

# CAMPBELTOWN

— remembered

1942 - 1982



Sold in aid of T.S. CAMPBELTOWN  
Sea Cadet Corps

The Sea Cadet Corps is an entirely voluntary youth organisation which has the backing of the royal Navy. 1981 saw full integration of the Girls' Nautical Training Contingent, formerly an independent corps.

The movement greatly assists young people wishing to make their careers in the Royal Navy, Women's Royal Naval Service or Merchant Navy, but whether or not they choose to go to sea, the chief aim is to produce reliable and useful citizens.



**"Happiness Is A Burgee," Lieutenant Patrick Stewart, Robin Knox-Johnston and J. S. Houston.**

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This booklet has been written to commemorate the fortieth anniversary of the raid on St. Nazaire, and to provide the cadets of T. S. CAMPBELTOWN with a lasting reminder of the gallant ship whose name they bear. The story is also told of the cadets themselves, who have added their own lustre to the name by becoming Scotland's champion Sea Cadet Unit.

Many people have given help and encouragement in the production of this booklet, and grateful thanks are extended to Captain R. E. D. RYDER, V.C., R.N.; Rear Admiral R. T. W. MAYO, C.B., C.B.E.; Commander R. C. KUHN, USN, and Lieutenant-Commander (S.C.C.)P. L. M. STEWART, Commanding Officer of T. S. CAMPBELTOWN.

The Unit is indebted to the Photographic Library of the Imperial War Museum, the Illustrated London News and the Campbeltown Courier LTD., for their kind permission to reproduce the photographs which appear in this publication.

All proceeds from the sale of this booklet will be donated to No. 480 Unit Sea Cadet Corps, T. S. CAMPBELTOWN.



**Commander R. E. D. Ryder, VC, RN**

(Photograph by courtesy of the Imperial War Museum)



**Lieutenant-Commander S. H. Beattie, VC, RN**

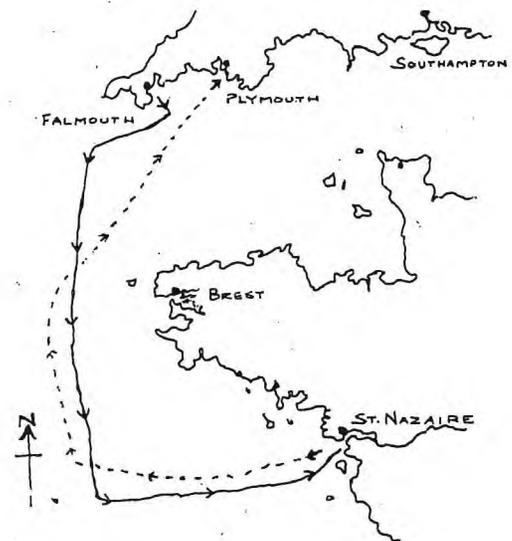
(Photograph by courtesy of the Imperial War Museum)

## CAMPBELTOWN - remembered

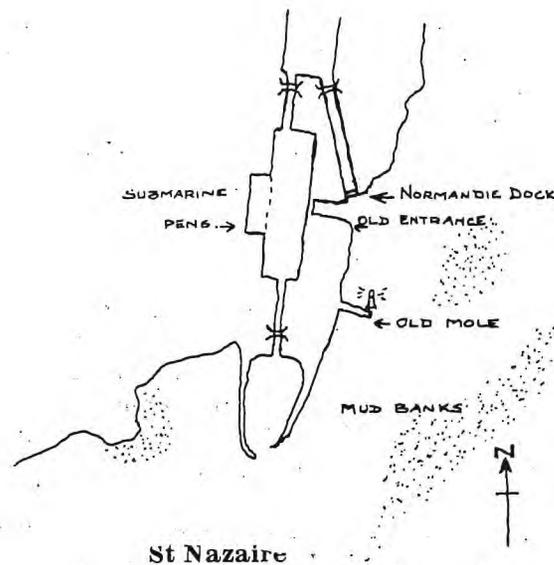
On the afternoon of March 26th 1942 a small fleet sailed from Falmouth harbour on what was to go down in history as one of the most courageous naval exploits ever attempted.

