

## A month with the Royal Navy in Antarctica

HMS Endurance was the Royal Navy's Antarctic survey ship, her mission "To patrol and survey the Antarctic and South Atlantic, maintaining Sovereign Presence with Defence Diplomacy and supporting the global community of Antarctica". This involved close links with the Foreign Office, United Kingdom Hydrographic Office and the British Antarctic Survey. She was deployed annually to the Antarctic, her operating area for 7 months of the year.



*HMS Endurance*

I was very fortunate to be a guest of the Royal Navy on board HMS Endurance throughout the month of November 2008. Other civilians included a BBC Wildlife team who were filming the wildlife and landscape (using a 'Gyron' camera mounted on one of the Lynx helicopters) for the forthcoming 'Frozen Planet' series. Also on board was a film crew of four (Spiderlight Films) commissioned by Channel 5 to make a documentary about life of the ship and its company.



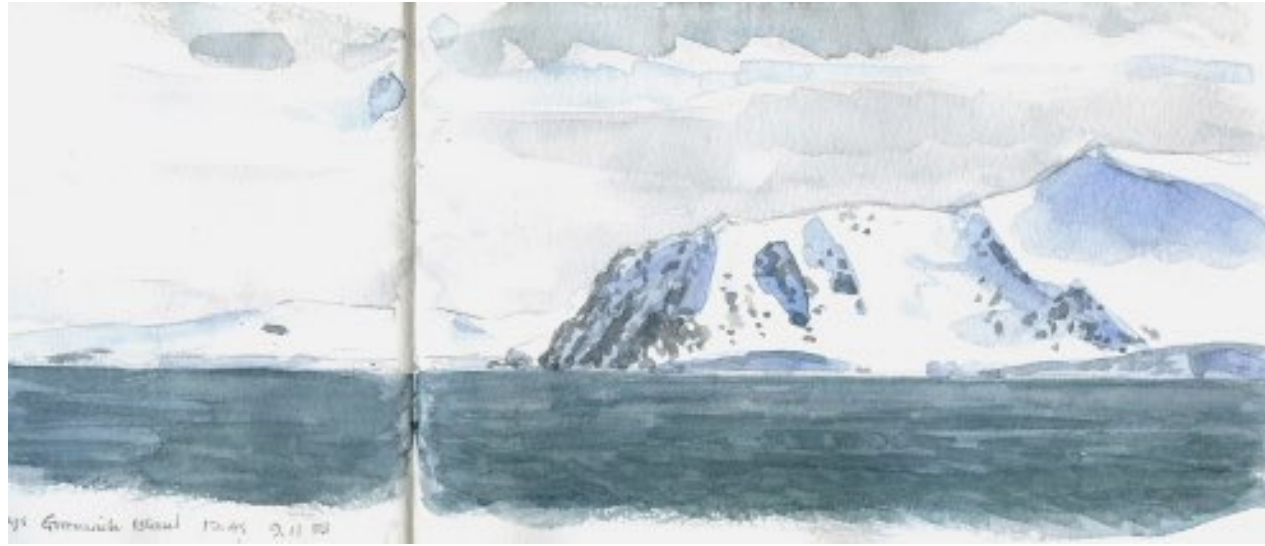
*Sitting in the hanger waiting for better weather, a sketch of the Lynx fitted with the Gyron camera*

November was 'Work Period 6' and having flown from Brize Norton I joined the ship at Mare harbour in the Falkland Islands from where we sailed south across Drakes Passage to the South Shetlands – a remote chain of islands just off the Antarctic Peninsula.



