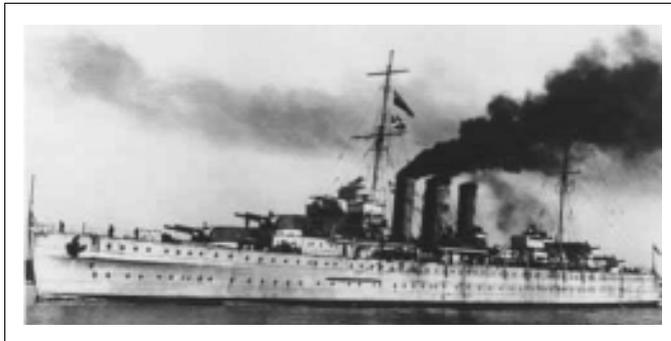


Chapter 15

Gibraltar and Home

We boarded the Dorsetshire¹ at Port Said. The first night on board, I had to sling a hammock, along with my Dad, somewhere in the bowels of the ship mixed up with all



SS Dorsetshire pictured in 1930

manner of men. Dad thought the company a bit rough for me, what with the bad language and dirty jokes. I didn't really worry, because I didn't understand the jokes anyway, but I was still glad to be found a comfortable bed in the Sick Bay.

We called in at Malta but did not go ashore. My Dad fell ill with pneumonia and by the time we reached Gibraltar, was in a bad way. We had our hearts in our mouths as we watched him lowered onto the quay in a sling operated from the ship. He, of course, went straight to the hospital and we were allocated a quarter. There was no fresh water on tap here; it was brought round in water tankers. Fortunately, as is usual in the Army, people rallied round. A friend of Dad's from our Canterbury days helped us and Betty and I got an invitation to the children's Christmas Party and even got presents. Mr McNally showed us round The Rock, including the top which was covered in thousands of narcissus. The scent and sight were lovely. We were shown the old guns housed in caves carved out of the rock and he also showed us how the water was collected by an artificial apron built on the back side. We also went on a trip to La Linea. In between, of course, we were visiting Dad who was making slow but gradual progress. The Rock area was a delight to a boy, full of Naval Ships, including the Nelson and Rodney. Every week, the P&O and Orient liners came on their way to and from the Far East. There was an interesting garden in Gibraltar, including one tree which had both oranges and lemons growing on it. I noticed, about this time, that my brain was reacting to girls; there were quite a few attractive young women on The Rock and I particularly noticed their breasts, but really only gave them a passing thought. I had some vague idea of what sex was all about, but not much.

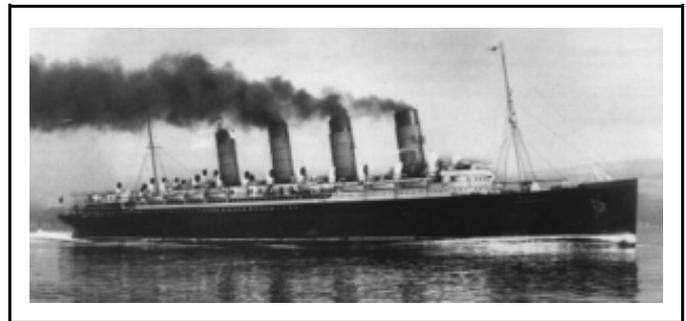
¹ - SS Dorsetshire was sunk on 5th Apr 1942 SW of Ceylon

I was still in the habit of running when I went on errands for Mum. One day I was running back with a bottle of sauce in a bag when I dropped it. Picking it up, I carried on, brought it into the house and slapped it onto the table with the words: "I thought so". Of course it was broken so back I went, running of course. We only had our Summer clothes with us at the time so, as it was Winter in England, Mum bought us winter coats.

Finally, with my Dad recovered, we set sail in the Troopship Nevassa towards the end of January 1930. Leaving harbour, as we passed each Battleship, the crews dressed ship and the bands played. It was quite an exciting moment.

Trouble started almost at once. My Mum and Sister were allocated a four-berth cabin along with another woman. Seeing that there was an empty berth, my Mother asked the other lady if she would mind me taking the spare bunk. "Yes I would" said she, "it wouldn't be decent". This was funnier than it sounds because the woman was sitting there with her legs wide apart and skirt above the knee giving everyone a fine view of her stockings and underwear all the way up to her crotch. It was a good job that she wasn't wearing French Knickers. My Mum told me later that she sat like that all the time. Dad didn't want me slinging a hammock among the troops so he slung one in the middle of the lower deck among the families. I was tucked in every night by a lovely, Motherly lady who had a large family but who still had time

to see that I was alright, what a difference in people. After four days, we docked at Southampton where "Mauretania" was also berthed. We had only just tied up when a stentorian shout went up "Boy Turner, Boy Turner". It was



RMS Mauretania

an RAF Sergeant who had been detached to meet me. Dad explained that he would be taking me himself on the following day. The same thing happened when we reached Waterloo. We duly arrived at Hounslow Barracks and were allocated a quarter which was pretty old and battered and had unfaced brick walls painted a bright red. It was quite awful. The following day my Father, in uniform, took me to Halton. As it transpired, this gave me a good start and I started my new life.