

Fairbairn dies at 72

Chief Reporter

COMMODORE John Fairbairn, former commanding officer of the SA Naval Dockyard at Simon's Town, captain of a number of naval vessels in war and peace and the man who planted the flag annexing Marion Island to South Africa in 1948, died in Tygerberg Hospital on Tuesday night after an illness. He was 72.

Commodore Fairbairn was a great-great-grandson of John Fairbairn, fighter for press freedom in South Africa and founder of the Old Mutual.

Educated at Diocesan College, Rondebosch, he joined the South Africa Division of the Royal Naval Volunteer Reserve (RNVR) in the 1930s and became a full-



Commodore John Fairbairn

time officer in South Africa's fledgling navy at the outbreak of World War II.

Commodore Fairbairn commanded several of South Africa's "little ships" along the coast and in the Mediterranean, and in 1944 he was appointed naval officer in command, Saldanha. In 1946 he was put in charge of the SA

naval contingent for the Victory Parade in London.

He was in command of the Loch-class frigate HMSAS Transvaal at the annexation of Marion and Prince Edward islands in 1948 and five years ago, while in retirement, he revisited Marion Island with members of the National Monuments Council for the unveiling of a commemorative plaque at what is known as "Fairbairn City".

Commodore Fairbairn commissioned the frigate SAS President Steyn in Scotland in 1962 and was appointed naval officer in command, Simon's Town, in 1965 and OC Dockyard in 1968. He retired in 1972.

His wife died in England in 1963. He is survived by his daughter Tessa.