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FLYING BOAT TOWED HUNDREDS OF MILES BY CORVETTE

WORLD RECORD IN SOUTH ATLANTIC

A Sunderland flying boat which was forced to alight on the sea through engine trouble was towed hundreds of miles across the South Atlantic to its base in West Africa by a Naval corvette.

No flying boat had ever before been towed such a distance over the open sea. The tow lasted for 74 hours, during much of which time there was a heavy swell and a cross wind, which gave the flying boat a terrible buffeting. One night there was a tropical electrical storm.

In spite of this the flying boat was brought back to its base unharmed - a great tribute to the toughness of the aircraft.

The Sunderland was on escort duty over the South Atlantic when the engine trouble developed. Its captain, Flight Lieutenant P.N.B. Parsons, just managed to maintain sufficient height to get him near to a corvette. He alighted near her and signalled a request for a tow.

That was the beginning of the long journey.

At first a thick rope was used for the tow, but after a while it parted. The rope was reconnected, but it parted again, this time just as dusk was falling and a heavy sea was getting up.

In the gathering darkness a steel hawser was then cast aboard the flying boat and fastened to the main spar, and the journey continued.

"The first night was the worst," said the captain of the Sunderland when he got back to his base. "There was a strong wind, with several rainstorms and a fair bit of lightning. Sometimes we could not see the corvette which was towing us, although she was only three hundred yards ahead.

"In the morning the wind and the swell dropped noticeably, and throughout the following day and night - our second night on the water - we made a good speed.

"During the morning of the third day, though, the wind freshened, and the Sunderland began to plunge very heavily and to make water forward. That night, with a rough sea and a strong wind, we had to reduce speed and just crawl along, and the flying boat really took a terrific buffeting. We put out three dinghies on the main plane, in readiness if the Sunderland sank.

"The fourth day the going became a lot easier, but by then we were wondering just how much strain had been put on the Sunderland, and whether she would stand very much more. However, she came through splendidly, and the corvette handed us over to a pinnace when we reached our base.

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"On the last day the first lieutenant of the corvette came aboard to help us. The whole thing, indeed, was a magnificent piece of work by the corvette."

The Sunderland crew arrived home weary and unshaven, but unharmed, although for 74 hours they had been buffeted about in the most violent manner, often wondering if they would have to scramble out of a sinking aircraft and take to their dinghies.

They had been supplied on the journey from the corvette. Every morning they received a signal by Aldis lamp, asking what food they needed, and they signalled back their "order for groceries" for the day. Then the corvette drew then almost alongside, and floated the supplies down to them on a rope. Two kegs of water were sent across in the same way, and, a most thoughtful attention, a toothbrush and a tube of toothpaste.

The result of this patient effort by the crews of the corvette and the Sunderland is that a valuable flying boat which would otherwise have been lost to the R.A.F. is now safely back at its base, and will soon be fit for flying again.