduced into other parts of the world and I have seen it before on the East Coast. It is one of the largest trees in existence, but does not reach a very great height. To my mind it is very ugly, the trunk being entirely out of proportion, and it reminds me of a huge octopus.

August 10th

Death of Empress Frederick. Received the news of the death of Empress Frederick and half masted colours with the German Ensign at the main to continue so until sunset of next Tuesday, the date of the funeral. HM's death following so soon on that of her mother, our late beloved Queen, is very sad, but has long been expected.



Victoria, Princess Royal (Victoria Adelaide Mary Louisa; 21 November 1840 – 5 August 1901) was German Empress and Queen of Prussia as the wife of Frederick III, German Emperor. She was the eldest child of Queen Victoria and Prince Albert and as such she was briefly heir presumptive until the birth of her younger brother, the future Edward VII. She was the mother of Wilhelm II, the last German Emperor.

August 18th

The ship. The ship looked like a 'new pin' this morning after the painting. She was thoroughly cleaned inside and out and I felt very proud of her. I wish that there could have been a senior officer present to share my views.

August 19th

Leave. I decided to give leave to the men, subject to their good behaviour onshore and told them this after divisions. I was much gratified that they showed their appreciation of the privilege by all coming on board of the proper. It is a pity that one cannot give more liberty on this station, but it is against the station orders. The fact is, the men have 'spoilt their own game' at different times by their inebriety and excesses ashore,

thereby bringing on fevers, although even though this is not to be wondered at when one considers in monotonous conditions of their life on the West Coast.

September 2nd to 11th

At ascension

September 4th

Mail. In the morning the storeship arrived from Sierra Leone, bringing us our mails, of which we have received none since our departure from Sierra Leone two months ago. They were thus well very welcome indeed.

September 17th

Arrived at Saint Helena to take up duties as guardship - Death of U.S. President.

She ('Philomel') was flying the US colours half mast, which was done in consequence of the death of President McKinley who was shot by an anarchist whilst attending the exhibition at Buffalo. This fiend concealed a revolver under a pocket handkerchief and whilst shaking hands with President discharged two chambers with his left hand into the chest. At first, hopes were entertained of McKinley's recovery, but the wounds proved eventually fatal.



September 6, 1901: McKinley was shot twice at point blank range at 4:07 pm in Buffalo, New York while attending the Pan-American Exposition. His assassin, Leon Czolgosz, was an anarchist who believed the centralized powers of the presidency were too great for one man.

September 18th

Saint Helena. My last visit to this island was in 1893 when I was taking passage to the Cape in the Union Steamer 'Gaul' to join HMS Thrush. Like Ascension, it is of volcanic origin, and from the sea presents a most bold and forbidding appearance, rising abruptly from the sea in jagged precipices of basaltic rock, lava, and refuse. The interior is luxurious in vegetation, which is a pleasing surprise, for hardly any green thing is visible from seaward. At present it is useful as a prison for the Boers. There are about 4000 here at present. The island is 9 miles from east to west, and north to South nearly 6 miles. On October 15th, 1815, Napoleon lived here in HMS Northumberland and remained until his death in 1821 (5th May).



