

Canadian Military History

Volume 6 | Issue 2

Article 11

1-24-2012

With HMS *Prince of Wales* and HMS *Warspite*: The Adventures of a Canadian Radar Officer in the Royal Navy

Stuart E. Paddon

Recommended Citation

Paddon, Stuart E. (1997) "With HMS *Prince of Wales* and HMS *Warspite*: The Adventures of a Canadian Radar Officer in the Royal Navy," *Canadian Military History*: Vol. 6: Iss. 2, Article 11.
Available at: <http://scholars.wlu.ca/cmh/vol6/iss2/11>

This Feature is brought to you for free and open access by Scholars Commons @ Laurier. It has been accepted for inclusion in Canadian Military History by an authorized administrator of Scholars Commons @ Laurier. For more information, please contact scholarscommons@wlu.ca.

With HMS *Prince of Wales* and HMS *Warspite* The Adventures of a Canadian Radar Officer in the Royal Navy

Stuart E. Paddon

When the war was declared in 1939, I was in Noranda, Quebec, in a gold and copper mine. I came back from there in September to complete my final year in Physics at the University of Western Ontario. We had just started the University year when we were approached by the head of the Physics department to see if we were agreeable to having our syllabus altered to give emphasis to electronics. If you recall in those days electronics, certainly at Western, was a post-grad course, not an undergrad course. We agreed.

This request had really originated with the Royal Navy, who had been unable to find any electronic talent at home because, I gather, all of it had been bought up by the RAF. The RN appealed to the Royal Canadian Navy, who in turn approached the National Research Council. Things proceeded as one might expect, until somewhere about February 1940. I then met the first naval officer I had ever seen, one Lieutenant-Commander Finch-Noyes. He made it known to us that in a relatively short time we would be proceeding to serve with the Royal Navy in certain not very clear duties. There appeared to be a great deal of secrecy involved. In April we were asked to go to HMCS *Prevost* in London where we were attested, I believe my date was the 24th of April and I became an acting sublieutenant, temporary while holding on, gasping for breath, in the RCNVR.

We crossed the Atlantic in a Castle Class Ship, the name I can't recall, but I do recall that the warship escorting us was the *Revenge*, an

"R" Class battleship. We arrived in Portsmouth in early May 1946.

As far as I know we were the first group of Canadians to hit the Portsmouth Royal Naval Barracks. Then radar was not called radar, it was called RDF. The term radar did not come into play until the Americans got involved. In any case we had a very short course to acquaint us with the principles of radar, which term I will use.

By the end of June people then began to disperse to various ships. I was informed that I would be going to HMS *Prince of Wales*, but she was not to be commissioned until January 1941 and there would be no requirement for me to stand by the ship much before November 1940.

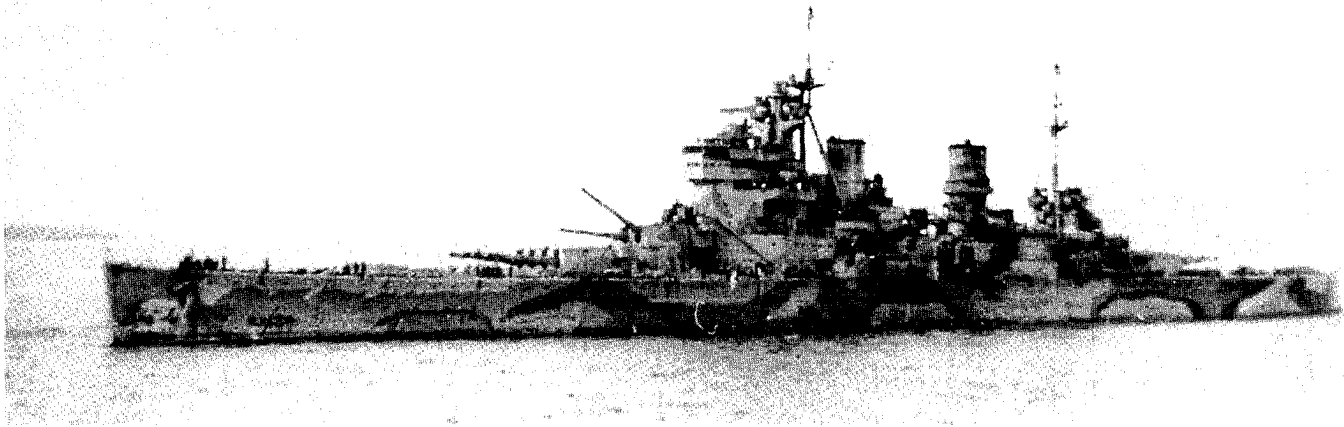
About mid-August I became one of several radar officers who acted as officer of a watch in the only naval radar station in the Battle of Britain chain, the remainder being manned by Air Force.