In the difficult and dangerous early years of the 1939-45 war many of the supplies essential to the British people had to be brought in by convoys of ships crossing the North Atlantic. As the German forces swept across Europe, over-running our allies, many of the major ports fell into their hands, and from these operated the enemy fleet which threatened our island stronghold. Time and again our ships made the hazardous voyage back and forth, each time losing many of their number to the U-boats which lay in wait like a pack of wolves. The main enemy base was at St. Nazaire on the Bay of Biscay, and it was this port which also had the largest dry dock in the world. The pride of the German Navy was the massive battleship TIRPITZ, which lurked in a Norwegian fjord to pounce on our convoys, but should she be damaged, the Normandie Dock at St. Nazaire was the only one large enough to take her for repairs. It became vitally important, therefore, that the port of St. Nazaire must be put out of action if Britain was to survive.

The task was a daunting one, as St. Nazaire lay across more than 400 miles of enemy patrolled sea, and was a heavily defended port in the tidal waters at the mouth of the river Loire. A plan began to take shape for an operation similar to those devised more than a hundred years previously, when Admiral Lord COCHRANE and the Royal Marine Major William MILLER led night raiding parties and fireships to cause havoc in enemy ports. Their twentieth-century counterparts at the Headquarters of Combined Operations decided to send



The Voyage



an old and expendable destroyer, packed with explosives, to ram the sliding gates, or caisson, of the huge Normandie Dock. The crew, together with a volunteer force of Commandos, were to leap ashore and destroy as many of the port's vital installations as possible, and attempt to make their escape in an accompanying fleet of small, fast Motor Launches equipped with extra fuel tanks for the long and hazardous journey. The destroyer chosen for this mission was one of fifty obsolete vessels transferred to our beleagued nation by the United States Navy and, in this spirit of friendship, to be called after towns in both Britain and America bearing the same name.

The USS BUCHANAN was launched in 1919 at the Bath Iron Works, Maine, and named for the first Superintendent of the United States Naval School, Annapolis. She became a patrol vessel in the Pacific and the Gulf of Mexico before being handed over to the Royal Navy in September 1940, and re-named HMS CAMPBELTOWN. Whilst escorting convoys in the North Atlantic during 1941 she helped in the sinking of an enemy U-boat, recovered survivors from a Norwegian tanker and shot down a mine-laying aircraft. The twenty-three year old "four stacker" was scheduled to visit Campbeltown early in 1942, and a civic reception was being prepared for her crew, but instead her destination became St. Nazaire, and a place in history.

But although this is CAMPBELTOWN's story, it cannot be hers alone any more than one brilliant goal tells the story of a winning game. Every man and every vessel had an essential part to play in the desperate and deadly enterprise which was given the code name OPERATION CHARIOT.

In command of the naval force was Commander R. E. D. RYDER, who had already experienced more

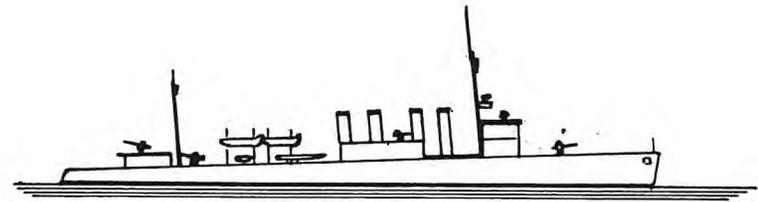
than a little adventure in his thirty-four years. In pre-war days he had sailed a ketch from China to England, served in a topsail schooner on a research expedition to the Antarctic and, following a U-boat attack in 1940, survived for four days clinging to a piece of driftwood in the open sea. A quiet, disciplined man, Robert RYDER was more than equal to his new command. Lieutenant-Colonel A. C. NEWMAN was chosen to lead the two commando units, and to Lieutenant-Commander S. H. BEATTIE fell the task of commanding HMS CAMPBELTOWN on her last voyage. All three men, together with a sailor and a soldier, were soon to win their country's highest award for valour.

