

# Obituary

**David Geoffrey Dalglish**, naval surgeon was born on 22 March 1922 to Kenneth and Ellen Dalglish. With three sisters and a younger brother he grew up in Sidcup, Kent, in semi-rural surroundings of gardens, fields and woodlands where he developed a lasting love of natural history. Aged nine he learnt woodwork, a manual skill that re-emerged later in his gift for surgery. He attended Merchant Taylor's School until 1939, taking the 1st MB examination in preparation for entering medical school. When World War II began in September 1939 he was of military age but compulsorily reserved as a future doctor. After a gap year as agricultural labourer, fire watcher and founder member of the Local Defence Volunteers (forerunner of the Home Guard), David joined St Thomas's Hospital Medical School in 1940. His early months of study coincided with the London blitz, in which every city hospital was fully involved and severely tested. Later he served in emergency dressing stations, set up in southern England to treat casualties returning from the Normandy invasion. On graduating MRCS and LRCP in 1946, David had gained an unusual but invaluable practical training in emergency medicine.

His first posting as a doctor was as houseman in Farnham Hospital, an intense but brief experience in general practice. Directed in the same year into national service, he joined the Royal Navy, becoming a Probationary Acting Surgeon Lieutenant, and starting the distinguished career that absorbed much of his working life.

After sea time in the cruiser HMS *Superb*, in 1947 David joined the Falkland Islands Dependencies Survey and was posted as medical officer to Base E, Stonington Island. His first job, within minutes of landing, was separating brawling sledge dogs and sewing up the casualties, a task in which, during the next two years, he came to excel. He loved the huskies, but favoured sewing up humans, who were less liable to bite. His ten human companions at the base were a healthy bunch, who for about 95% of the time needed no doctoring. Like the rest of us David became in turn stevedore, snow-shoveller, storesman, veterinarian, cook, scrubber-out, painter, carpenter, sledger (eventually with his own nine-dog team), greenhouse-tenderer, surveyor and scientific assistant. To all these rôles he brought his own brand of off-beat humour and relaxed competence. When doctoring was needed he was never at a loss, quietly taking charge and showing his professional skills. Part of his job was to act as radio doctor to the small bases that had no medical officer of their own. Consultancy involved receiving the often confused RT quacks of a patient or base leader from the other end of the dependencies, interpreting them and shouting replies. It seemed to work.

Toward the end of his first year David and his team took part in the Northern Sledging Journey, a ten week expedition over sea ice in which we surveyed the northern half of Marguerite Bay, a distance roughly comparable to the coast of Wales. On a small group of islands we discovered an emperor penguin colony, at that time only the third one known for sure in Antarctica. We returned to base in late spring,

expecting soon to be relieved and shipped back to Britain. However, the sea ice surrounding Stonington Island remained fast, and in the following March the relief ship had to turn back without us.

It was a difficult time. David was diverted to find himself reported by the BBC as one of 'the lost eleven'. Lost we were not, but five of us had already spent two years in the Antarctic, and none of us looked forward to an enforced further year. David kept a careful eye on us, and prescribed a comfortable room, we dubbed it the First Class Compartment, where anyone who felt the strain of our crowded quarters could retire and just be quiet for a time. Characteristically, he then turned carpenter and helped to build it.

My own solution, as a budding zoologist, was to get away from the base altogether and take the opportunity offered by the emperor penguins, to camp alongside their colony and discover why and how they bred in winter. David had relished the emperors during our first brief visit, and was keen to join me. The wintering party was completed by David Jones, our aircraft fitter, who had had no aircraft to fit for eighteen months and fancied a change from base life.

Though life in a three man tent for 70 days, in temperatures that dropped below  $-40^{\circ}\text{C}$ , was not always comfortable, it was a fascinating winter for all three of us. The two Davids could not have been better company. They managed the camp (that is the tent and the laboratory, a ramshackle igloo alongside), tended the dog teams, marveled at the penguins, and generously left me every opportunity to study the colony day by day. We got on well together and none of us ever forgot the experience. Fifty years later, in a memoir for his family, David Dalglish wrote as follows. 'I shall never regret going on what was the experience of a lifetime – what I gained is invaluable and what I lost of small consequence.'

The following summer the ice relented and Base E was closed. David returned to England, to the relatively prosaic life of the navy, with hospital appointments in Plymouth followed by Trincomalee and Haslar. In 1955 he returned to Antarctica for a year as leader of the Royal Society Expedition, to establish a scientific base for the International Geophysical Year above the ice cliffs of Coats Lands. With him as a tractor driver went Robin, his younger brother. David's expedition was a conspicuous success. The site he chose above Halley Bay, on the Weddell Sea coast, proved right for the job, and a much bigger geophysical station still operates there under the British Antarctic Survey.

David's next sea time appointment was as Principal Medical Officer to the Royal Yacht HMS *Britannia* (1959–1962), followed by three years in the Hong Kong naval base, a staff course in Britain, and a posting to Britannia Royal Naval College, Dartmouth. While there he met his future wife, Cally Scott. They married in 1969, and in 1970 were posted to the naval base at Singapore, where Surgeon Captain Dalglish became the last Fleet Medical Officer. His final appointment was to the Ministry of Defence as Deputy Medical Director of the Navy,

with the rank of Surgeon Commodore. From that he retired in 1975.

Having determined to settle in Devonshire, David and Cally restored Farmstone, an old and semi-derelict farmhouse near the village of Halwell, a few miles from Totnes and Dartmouth. There they created a garden and raised their two children, Anna and Adam. David filled his time by becoming a county schools medical officer, running a small flock of sheep, and taking an active rôle in village and church life. He wrote several memoirs, and he and Cally warmly welcomed old friends, particularly

from Antarctic days. David died suddenly on 28 March 2010, ending a rich and varied life of medicine, polar exploration, naval administration, and contented country retirement.

For his Antarctic service David was awarded a Polar Medal and bar, and Dalglish Bay, a corner of northern Marguerite Bay, is named for him. At Base E the 'lost eleven' knew him as a caring doctor and a multi-skilled and hugely entertaining companion. For details of his further career I am indebted to Cally, and to his close friend Michael Hickey.

*Bernard Stonehouse*