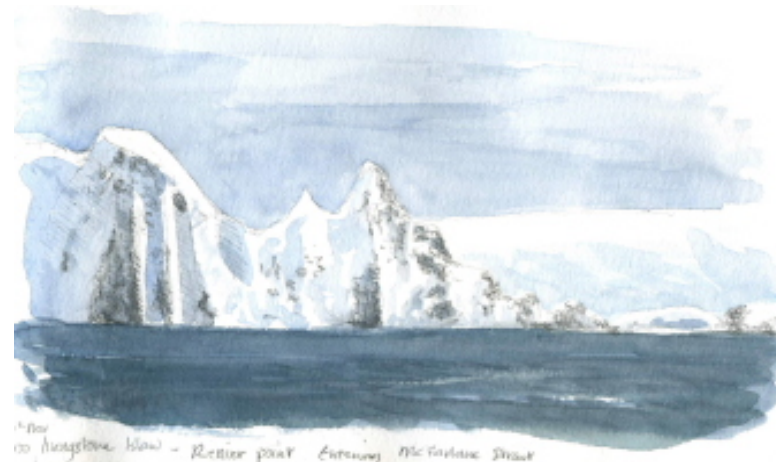
*Gentoos, Yankee Harbour*

Surveying took place most days especially around Yankee Harbour and McFarlane Strait, (between Greenwich and Livingstone Islands). There was more survey work in the Bransfield Strait (between the South Shetlands and Antarctic peninsula) and the Antarctic Sound (at the top of the peninsula) before the ship broke ice in the Erebus and Terror Gulf on the south side of the Antarctic Sound.



*Greenwich Island*

We then returned through the sound, picked up a team of surveyors that we had left at Yankee Harbour and headed down to the Gerlache Strait.



*Renier Point*





*Brash ice, bergy bits and growlers*

We paused at Paradise Bay and Deception Island before heading back north across Drakes Passage and finally returning to the Falklands.



*Anvers Island*

The trip was an extraordinary and unique experience for me; from the big seas we encountered in Drake Passage to the magnificent Antarctic scenery around the peninsula; the daily drama of the ever changing environment to the wonderful encounters with the unique wildlife; there were challenging new paintings every hour of every day, and I lapped them up at every opportunity.



*Back at Mare harbour, Falkland Islands*

I was put ashore whenever there was an opportunity, and always with a Royal Marine 'minder' to cover for any emergency such as transport failure or sudden weather change. Being deployed by MIB or Lynx helicopter was always a thrilling event in itself. I would then be left to draw and paint for three to four hours, often several miles from the ship in a silent wilderness of dramatic snow covered mountains and a foreboding sea littered with ice.



*Checking where we were going in the Lynx.*



*Heading south through the Erebus and Terror Gulf*



Albatrosses (Black browed, an occasional Royal, Wandering and Sooty) and petrels (all sorts from Giant to Cape) accompanied the ship across Drakes passage and when ashore I visited several penguin colonies (Gentoo, Adelie and Chinstrap) as well as watching seals (Fur, Elephant, Weddell and an occasional Leopard). Minke Whales were seen fairly regularly, there was a brief glimpse of some Orcas and the BBC spotted an amazing pod of beaked whales from the air.



18 Nov 9:20 am from the bridge -  
Foggy - First Sooty Albatross seen near ship as  
Sailed on into the gloom. Very elegant bird. Lat 58.4 Long 57.1

Sooty Albatross

I sketched most days and took hundreds of photographs. Back home I spent the next six months working on a series paintings inspired by my Antarctica trip and held a major exhibition of my work in June 2009 at Frost & Reed in St James, London.

The Royal Navy were exceptionally helpful and supportive throughout my time on board - many also turned up to the exhibition which proved to be a great success.



*Gentoos*



*The month after my trip, December 2008, Endurance suffered extensive flooding to her machinery spaces and lower accommodation decks, resulting in the near loss of the ship. A serious engine room flood left her without power or propulsion, and she was towed to Punta Arenas by a Chilean tug. After an extensive survey was completed, the estimates to refit the ship were put at around £30m. On 8 April 2009 Endurance arrived off Portsmouth, on the semi-submersible transporter ship MV Target.*

*On 9 September 2010 speculation in the press suggested it was likely that Endurance would be scrapped and replaced with another icebreaker from Norway.*

*Endurance was laid up in Portsmouth from 2009 to 2016. In October 2013 it was reported that she would be scrapped; in July 2015 the vessel was offered for sale for further use or recycling and on 1 June 2016 left Portsmouth under tow for the Leyal ship recycling facility in Turkey.*

*On 22 March 2011, it had been announced that the Royal Navy intended to hire MV Polarbjørn, to be renamed HMS Protector, for three years whilst a final decision on whether to repair or scrap Endurance was made. HMS Protector was purchased in September 2013 and serves to this day as the Royal Navy's Antarctic survey ship.*

*(details from Wikipedia)*