From the moment the raid was first conceived, no time was lost in putting the plan together and a rigorous training programme embarked upon for all who were to take part. Volunteers from all parts of the United Kingdom were gathered on the south Devon coast, where vague rumours of leaving for tropical climes were circulated to deter spies from learning the true destination. Royal Engineer officers studied the mechanism of the George V Dock in Southampton, the only other sliding dock gate similar to that of the Normandie, and the Liverpool Tidal Institute was asked to provide detailed calculations for navigating the mud banks of the Loire estuary. Meanwhile, CAMPBELTOWN herself was undergoing a dramatic disguise as a German Mowe class torpedo boat. Her two after funnels were removed and the remaining two cut at an angle. Bullet proof plating was added to the bridge and round the deck, eight 20mm Oerlikons were fitted, and her 12 pounder, light automatic, high angle gun transferred to the fo'c'sle. Finally came the master plan for the ship to explode a few hours after ramming the dock gates, when all the raiders had scrambled ashore. Demolition experts Lieutenant Nigel TIBBETS, R.N. and Captain W. PRITCHARD of the Royal Engineers, worked together to pack the doomed ship with twenty-four depth

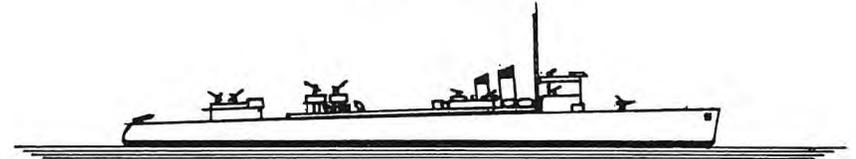
charges, strung together with waterproof fuse. CAMPBELTOWN's draught had been reduced to 10 1/2', but it would still be a difficult manoeuvre as the Tidal Institute warned there was only one time in the immediate future when it would be possible for the old destroyer to enter the river under cover of darkness. It was to be 1.30 a.m. on Saturday 28 March - or never.

It was calm and hazy when the little convoy set out on the afternoon of Thursday 26th. Apart from HMS CAMPBELTOWN there were sixteen fast Motor Launches, a faster Motor gun Boat which could act as a Headquarters ship for the leaders of the force, and a Motor Torpedo Boat which had been modified to carry a vast quantity of high explosives which could be fired at close range. This tiny vessel had been described as "a frisky filly of great unreliability" but was greatly loved by her commander, Sub-Lieutenant M. WYNN, whose persistent argument earned them a place in OPERATION CHARIOT. The two smallest craft were to be towed for most of the voyage, and would be cast off late the following evening. Two other destroyers, HMS ATHERSTONE and HMS TYNEDALE were given the role of protecting the outgoing convoy, patrolling the open sea during the raid and waiting to aid survivors. These ships saw considerable action themselves during the following few days, but that is another story.

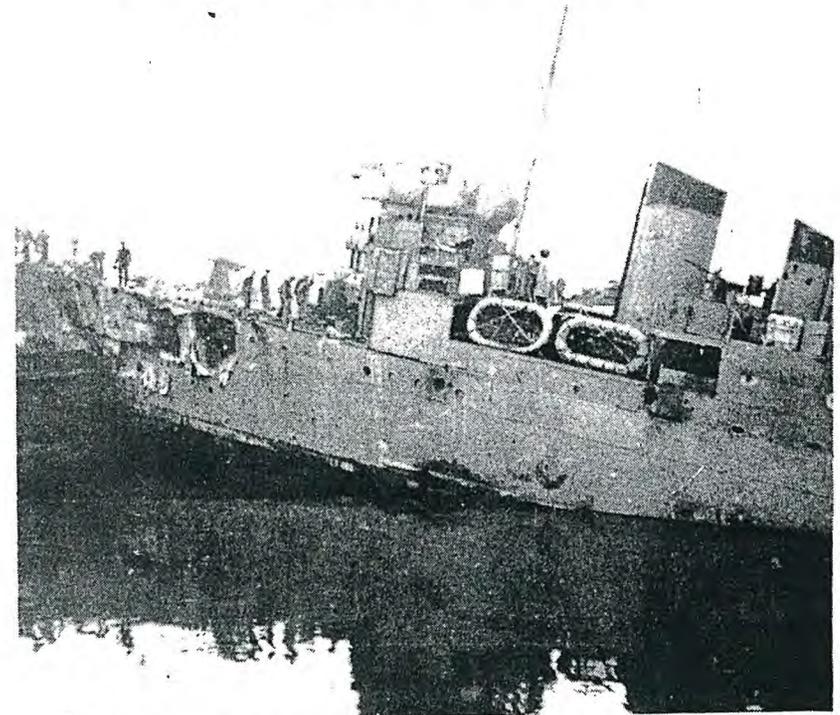
As darkness fell at 8 p.m. on the Friday, Commander RYDER and Lieutenant-Colonel NEWMAN transferred to the MGB and took their place at the head of the convoy, now grouped about CAMPBELTOWN. The accompanying destroyers fell behind, and the tiny winking beacon of the half-submerged HMS/M STURGEON told them they were on course for the river estuary. In the leading vessel Lieutenant A. R. GREEN executed a brilliant feat of navigation by bringing them safely across the dark and unfamiliar mud flats,



