

OBITUARY

VICE ADMIRAL SIR JOHN EDGELL

(1880-1962)

Vice Admiral Sir John EDGELL, K.B.E., C.B., F.R.S., who had a distinguished career in the Surveying Branch of the British Royal Navy and was Hydrographer of the Navy from 1932 to 1945, died in hospital in Salisbury on 14 November 1962.

John Augustine EDGELL, the younger son of James EDGELL, of Teddington, was born on 20 December 1880. He entered the Navy through H.M.S. *Britannia* in 1893 and joined his first surveying ship H.M.S. *Triton* as a sub-lieutenant in 1902. His first surveying command was the *Mutine* on the coast of Africa, and later he commanded H.M. ships *Triton*, *Hearty*, *Endeavour*, *Merlin*, and H.M.A.S. *Moresby*. His surveying duties took him to most parts of the world and he was in charge of surveys in China, Australia, the Red Sea, the Mediterranean, and the South and West coasts of Africa.


During the First World War he surveyed in the North Sea and the Dardenelles approaches, setting up a mobile chart-production unit in H.M.S. *Endeavour* for the provision of local charts during the operations in that area. He was Superintendent of Charts in 1917-20 and 1923-25 and Assistant Hydrographer in 1928-30 and 1931-32.

He became Hydrographer of the British Navy in 1932 and served in this post till the end of the war, a longer tenure of this office than any of his predecessors except BEAUFORT and WHARTON.

EDGELL was promoted to Vice Admiral in November 1938, and placed on the Retired List, although he continued actively to head the department throughout the war. He was a delegate at the first conference of the International Hydrographic Bureau in London in 1919 and again in Monaco in 1929 and 1932. In 1937 and 1947 at the International Hydrographic Conference he was elected president of the assembly.

He was awarded the O.B.E. in 1919 for services in command of surveying ships in the war and was made C.B. in 1936 and created a K.B.E. in 1942.

During his time as hydrographer he saw great changes in the department both ashore and afloat. Improved echo sounding equipment completely replaced the leadline, and he planned a new fleet of modern surveying ships which were used to survey the beaches and liberated ports during the landings of troops in the Mediterranean, north-west Europe, and Burma and Malaya. Ashore he organized the transference of the Chart





Printing Establishment from London to its new commodious premises in Taunton and established rotary offset methods which coped adequately with the vastly increased volume of chart printing required by the Fleet. He received the very warmest commendations from the Allied Naval Commander in Chief Expeditionary Force for the superb efficiency of the department whose vital activities he had guided throughout the war.

A signal honour was conferred on him by his election to Fellowship of the Royal Society in 1943. Sir John was the prime mover in setting British oceanography on a firm footing immediately after the war and, thanks to his great efforts, the National Institute of Oceanography came into being. Since that time he had served on the executive committee of the institute and also on the National Oceanographic Council. It is, therefore, all the more regrettable that he did not live to see the commissioning of the new research ship *Discovery*.

Side by side with all this activity he was the Admiralty representative on the Port of London Authority from 1941 to 1961, Acting Conservator of the Mersey in 1945-51, and on the Kent River Board as the nominee of the Port of London Authority.

His publications were limited to professional papers and two small booklets on the record and history of the Hydrographic Department and it is most unfortunate that he never wrote his memoirs, which would have covered such a unique span of naval surveying history from the days of sail to those of steam and electronic instrumentation. He was the last naval officer to sail his ship out of harbour with the yards manned.

He married Caroline Elizabeth, only daughter of the late G. RODOLPH, of Eastbourne, who survives him with their two daughters.