



Conway History

Tales from the Boards

By Geoffrey Haskins (40-43)

Continuing a series of tales culled from research into names inscribed on the Memorial and Honours Boards now located in the Conway Chapel at Birkenhead Priory. All the information has come from the public domain, including various web-sites and publications. Other sources are the Commonwealth War Graves Commission and London Gazette, together with numerous Associations and specialised sites.

Robert Herbert Wilfred HUGHES DSO CB CMG CSI RD

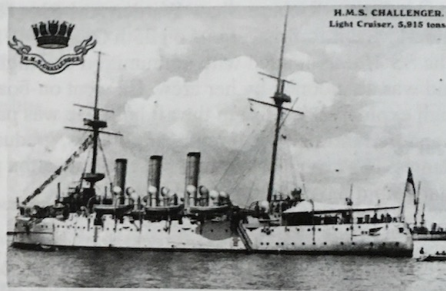
Britain's Colonial Service employed many professional mariners throughout the world supporting safe navigation and security in rivers, ports and coastal areas.

An interesting job, it attracted adventurous young men who had served their time and gained a Master's or Chief Engineer's ticket. Notable destinations included the Hooghli River Service, Royal Indian Marine, Nigerian Marine, East African colonies and Pacific Islands. Robert Hughes passed for Masters in 1894. Already an officer in the Royal

Naval Reserve, he decided on a career in West Africa. There, he played an important part developing and maintaining trading routes in the Niger delta and river traffic from the North, opening up facilities in Sapele, Warri, Burutu and Port Harcourt. He made a name as a hydrographic surveyor in the Niger, Forcados, Escravos, Brass, and Bonny bar entrances and left his mark on Hughes Channel, the part of the route from Bonny to Port Harcourt named after him.

On the outbreak of WWI, mobilised as a Commander RNR, he promptly saw action in the German Cameroons and was awarded the DSO: the citation read: *For his services during operations in the Cameroons. At the beginning of the campaign Commander Hughes superintended the work of clearing a way through the wreck barrage and piloting HMS Challenger (above right in 1914) to within bombardment range of Douala, and he has subsequently, at considerable risk and frequently under fire, carried out survey work on the Sanaga, Njong and Campo rivers, and continuously harassed the enemy's coast outposts.*

Thereafter, his ability and experience in managing river and estuarine transport were put to valuable service, principally in Mesopotamia, but also the Gallipoli campaign. In common with others similarly employed, he was assigned temporary military rank in the Royal Engineers, but he alone rose to become Brigadier General. In each role, he clearly distinguished himself and was awarded, successively, the CMG, CSI and CB.



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After the war, it is believed Captain Hughes returned to the Nigerian Marine, eventually retiring in 1930. The Nigerian government awarded him a final honour in 1932 by naming its new dredger *Robert Hughes* (*right*). It is a comfort to know that he passed away in March 1936 in Westminster before she was destroyed by a German U-boat.

The dredger, working in the entrance to Lagos harbour, struck a mine on 4th June 1941 and sank with the loss of 14 of her crew of 31. The mine had been laid a week before by *U-69*. The dredger had been operating since 1932 and her work was vital in keeping the harbours of the Nigerian delta open for shipping; her loss caused considerable problems.

