

Second Radio Officer John Campbell and Boatswain Hugh Hughson BEM



John Alexander Paris Campbell was born in Kirkwall on 16th September 1919, the elder son of Druggist John Campbell and Mary Campbell (née Meason). John's father had a chemist shop in Bridge Street and the family, including a year younger brother George, lived in Cromfort, Cromwell Road. John's father had reached the age of 45 before he married in June 1918, while mother Mary was then aged 31.

John attended Kirkwall Grammar School, where he passed three Higher Grades in August 1938. John trained for two years at Edinburgh University to become a technical studies teacher, but left to join the Merchant Navy soon after World War 2 started. John trained to become a radio officer. In May 1940 John was in harbour in Cuba, from where he sent home a letter to his year younger brother George.

Hugh Edward Hughson was the eldest of the five children of Magnus Hughson and Georgina Hughson (née Barclay). Hugh was born on 11th January 1919 in the Shetland ferry port of Toft, in the parish of Delting. The family moved to Orkney before

World War 2 started, living at first on Eday.

Although his father was a shepherd, Hugh followed many young Shetland men in making a career at sea in the Merchant Navy. The hazards of everyday life at sea increased greatly when war broke out again in 1939, especially in the difficult early war years when the Royal Navy was stretched to find escorts for convoys and they had very limited support from aircraft, shore based or afloat.

Hugh had been promoted to Able Seaman when he was awarded the British Empire Medal in December 1941. The medal was awarded to Hugh and to a carpenter, William Wastle, while Third Engineer James Annandale was awarded the OBE, for their brave (but eventually unsuccessful) attempt to reboard and save a sinking ship.



John Campbell and Hugh Hughson were both crew members of the steamship *Cape Corso* in 1942. John was the Second Radio Officer, while Hugh had taken on the duties of the Boatswain.

SS Cape Corso was built by Lithgows of Port Glasgow, completed in 1929 as *Knight of St George* with gross tonnage of 3,807 tons and speed of 10.5 knots. In 1934 the ship was bought by Lyle Shipping of Glasgow, who changed the name to *Cape Corso* and used her for general tramping, with much Vancouver-UK-NW Europe trade. The outbreak of war increased the demands for merchant shipping and *Cape Corso* was busy carrying cargoes to many ports.

Cape Corso's first Arctic Convoy was in PQ3, which arrived in Archangel on 28th November 1941. *Cape Corso* returned via Seidisfiord in Iceland, then Kirkwall and Methil Roads to reach Hull on 2nd March 1942.

SS Cape Corso sailed from Hull on 21st March and arrived at Reykjavik on 8th April in Convoy UR18. *Cape Corso* did not sail as intended with convoy PQ14, but left Reykjavik with Convoy PQ15 on 26th April.



PQ15 consisted of 25 merchant ships (15 American), including the first Arctic Convoy CAM ship, *Empire Morn*, with a Hurricane fighter ready for catapult launch (but not used). Close escort included an improvised “anti-aircraft cruiser”, the converted Irish Sea packet HMS *Ulster Queen*. There was also a strong naval force providing distant cover for the convoy that included the battleships *King George V* and *Washington*, the carrier

Victorious and five cruisers, two of these the American *Wichita* and *Tuscaloosa*.

A German long-range Condor detected Convoy PQ15 late on 30th April. Air attacks on the convoy started next day. The air attacks on 1st May were ineffective and were driven off by the heavy fire of the escort and convoy. There was a tragedy that day, when the convoy’s distant cover ran into fog and the battleship *King George V* collided with and sunk the destroyer *Punjabi*, killing 49 of her crew.

On 3rd May PQ15 was attacked by six Heinkel 111 bombers in the first attack on an Arctic Convoy by aircraft trained in torpedo attack. Although met by ferocious fire, which blew up two planes and fatally damaged a third, the torpedoes they launched hit three of the merchant ships. One was the ship of the Convoy’s Commodore, *Botavon*, another the heavy lift ship *Jutland* and the third *Cape Corso*.

Cape Corso’s cargo included explosives, stored in the hold that was hit by the torpedo, and she blew up instantaneously. Although 137 survivors were picked up from the three merchant ships that sunk, very few were from *Cape Corso*. Only 6 of her crew were saved, while 56 (including 11 of her 12 DEMS gunners) died. These included both John Campbell and Hugh Hughson.

John Campbell and Hugh Hughson are both commemorated on Panel 23 of the Tower Hill Memorial in London. John Campbell is commemorated on the Kirkwall War Memorial in Orkney, Hugh Hughson on the Eday War Memorial.

John Campbell’s father, then retired and aged 70, died of heart failure a few months after his son’s death. Hugh Hughson’s oldest sister, Mary, married a Hatston based Fleet Air Arm pilot, but died of tuberculosis in June 1945, while their mother died of cervical cancer six months later. The

Hughson family had moved to Kingsdale in Firth and Georgina and Mary are buried there.