An artist's impression of USS Buchanan/HMS Campbelltown  
1919-1942, before modification



HMS Campbelltown, 1942 after modification for the raid



HMS Campbelltown after crashing into the caisson

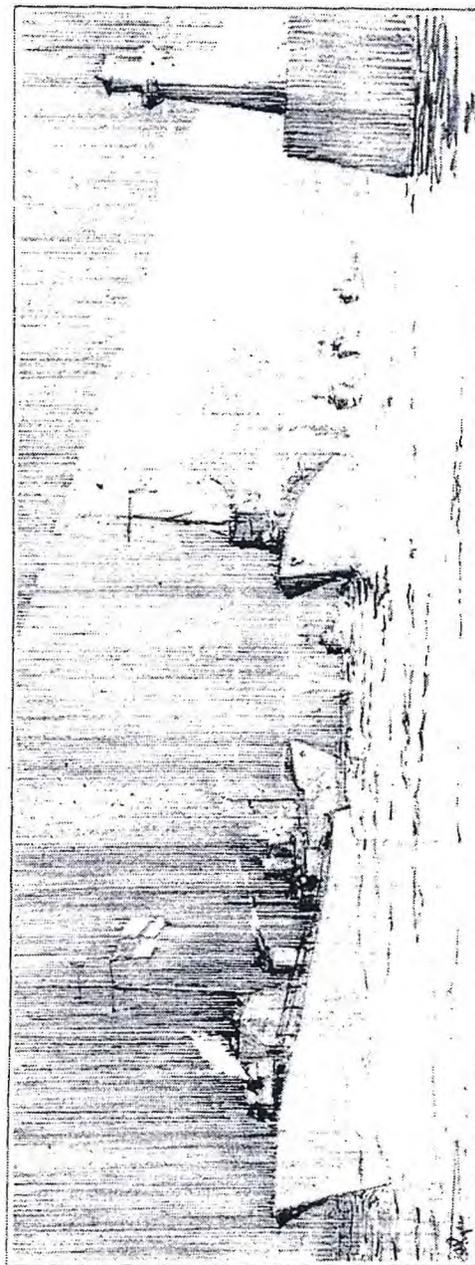
(Photograph by courtesy of the Imperial War Museum)

while aboard CAMPBELTOWN, Lieutenant TIBBITS worked calmly on his time fuses.

Above the low, drizzling clouds could be heard the RAF bombers on their way to a raid which, it was hoped, would help in diverting the attention of the coastal batteries. Search lights and tracer bullets cut through the night sky, but visibility was poor and the RAF had strict orders not to drop their bombs unless they had a clear view of the target. The bombers turned for home. But the Germans were now alert.

Silently the little flotilla continued on its way up the river. Suddenly search lights illuminated the whole scene, there was some sporadic gunfire, and a challenge was issued from the dockyard. Not only had CAMPBELTOWN been made to resemble a German ship, but on board MGB 314 was Leading Signalmal PIKE who transmitted a reply in perfect German, that they were accompanying badly damaged vessels to the harbour for repair. CAMPBELTOWN was within a few minutes of her destination, and at first it seemed that the bluff had worked. But it was not to last, and once the astonished enemy realised they were under attack from this audacious little force, they opened fire with every available weapon. CAMPBELTOWN returned their fire, and so did the leading MGB, and the gun crews on the open decks of the little MLs, putting several enemy positions out of action.

