

### THE LAST VOYAGE OF H.M.S. AJAX

At anchor off Falmouth is a ship, steeped in naval history. It's Ajax - last survivor in the Royal Navy of that famed trio of cruisers which destroyed the German pocket battleship "Graf Spee" in the action of the River Plate. Her decks littered, her magazines empty, Ajax of the Royal Navy is no more. It's now Ajax of the British Iron and Steel Corporation. For what was once a proud and gallant ship now just represents 7,000 tons of scrap. Yet the exploit that won Ajax - and Britain - the first naval battle of the war, will never be forgotten. The "phony" war was at its peak, when, one December morning, ten year's ago, the "Graf Spee" limped into Montevideo Harbour. After a raging fight, she sought refuge in a neutral port. Aboard her were 62 British merchant seamen, survivors of ships sunk by the "Graf Spee." Though her Commander, Captain Langsdorff refused the challenge to come out into open his ship was hit and 36 of his crew killed. They were buried in Montevideo, with full military honours from the Uruguayan Navy and a wreath from British sailors.

On orders from Berlin, Captain Langsdorff, 72 hours after reaching port, headed the "Graf Spee" seawards again. The stage was set for the second half of the battle. Before a large audience, the climax came suddenly. The pride of the German Navy was scuttled - put to the torch by her own commander, rather than face the British ships that were waiting for her.

Today, the end is near for Ajax, too. Her last defiant gesture comes in the River Usk, where she ran-against on her way to the breakers' yard. To the ship comes a last signal from the nation, "Ajax, well done!"