

# Two former Dockyard OCs die

## Cdre J. Fairbairn

WHEN *SAS President Pretorius* sailed from Simon's Town recently, it had a solemn task to perform in False Bay before proceeding with its other duties. On board were the ashes of, amongst others, the late Cdre John Fairbairn, to be committed to the sea in accordance with one of his last wishes.

Cdre Fairbairn was known to all who served with him as a forthright man but a real gentleman who was always genuinely interested in the welfare of his officers and men.

Cdre V.F. Holderness, who served with him in *SAS Vrystaat* and *SAS President Steyn* of which he was the first captain, said of him that he was "the epitome of what a Divisional Officer should be" and that he had had "the willing co-operation of all his men".

"Gentleman John", as he was fondly called, was indeed a Divisional Officer par excellence and, as another of his men recalled, "it was terrific serving with him".

He was the great-great grandson of the Scot, John Fairbairn, who settled in the Cape in the early 1800s and campaigned for—and obtained—freedom of the Press in the Cape and founded the first, and now the largest, life assurance office in South Africa in 1845. This was the **Old Mutual**, now one of our sponsors.

John Fairbairn was educated at the Diocesan College in Rondebosch in the Cape and joined the SA Division of the RNVR in the early 1930s after matriculating.

He commanded various "small ships" during WWII and, in 1944 was appointed OC *SAS Saldanha*. In January 1948, as captain of *HMSAS Transvaal*, he annexed Marion and Prince Edward Islands in the South Atlantic for the Union Government.

In 1968, he was appointed OC SA Naval Dockyard after three years as Naval Officer in Command, Simon's Town Dockyard. He retired in 1972 and settled in Simon's Town.

Cdre Fairbairn is survived by his daughter Tessa.