The MGB, with the naval and military commanders RYDER and NEWMAN on board, led the destroyer to within 200 yards of her final resting place before breaking away to starboard. Lieutenant-Commander BEATTIE increased CAMPBELTOWN's speed to 12 knots as she approached the mighty sliding caisson of the Normandie Dock, into which she crashed fair and square, with all guns blazing, at 1.34 a.m. As one officer remarked, glancing casually



FORCING EVERY SHINE OF POWER FROM HER ENGINES, THE "CAMPBELTOWN" PASSES HER CONVOY AND HEADS FOR THE GATES OF THE DRY DOCK, GUDFIRE FROM THE LAUNCHES MOMENTARILY SMELTERS THE DEFENCES, ENABLING THE "CAMPBELTOWN" TO COVER THE LAST FEW HUNDRED YARDS OF HER JOURNEY.

**Commander Ryder's own drawing of MGB 314  
and HMS Campbeltown approaching the target**  
(Photograph by courtesy of the Illustrated London News  
Picture Library)

at his watch, "four minutes late".

Under covering fire from the eight Oerlikons, the Commandos were quickly down the scaling ladders and making their way to the carefully planned targets. These were the main pumping house and winding machinery, fuel storage depots and gun placements at the Normandie Dock itself, and this handful of men, in dark and strange surroundings, succeeded in nearly every task under the noses of the enemy, and in less than half an hour of their spectacular landing.

Out in the river, however, the MLs were paying the tragic price by which all victory is bought. They were to have landed troops at other points around the huge and complicated St. Nazaire Docks, with orders to destroy lock gates, power stations and bridges, in the hope of making the great U-boat pens inoperable. But the frail wooden craft with their extra fuel tanks proved vulnerable targets. Many of the raiders never reached their destinations, and those who did found themselves few in number, some badly wounded, with a shortage of equipment and little hope of rescue. The remaining launches took on board as many as they could, some then became victims themselves. Blazing launches drifted, helplessly, in the river. Some survivors managed to scramble ashore; some were saved by German vessels; most were to spend the rest of the war as prisoners, although there were several who made dramatic escapes and succeeded in returning to Britain.

Sub-Lieutenant Micky WYNN's temperamental MTB had hiccupped along at the rear of the column, with the idea that it could torpedo the caisson should CAMPBELTOWN's mission fail. As this plan was no longer necessary, WYNN turned his attention to the entrance of the Old Harbour, and had the

pleasure of using his weapons to cause considerable devastation there. He then picked up more survivors than the little vessel could reasonably carry and, with a rare and providential turn of speed, beat a hasty retreat.

Commander RYDER went ashore to satisfy himself that the CAMPBELTOWN was well and truly rammed against the caisson, and was slowly sinking by the stern. As he did so the explosions within the neighbouring target areas told him of Commando work well done. Returning to his MGB Headquarters ship they set off in search of survivors, and thence to the open sea and the comparative safety of the waiting destroyers.

Every boat had its heroes. Every member of OPERATION CHARIOT could tell many stories of courage and endurance beyond imagining. We cannot tell them all, but their sacrifices will never be forgotten.

Several of CAMPBELTOWN's crew had been picked up by one of the MLs which was later destroyed in a fierce river battle, and the survivors taken prisoner. Among them was Lieutenant-Commander Sam BEATTIE, who was brought before a German Intelligence Officer at about 10 a.m. The interrogator was remarking how strange it seemed to try to smash so mighty a target with one relatively small ship, when the town was rocked by a massive explosion which shattered doors and windows, reverberating for many seconds. Lieutenant TIBBITS and Captain PRITCHARD had not lived to know it, but their meticulously planned time-fuses had devastated the 160 ton caisson so completely that it was of no further use to the enemy, and was not repaired until many years later.

The main objective of OPERATION CHARIOT had succeeded.