Boers being marched along the Main St from the port to the POW camps

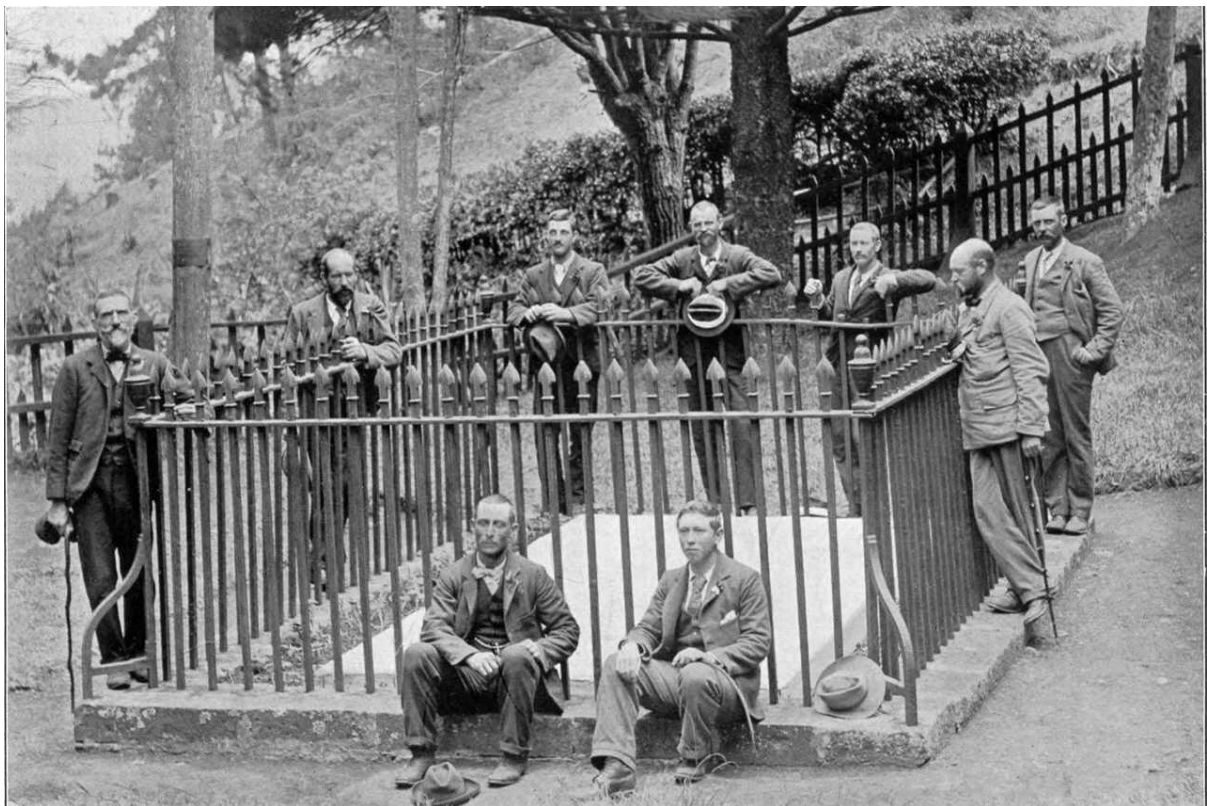
September 22nd

Napoleon's tomb. In the afternoon I visited Napoleon's tomb. It is prettily situated in Sane Valley in a spot which he was very fond of in his lifetime. Formerly there were some weeping willow trees here, but they were destroyed in '81. At present it is surrounded by a circle of trees in which the Norfolk Island Pine is prominent. The tomb consists of a cement slab surrounded by an iron railing. There is no inscription on it, but near on a tree is a brass plate put up by the officers of a French frigate to commemorate their visit. *[note – the story goes that the British wanted 'Napoleon Bonaparte' inscribed whereas the French wanted just 'Napoleon' in the royal tradition. They couldn't agree, so it was left blank!]* The body was exhumed for conveyance to France in 1840 (15th October) and it is said that on opening the coffin the remains appeared to be untouched

by the hand of time.



Napoleon's tomb before 1881 when the weeping willows were destroyed and replaced with Norfolk Island Pines.



Boer POWs visiting Napoleon's tomb in 1901. On the tree on the left can be seen as plaque, possibly the one referred to above.

September 25th

Leave. I gave 42 hours general leave on Monday, which is the first prolonged leave the men have had since leaving England [*note - seven months*] and so they deserved it. There were a few leave breakers but I soon got them on board by putting out 1 pound reward for each to the police who brought them to the ship. They were very much surprised and not a little chagrined at finding themselves arrested for the reward is stopped from their pay. However, it is a great deterrent to future would be leave breakers.

October 9th

Loss of HMS Cobra. Intelligence came of the terrible disaster to the t.b.d. 'Cobra' [*note – torpedo boat destroyer*]. She was one of the new turbine destroyers and was being brought from Elswick by navigating party. They experienced heavy weather in the North Sea and it is said that she struck on the Outer Dowling Shoal and immediately broke in two and foundered. Out of 79 men on board, only 12 were saved and these were picked up in an exhausted condition. By some it is said that she never struck at all, but was broken in two by the force of the seas, but this, I think is unlikely.



The Wreck of the Turbine Torpedo-Boat Destroyer Cobra off the Lincolnshire Coast on 18 September

October 12th

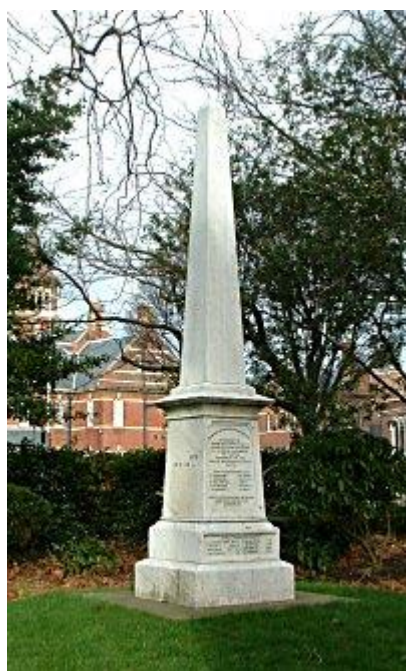
Departure of 'Philomel' - the horse. At 11:00 AM the 'Philomel' left, having received sudden orders to proceed to Simon's Bay, where martial law has been proclaimed and the blockade of the coast ports established. By his departure, I now have the use of the Senior Naval Officer's Horse. Owing to the difficulty of communications with the Governor and the different camps, a horse has been found necessary for getting about the island. I have a mare who, although rather old and slow, is very quiet and sure.

