



Names and Naming

Denman Island was named after the Honorable Joseph Denman who was Commander-in-Chief of the Pacific Fleet from 1864 to 1866.

According to Edmund Hope Verney, a young navy officer commanding a gunboat here at the time, Denman was addressed by his wife (who travelled with him on board his flagship) as 'Dear Josey' and was so called throughout the Fleet, except when he was called 'Josey Dear'. Our authority on British Columbia Coast Names is Captain John T. Walbran who writes that Denman Island was named by Captain Richards 'circa 1864' - which was when Denman took up the role of Commander-in-Chief. Previous Commanders-in-Chief included Rear Admiral Phipps Hornby and Rear Admiral Robert L. Baynes. There does seem to be a pattern.

However it is clear that Denman Island was named by Captain Richards in the winter of 1859 -60 after his first sortie into the area in late October 1859, almost five years before Denman's appointment as Pacific Commander-in-Chief. Our name appears on Admiralty Chart 580, dated 1862.

Perhaps a small discrepancy like this is of little general interest? But it begs the question: What was it about Joseph Denman that led Richards to put Denman's name on the Chart alongside other Commanders-in-Chief? History offers two clear possibilities.

First is the episode in 1840 when Denman was a senior officer in the West African Squadron of the Royal Navy engaged in suppression of the Slave Trade, then illegal under British law. Not content with the standard practise of blockading slave-shipping ports on the coast he landed a military force and freed 840 slaves, including

several British subjects – his pretext for the action. Subsequently he destroyed the slave holding compound. The action was acclaimed in Britain but subsequently the Spanish owner of the slaving operation sued in British courts for his property loss. The exchequer Court finally found in favour of Denman in 1848.

Released from that burden, Denman's second claim to fame arose in 1849 when he was appointed Groom in Waiting to Queen Victoria followed in 1853 by his appointment as Captain of Her Majesty's Yacht *Victoria and Albert*.

Lacking specific evidence I would pick the second of these possibilities. HMY *Victoria and Albert* was based in Portsmouth where Captain Richards commissioned his first command, *HMS Plumper* in 1856 - 57. Richards had to prepare his ship for its four year voyage round the Horn to this remote West Coast of N. America which, no doubt, required endless battles with the notorious Admiralty bureaucracy. A senior Captain such as Denman may have provided substantial assistance or merely been a gracious host. At any rate he had caught Richards' attention. After charting this coast for five years Richards ended a brilliant peacetime naval career as hydrographer to the British Navy.

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