**The Ship's Company**



**Remembrance Day, Campbeltown Esplanade**

Further explosions continued for another three days, causing numerous casualties among the enemy personnel who rather unwisely went to inspect the scene, and throwing the whole area into total confusion. By creating so much devastation in the great port of St. Nazaire this most courageous and historic operation saved many of our convoys, aided our eventual victory and gave encouragement to our French allies.

As a result of this one action the unprecedented number of 136 awards were given. There were no fewer than five Victoria Crosses, that highest of all decorations for valour and self-sacrifice. First and foremost was that of Commander Robert RYDER, awarded for the supreme gallantry of his overall leadership of OPERATION CHARIOT. Those similarly honoured were Lieutenant-Colonel Charles NEWMAN, commander of the brilliantly successful Commando forces, and Lieutenant-Commander Sam BEATTIE, last commander of the CAMPBELTOWN, who brought her to an end which has become a legend in naval history. His V. C. was given "not only for his own valour, but also that of the unnamed officers and men of a very gallant ship's company." Able Seaman W. A. SAVAGE, gun-layer on the MGB, calmly went about his task of silencing the deadly shore batteries, and died in earning his Victoria Cross, which was awarded to mark his own courage and that of all the coastal forces. And Sergeant T. F. DURRANT - another hero of the river battle lost his life in one of the crippled little Motor Launches, and became the only soldier to gain a Victoria Cross in a naval action.

The Distinguished Service Order was awarded to four men; the Distinguished Service Cross to 17, including the superb navigator of the leading MGB, Lieutenant GREEN; Lieutenant TIBBITS on whose skill with explosives rested the success of the whole

mission, and Sub-Lieutenant WYNN who so tenaciously insisted on taking the temperamental, and eventually vitally important, little MTB. Eleven men received the Military Cross; nine the Conspicuous Gallantry Medal; 24 the Distinguished Service Medal; 15 the Military Medal and 51 were Mentioned in Dispatches. Two members of the crew of HMS CAMPBELTOWN were also awarded the French Croix de Guerre for their part in the raid.

In his own book telling the full story of "The Attack on St. Nazaire", Commander (now Captain) RYDER wrote of his comrades, "in this fight they established a tradition of fearless determination that will be a lasting inspiration to future generations who may have to dare all in the defence of their country".



The Unit's 1981 prize-winners (A.C. Christine Barratt, best cadet; Cadet P.O. Duncan Westerman, helmsman; A.C. Alison Woodley, marksman; and J. S. Kevin McKillop, most improved cadet).

Forty years on, CAMPBELTOWN is remembered by a new generation of young people whose achievements show them to be worthy successors to the ideals expressed by Captain RYDER, and to whom he now sends this message:

"I would like to wish the Campbeltown Sea Cadet Unit every success in the future, and that goes for the associated Girls' Nautical Training Contingent as well.

It is very encouraging to anyone who values our Maritime tradition to see the keenness and efficiency of this Unit, one could wish that the same spirit prevailed elsewhere. For my part I find it worrying that the Russian threat is not being viewed more seriously in this country, and that we are neglecting our maritime defences. Ships of a sort can be rushed together, but it takes longer to train the crews to man them. This is where the Sea Cadet Corps plays such an immensely important part. If we are strong we may be left in peace.

Good Luck,

Robert Ryder."



HRH The Duke of Edinburgh inspects the Guard, 1971

In September 1955 No. 480 Unit of the Sea Cadet Corps was formed, and later granted the name Training Ship CAMPBELTOWN, to honour not only the town of its birth, but also the heroic ship's company of the lost destroyer.

Campbeltown itself is a charming small town at the southern end of the Kintyre peninsula in Western Scotland. A royal burgh since 1700, it has a long seafaring tradition, and the fact that it was one of the major ports of departure for Scottish emigrants to America in the eighteenth century made its wartime link all the more appropriate. During the 1939-45 war Campbeltown became the centre for training British, Commonwealth and Allied personnel in anti-submarine warfare, it was an important Rescue Tug Base and many hundreds of Fleet Air Arm crews received their training at nearby Machrihanish. Some Scots of by-gone days carried the name of their home town to the lush green Lebanon Valley in south-east Pennsylvania, where another Campbeltown flourishes today. It was to this town that one of the few precious relics of HMS CAMPBELTOWN - the ship's bell - was sent at the end of the war to promote goodwill between the two communities.