November 5th

Mail for Tristan da Cunha. HMS Beagle left today for Tristan da Cunha [*note – this is not Darwin's 'Beagle'!*]. The mails for the island have been accumulating here for about two years! Tristan da Cunha is inhabited by the descendants of part of the original guard which was placed there when the Napoleon was at Saint Helena. They were relieved in 1821 when he died, but three men decided to remain and so formed the nucleus of the present colony [*note – which in 1901 was a total of 74 inhabitants*]. Crime is said to be unknown, and the natives seem to live an ideal existence and are noted for their longevity. Their only communication is by ship of war, which usually calls there once a year, and by an occasional sailing ship, passing the island.

November 13th

HMS Royal Sovereign gun accident. News was received today of a terrible disaster on board HMS Royal Sovereign. A shell is reported to have exploded whilst the gun was being loaded and the Commander and five men killed and 19 wounded.



Memorial to those killed in the gun explosion on HMS Royal Sovereign in 1901, in Victoria Park, Portsmouth

November 21st

Admiral's visit. I received a letter from the Admiral today from the Cape in which he said that he hopes to pay a visit about Christmas. He said he was sorry to keep us so long at Saint Helena, but personally I am very glad and the ships company like the place also. The difficulty is to find a ship to relieve us, all those at the cape being occupied in blockading the coast ports.

December 25th

Christmas Day. The ship at daylight presented a festive appearance, bunches of green being displayed at the yardarms, mastheads etc. Great preparations have been made for the mess dinners which are being supplied by the canteen. The ship's cook has been busy for two days and nights cooking the puddings etc. After reading prayers at 9:30 AM I wished the men a 'Merry Christmas' and piped down. Soon afterwards I received a request asking if I would go round the mess deck with the officers. They had decorated it up with flags, evergreens, etc, and on the tables were laid out the preparations for dinner whilst the shelves displayed photos of the men's relatives, 'absent friends' etc. As I passed each mess, the caterers insisted on my sampling the pudding or taking a cigar etc, which was rather trying at 10 in the forenoon. Soon after noon I had all the officers in my cabin and we had a bottle of 'fizz' and toasted absent friends. After a quiet lunch I thought I would have a snooze, but had no sooner 'dropped off' than I was awakened by the most hideous noise approaching my hatchway. It was a 'squeejee' band consisting of a mouth organ, mandolin, concertina and a terrible accompaniment of pots and pans and empty casks. The noise reminded me of the orgies of the savages. I went up the ladder and they said they wished to carry me around the ship. This was a great compliment. They soon hoisted me up on their shoulders, and I was thus borne round the upper deck to the strains of the band. On arriving aft again they gave me three cheers and then served each officer a similar manner. They all seemed to have had a good dinner and were very pleased with themselves.

December 27th

Escape of Boer POW. Intelligence has been received of an extraordinary escape of a Boer prisoner of war, who is now landed at Ascension. By some means he secreted a box in the camp at Deadwood, which measured 4 foot by 2.3 foot. This was labelled 'this side up with care', and consigned (through Solomon and Co.) to Captain Marling, who recently left the island, of the Gloucester Regiment. The man who hid himself in the box which was passed out of camp and conveyed to Jamestown. Here it remained for the night of the Friday 20th. The following day it was shipped in a lighter and a pile of raw bullock hides were placed on top of it. On Sunday 22nd the 'Goth'

arrived and it was put on board and into the baggage room. On Christmas Day, one of the ship's officers requiring to open the baggage room was surprised to see a man there. Presumably he thought he was 'burgling boxes' and so locked the place up and went for assistance. After a search the man was at last found in his box, to which he had retreated and finally landed at Ascension. He must have been a plucky man with wonderful powers of endurance, and the whole thing was well planned and carried out. He is the first prisoner to have succeeded in getting clear of the island. Unluckily for him, he was on 'parole' and so renders himself liable to be shot. *[note – he was not shot but imprisoned until the end of the war]*



Andries Smorenburg and his crate. Possibly the most enterprising escape attempt was that of Andries Smorenburg, who fashioned a crate marked 'Boer Curios', in which he hid with clothing, matches, and food and water for 20 days and posted himself from St Helena on a passing ship. But although the crate was marked 'With Care' and 'This Side Up' it was tossed about and overturned on board and as a result Smorenburg suffered concussion and lost most of his water. In the meantime back on the island, Smorenburg's absence had been discovered when he did not appear for roll call. The authorities on St Helena contacted Ascension Island and Smorenburg was recaptured there and returned to St Helena after only five days at sea

December 31st

New Year's Eve. I have been eight years lieutenant RN today and so where a half a stripe between two rings on my coat sleeve. This also entitles me to two shilling a day more.