

**BOOK REVIEW****YEARS OF ENDURANCE ~ LIFE ABOARD THE BATTLECRUISER TIGER 1914-16****BY JOHN R. MUIR. FIRST PUBLISHED IN 1937. REPUBLISHED IN 2021 BY****SEAFORTH PUBLISHING A DIVISION OF PEN & SWORD BOOKS****ISBN 978 1 3990 1720 6 (H/B)**

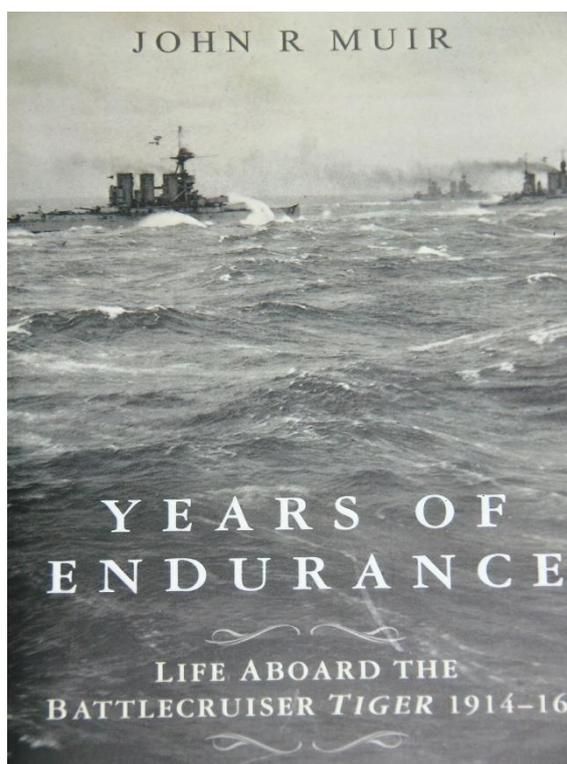
John Muir was born in Scotland in 1873 and after graduating in medicine and surgery he joined the Royal Navy, achieving the rank of Surgeon Rear Admiral. This personal historical account by him who as the Senior Medical Officer (SMO) aboard HMS Tiger from October 1914 until the winter of 1916, is superb.

The battlecruiser HMS Tiger was built under the 1911 Naval Estimates and laid down at John Brown & Company Clydebank in June 1913 and commissioned in October 1914. She was 704-ft in length, displaced 35,000-tons, powered by steam turbines driving four propellers, with 39 boilers in five boiler rooms, designed HP of

85000 with a speed of 28-knots. A year after she was laid down the Japanese battlecruiser Kongo was completed, and her design proved to be superior in armament and protection. Work was suspended on HMS Tiger and her design altered to accommodate the improvements which meant she remained on the stocks for eighteen months before launching. She was the largest ship in the Royal Navy until HMS Hood was launched in 1918.

John Muir begins his memoir with a prologue, which is a vivid and accurate description of HMS Tiger steaming at a reduced speed against the elements of a severe gale in the North Sea. Any mariner who has experienced such extreme weather in a ship would agree with the author's account.

The opening chapter relates to John Muir's service as SMO at Chatham Naval Barracks and the test mobilisation of the medical arrangements to receive reservists prior to the First World War. Deficiencies were made good and when war was declared some 30,000 reservists duly arrived at the barracks and were medically examined. The SMO was tasked to establish a temporary hospital in a large Wesleyan chapel in Chatham within 48 hours. A fully equipped hospital



appropriately staffed was opened on time to receive patients. With the country at war John Muir felt it was his duty to serve at sea. His request was approved, and he proceeded to the Clydebank where he joined HMS Tiger on the 30<sup>th</sup> October 1914. He expressed the opinion that she would be 'the last warship built to satisfy the sailors idea of what a ship should be like and nobly she fulfilled that ideal'. There were hundreds of shipyard workers still employed on the warship, and these were supplemented by 1500 sailors who had arrived from Devonport. Muir details how the crew settled down and began the process the turning HMS Tiger into an efficient warship in the shortest time available due to the exigencies of the war. In peacetime the warship would have undergone sea trials taking months, not just a few short weeks to complete before entering service. The reader is informed how this was achieved in a newly commissioned warship with anecdotes and humour. One problem of particular concern to the SMO was that many compartments had been used by dockyard workers as latrines and needed to be thoroughly cleaned by the crew as quickly as possible to avoid infectious diseases.