Post-war Britain was an austere place in which to grow up, and the Sea Cadet Corps provided welcome new interests for the boys of the remotely situated Scottish Town. The old life-boat shed was rented from the local authority, a regular training programme established, and T. S. CAMPBELTOWN started to make slow but steady progress. The ideals of the Corps were soon shown to be of practical value, when two cadets rescued a capsized and exhausted canoeist drifting out to sea. Cadets Ian Campbell and Malcolm Stewart were highly commended for their prompt and efficient action, and were presented with wrist watches by the Royal

National Lifeboat Institution. A fast growing number of cadets became actively engaged in community service, dinghy sailing and adventure training in the surrounding hills, and in 1971 T. S. CAMPBELTOWN provided the Guard of Honour for His Royal Highness the Duke of Edinburgh when he visited the town in order to embark on the nuclear submarine HMS CHURCHILL.

1975 saw the award of T. S. CAMPBELTOWN's first Efficiency Pendant, an honour which was to become an annual event as enthusiasm flared throughout the Unit. Boat displays on the loch became a regular attraction to residents and summer visitors alike, and yearround exercises achieved such popularity that on one occasion an injured cadet insisted on returning to the fray after first aid.

In 1978 the Unit received its fourth consecutive Efficiency Pendant, and was presented with its Colours by a former commanding officer of the Unit, Lieutenant Commander R. H. Craig, R.D., R.N.R.

A new dimension was added to the Unit early in 1979, with the proposed formation of a Girls' Nautical Training Contingent. Apart from ensuring a hundred per cent turnout by the boys, many of the girls who presented themselves at the first meeting have remained to play a major part in the life of the Unit, although their Contingent did not receive its official recognition until two years later.

1979 was to prove a momentous year for T. S. CAMPBELTOWN, seeing the start of a drum and bugle band, and the weekly performance of the Ceremonial Sunset on the Old Quay throughout the summer. The Unit mounted guard at the naming ceremony of Campbeltown's new Aran Class lifeboat, as well as at various Highland Games, and assisted with fund raising for the King George V Fund for Sailors



**Cadet P.O. Cameron McLellan receives the Ben Line medal from Lieutenant Swartz, USN**



**Combined Divisions for *T.S. Campbelltown* and their affiliated ship *HMS Bickington***

and the Royal National Mission to Deep Sea Fishermen. Cadet Petty Officer C. McLellan achieved the highest marks in the area for his advancement examinations, and was presented with the Ben Line Award before leaving the Unit to enter the Royal Navy. He follows the example of many another local cadet who has chosen a naval career, including a Lieutenant-Commander at present serving with the Fleet Air Arm. During the summer of 1979 two Campbelltown cadets took second place in the National Sea Cadet Corps Sailing Championships, and the year's successes culminated in the award of the Unit's first Burgee. A Burgee is only awarded on the recommendation of the Admiralty Inspecting Officer, after a very careful assessment of the Unit's ability to excel and sustain their efforts over a period of years.

The following year continued in similar vein, being marked by the start of a happy association with T. S. CAMPBELTOWN, New South Wales, Australia. Their commanding officer, Lieutenant L. Mower and Chief Coxwain MacTaggart made the long journey to Scotland and received cordial welcome from their namesake Unit. It is interesting to note that both Australian and American towns are spelled "Campbelltown", although the Sea Cadet Units retain the spelling of the gallant ship, and the original town for which she was named.