The following month I asked to get some sea-time because I had never served in any warship of any shape or size. The powers-that-be decided to send me to HMS *Dido*, a 5.25 cruiser, roughly 6,000 tons, which was just completing construction at Camel Laird's Shipyards in the Mersey across from Liverpool. The Canadian who was the radar officer of this ship was my ex-Western friend Maurice Hartley; he received the first 281 radar that had been put together. Upon commissioning we sailed up to Scapa Flow

and commenced fairly elaborate evaluation trials of the radar. Four Royal Navy civilian scientists were aboard to determine what trials were conducted and to take results.

At the end of this period Hartley wrote a scathing report of the type 281 radar, which his Captain should never have allowed to be dispatched from the ship, in the verbiage that was used; however, the fifteen or twenty recommendations that were the meat of the report were incorporated in later versions of the 281 over the next couple of years. But the report was so scathing that the Commanding Officer of Signal School hauled Hartley down to

been to sea before. I was the only technician; there were no technicians trained at that time in the Royal Navy for radar duties. Needless to say I found myself with my head inside a radar set almost continuously with maybe 40% of the sets not functioning at any one moment. Right from the outset I decided the type 281 would receive top priority, the gunnery sets would follow as best they could, with type 282s having the lowest priority. I didn't receive much direction because in those days nobody really knew much about radar and you found two things happen: one, you had to convince somebody it was worth carrying and when that was achieved, you had to convince them that it couldn't tell you what



HMS Prince of Wales

Portsmouth and raked him over the coals for the language used. I blame *Dido's* Captain for allowing it to go out of the ship without appropriate editing.

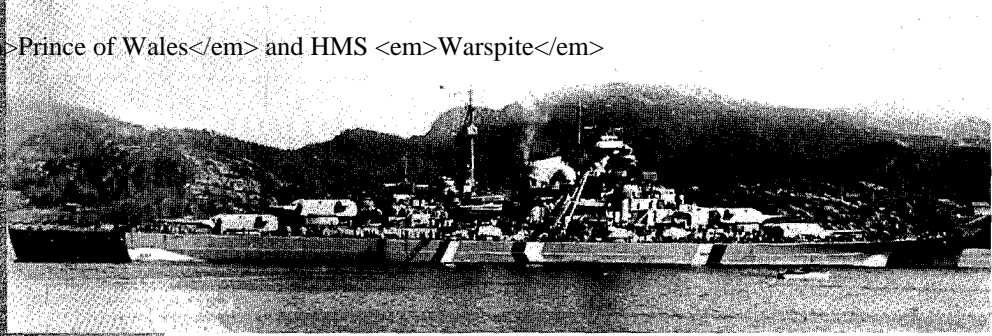
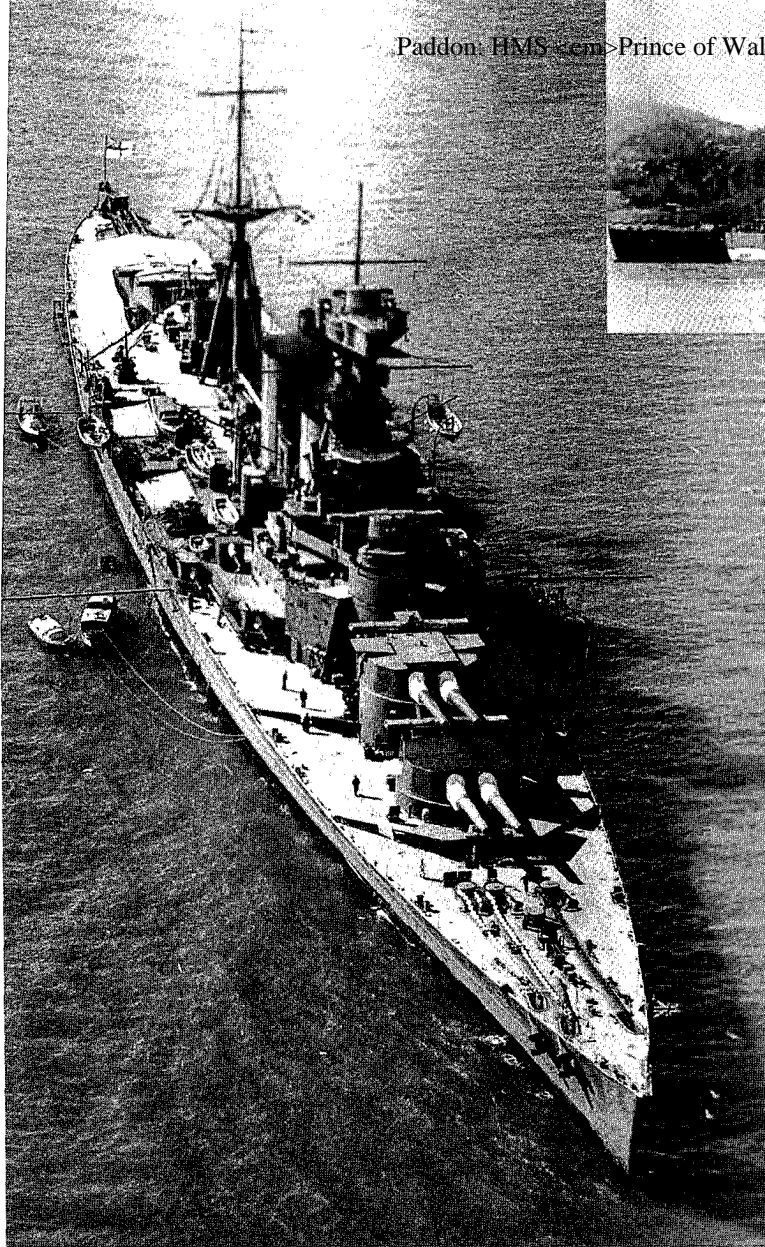
I left *Dido* some time in early November for Camel Laird's shipyards, there taking up lodging at the little hotel at the ferry, across from Liverpool while standing by the *Prince of Wales* which was now nearing completion.

