



Joe Dyer as a boy, c1903.

recalled to duty. He joined *HMS Dunedin* on 25 August 1939 and, at noon, the ship sailed to join the 12th Cruiser Squadron for service on the Northern Patrol at Scapa Flow. Vi was at the dockside, along with many others, waving their men off to an uncertain fate. On 3 September, Neville Chamberlain announced to the nation that Britain was at war with Germany. Vi, who was still grieving her first child, was seven months' pregnant with Brian and must have hoped Joe would be back for the birth; everyone had predicted the war would be over by Christmas.

An early Christmas

The couple's second son, Brian, was born in November 1939. Joe hoped he would soon be back in the bosom of his family. The long-awaited leave came on 4 December, when the *Dunedin* arrived at Govan on the banks of the River Clyde, Glasgow. At

The Dunedin Society

The Dunedin Society was set up to keep alive memories of *HMS Dunedin* and her men. It organises several commemorative events, including the annual 24 November ceremony. The Dunedin Memorial plinth at the National Memorial Arboretum in Staffordshire also provides a lasting tribute to the crewmen. Visit www.hmsdunedin.co.uk.

www.family-tree.co.uk

3.30pm, the men fell in on the jetty. They marched to the gates, then made their journeys home to loved ones. Joe travelled through the night from Glasgow to London, and then on to Portsmouth, arriving on Tuesday. For the next 10 days, Christmas came early in the Dyer household; Joe was at Vi's side, doting on his newborn son. All too soon, he had to leave them behind and return to *HMS Dunedin*. The ship sailed on Christmas Eve. At the Christmas Day service on board ship, each man was wished a happy Christmas by the captain, given a bottle of beer and a Christmas card from the King and Queen. Along with many other mementos, Vi kept and treasured this Christmas card.

The Portsmouth Blitz

While Joe was engaging the enemy at sea, Vi was experiencing the full wrath of the German *Luftwaffe* as they bombed Portsmouth, the home of the Royal Navy. Almost 1,000 civilians were killed over four years during the Portsmouth Blitz, and many more were injured. Some 80,000 properties in the area were damaged and 6,625 homes were destroyed. Many bombs fell on the street where Vi lived, but luckily her home was spared. She spent many nights in the air raid shelter. In a letter, Joe wrote: 'I'm so sorry you have had so many nights in your shelter again for I could tell that you had to make several quick moves indeed, but thank God you are still safe and well.'

Devastating news

HMS Dunedin left England for her final journey on 8 April 1941 at 8pm. This was to be the last time Joe and Vi saw each other. On the 10 August, *Dunedin* arrived at the South Atlantic Station in Freetown, Sierra Leone. One crew member wrote: 'It's hot and humid, there are cockroaches in the sickbay, but the mail has arrived: at last, news from loved ones.' Joe's telegram from Vi informed him that Brian had died during an operation at The Royal Hospital in Portsmouth on 9 June 1941, while Joe had been at sea, oblivious to the tragedy. Brian was just 19 months old. In a letter dated 11 August 1941, Joe replied: 'We arrived in port [Freetown] yesterday to find 25 bags of mail waiting for us

A history

HMS Dunedin was a D-class light cruiser of 4,500 tons. She was built during World War I and was among the pride of the Royal Navy. Launched on 19 November 1918 from the yards of Armstrong Whitworth in Newcastle upon Tyne, she was commissioned by the Royal Navy in 1919.

Between the wars, the *Dunedin* was part of the New Zealand division of the Royal Navy, spending her time in the Pacific Ocean. When war broke out in 1939, she was called upon to mobilise and sailed hostile waters in pursuit of enemy ships.

On 24 November 1941, *HMS Dunedin* was torpedoed by a U-boat, and sank with the loss of 419 crew. A survivor's personal story can be found on the BBC's World War II People's War website at www.bbc.co.uk/ww2peopleswar/stories/11/a5925611.shtml.

and it was not very long before we had it unbound and sorted.' He went on: 'When I read the telegram, it was one of the saddest moments of my life... I can picture him now, toddling off that morning in his blue suit and fluffy hat, looking so nice.' He added: 'Last night I had very little sleep, I had two watches to keep but I was just walking around; my mind far away from here.'

A desolate scene played out as the men struggled to haul themselves onto rafts and floating debris

Sinking of *HMS Dunedin*

The Admiralty had learned from Enigma decrypts that four German U-boats, supported by a supply ship, were planning to attack shipping near Cape Town. *HMS Dunedin* was ordered to track them down. On 24 November 1941 in the stifling equatorial heat, the crew was busy going about its various duties, unaware of the peril that lay ahead. Almost by chance a German U-boat came across the *Dunedin*. She was sunk at 1.26pm by two torpedoes. Survivor Bill Gill