HMS Tiger joined the fleet at Scapa Flow, the topography of which John Muir describes in striking realism. The ship was ordered to Invergordon and from there they sailed on a dark December night with the 5<sup>th</sup> Battle Squadron in a fruitless attempt to engage the enemy whilst they made a daring raid on Scarborough. The incident was a pertinent lesson learnt by the Royal Navy to improve their tactics for any future engagement with the German High Seas Fleet.

By January 1915 HMS Tiger was based at Rosyth and she participated in the Battle of the Dogger Bank during which the SMS Blücher was sunk. HMS Tiger was struck six times by enemy shells. One shell hit 'Q' turret, killing ten and wounding eleven. Civilian workers were still on board the warship and whole encounter and its consequences is conveyed to the reader. After repairs HMS Tiger was deployed on patrols which Muir makes clear was 'tedium' for sixteen months. He also explains at great length the geographic features of the North Sea where HMS Tiger spent much of operational time during the war.

HMS Tiger was part of the 1<sup>st</sup> Battle Cruiser Squadron, which put to sea on the 31<sup>st</sup> May 1916 to intercept the German High Seas Fleet. Muir firstly, gives an overview of the Battle of Jutland and then of his participation as the SMO during the battle. His medical station was in the bowels of HMS Tiger, and he asks the reader to imagine the conditions and surroundings in which he and his staff were working as the wounded and dying were brought to them. The reality of the situation he brilliantly conveyed and the worry they have if the ship was mortally damaged. For them, in such circumstances there would be no chance of escape. The explosive force of one shell which struck the ship flung the SMO against a bulkhead, leaving him bruised and shaken.

HMS Tiger was astern of HMS Queen Mary when she blew up and the concussion impacted on the former causing her heel alarmingly over to port. Whatever was happening above them the SMO and his staff continued attending to the wounded. HMS Tiger was struck by eighteen shells, having fired over three hundred from her main armament. Twenty of her crew were killed and forty-six wounded. The dead were buried at sea whilst the ship was underway.

After the battle HMS Tiger returned to Rosyth leaving 6,000 of their shipmates in the cold dark water of the North Sea. As the news of the battle spread the public response to it was that the Royal Navy had failed to defeat the Germans. Their expectation was that the Royal Navy would have a resounding victory as Lord Nelson had at Trafalgar. Muir expresses his reaction and that of the Royal Navy which is unequivocal. The battle damage to HMS Tiger was repaired and she resumed a pattern of patrols in the North Sea. Muir's considered thoughts are shared with the reader from the point of view of 'Jack At War', a fascinating appraisal of the Royal Navy.

Having spent two years on board HMS Tiger, John Muir became deeply attached to the warship and wanted to remain with her until the war ended. However, as a naval officer he obeyed his superiors and was appointed as medical officer in charge at Wai-hai-wei on the China Station. He closes his memoir as a passenger on a P & O ship sailing to China. A fellow passenger concerned about the possibility of being torpedoed asks him whether he is frightened. John Muir simply replies that he had 'been so frightened for the last 2½ years that he could not be frightened anymore'!

This outstanding memoir must be rated as one of the best about what it was like to serve on a battlecruiser or any other warship during the First World War. The text is accompanied by black and white photographs and Mike Farquharson-Roberts former Naval Medical Director General provides a first-class introduction to the book. There was little comfort on these warships for the crew. They were designed and built to fight the enemy and the ship was equipped for that purpose first and foremost. Officer and sailors endured the good and not so good periods and made the very best of the situation, as had those before them with pride upholding and maintaining the traditions of the Royal Navy. John Muir communicates to the reader the daily routine of life aboard HMS Tiger in an honest and straightforward way. He does not mention the names of crew members only very senior naval officers when he considers it to be necessary. The book is a notable tribute to and, also a remembrance of a dedicated medical officer of the Royal Navy.

During the Second World War John Muir, formerly Surgeon Rear Admiral, served as a Lieutenant in the Royal Naval Volunteer Reserve and at the age of 67 was killed when HM

Yacht Campeador V was sunk by a mine with the loss of all her crew. He is commemorated on a CWGC memorial at Southampton Old Cemetery Crematorium, Panel 4.

Roger Coleman