Always mindful of the needs of others, the Scottish boys and girls continued to take an active part in fund raising within their community, and many joined in a Christmas Day carol service at local hospital and eventide homes. Three young cadets were presented with Good Citizenship awards for their considerate care of a disabled school-friend, and three senior boys remained with the Unit as Cadet Instructors on reaching the age of 18. In addition to their comprehensive training

A break during adventure training in the hills



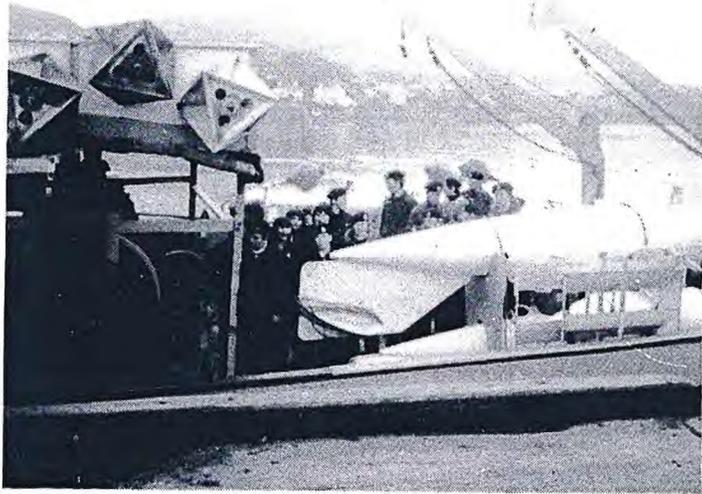
programme, the cadets' activities extend to sailing, shooting, swimming and football, and through the courtesy of the nearby R.A.F. station, mountain rescue and survival courses have been added to the syllabus. Continuing Campbeltown's links with America over more than two hundred years, a spirit of friendly co-operation has developed with locally-based United States Navy personnel. As well as regular visits to R. N. and R.N.R. vessels several boys and girls have spend a valuable if exhausting week aboard the S.C.C. square rigger T. S. ROYAL-IST, and a number of cadets are being presented for Duke of Edinburgh awards. The close line between practical training and the pursuit of enjoyment was emphasized when sailing for the Unit's Helmsman Trophy was delayed while cadets rescued a sheep which had strayed into the loch. Having rowed the animal to safety and restored it to its owner, competition was resumed.

In its Jubilee Year, the Unit was awarded its second Burgee, which was presented in a memorable and enjoyable ceremony by round-the-world yachtsman, Lieutenant-Commander Robin Knox-Johnston, C.B.E., R.N.R.

But the best was yet to come for the hardworking officers, instructors and cadets of T. S. CAMPBELTOWN. The continued variety and excellence of their activities led to the award of the coveted Stephenson Trophy for the Champion Unit of Northern Area, comprising all Scotland and north-eastern England. Shortly after the announcement of this achievement, Campbeltown was visited by the Unit's affiliated ship, HMS BICKINGTON. The ship's company and cadets joined together for an impressive march through the town, and combined ceremonial divisions. Several cadets spent the following day at sea, on board the mine-sweeper with which they have established such a happy



**First Lieutenant Arthur Ashley "volunteers" as patient in a clifftop rescue/exercise**



**Cadets enjoy a visit to their affiliated ship**

relationship.

The summer of 1981 saw the full integration of the Girls' Nautical Training Contingent. The girls play an increasingly important part in all activities, lending charm and skill to the band, and acquitting themselves well in shooting and sailing teams at both local and national level.

In recognition of the Unit's achievements, two cadets were honoured by an invitation from the Secretary of State for Scotland to attend the Trooping the Colour ceremony in London, and the following month another three cadets were in the capital on the occasion of the marriage of the Prince and Princess of Wales.

As plans are now being made for events to commemorate the fortieth anniversary of the heroic end of HMS CAMPBELTOWN in St. Nazaire, it is hoped that the Northern Area Champions will be represented, led by Lieutenant-Commander P.L.M. Stewart, who is now entering his tenth year as the Unit's Commanding Officer.

It is the earnest prayer of all right-thinking peoples that their youth should never again be called upon to suffer the terrible and bloody sacrifices of St. Nazaire, but perhaps there could be no finer memorial to the Charioteers than that their grand-children's generation should seek, through discipline, responsibility and a spirit of goodwill, to avert any threat to that hardwon peace. In this aim there could be no finer example than the cadets who wear with pride the name T. S. CAMPBELTOWN.



**A day with the Lifeboat**



**Third Officer Jean Bullock has a word with the G.N.s**