The *Prince of Wales* was the first ship to get a multiple suit of radar. Up until this time ships carried one radar, now I was to get ten as follows: one type 281 radar, air warning principally, with a capability for surface detection as well; and nine gunnery radars, type 284 to control the main 14-inch armament, four 285s to control the HA/LA 5.25 directors, four 282s for mounting on the pompom directors. During the ensuing period I received 30 personnel, one of whom had

kind of cigarettes a pilot was smoking when he was flying an aircraft.

The ship commissioned about the 15th of January 1941. Two or three days before the ship was to commission we were attacked and so much damage was done to the harbour basin where the ship was anchored that we had difficulty getting her clear of the basin. We sailed to Scapa Flow carrying with us some fifty dockyard mates; I had one civilian scientist from HM Signal School as my specialist aboard ship. The ship, being what it was, was a showpiece and there were trials officers of ever description from all quarters and all branches inundating the wardroom at all times. One could not be sure who was a ship's officer and who was not a ship's officer.

To illustrate this, one day at lunchtime I sat down beside a Commander (remember I was a



Left: HMS *Hood*

Above: *Bismarck*

off his monkey jacket, arranged these two chairs in such a way that they were both in their normal position about four to six feet apart. He went to the end of the anteroom. He made a flip in the air off the first one and landed seated in the second one, picked up his jacket, walked out of the anteroom saying, "They used to call me "Tarzan." Needless to say the Executive Officer sold himself completely to us on his first testing. Unfortunately, he was later lost when the ship was sunk. But he was one of the finest naval officers I have ever had the pleasure of serving with because he did everything in just the right proportions.

Our workups and test exercises were fairly extensive but we had had only one main armament shoot, when about May 22 *Hood* and ourselves had to proceed to sea to intercept the *Bismarck*, being shadowed with radar by *Norfolk* and *Suffolk*, two county class cruisers. Our Captain came on the PA system and told the ship's company that he anticipated intercepting the *Bismarck* at roughly six a.m. on the 24th of May, some thirty hours away.

At exactly six a.m. on the 24th of May we encountered the *Bismarck* at 26,000 yards, roughly thirteen nautical miles, twenty degrees to starboard. The Flag Officer was in *Hood* and we proceeded in line-ahead with *Hood* leading. The *Hood* was a battlecruiser, without the armour plating which the *Prince of Wales* enjoyed. We were doing roughly thirty knots and opened fire at 26,000 yards.

My position was in the 281 receiving office and I personally manned the display tube. In those days we had no gyro repeats; we had to give bearings by red or green, but we did have M-type transmission units, little counterdrums on which we could transmit range. The transmission counterdrum that I controlled had as its counterpart a receiver on the wall of the Transmitting Station, the TS. This had to be read

young sublieutenant) - and said to him, "Good morning, sir. Are you up for the trials?" He replied, "No. I'm your new Executive Officer. Who are you?" I answered, "My name's Paddon, sir. I'm the RDF officer." He said, "Well, I expect we'll get to know one another". This happened even quicker than he might have thought, because that night an engineer sublieutenant by the name of Tim Healey, who used to play rugger for the Navy, and I decided we would test out the new Executive Officer. In the anteroom, as distinct to the wardroom, we set up two chairs, one with its seat vertical and one in its normal position. I went to the far end of the wardroom and hurtled down the course, feet first over the first chair, caught the second one with my bottom in the seat causing it to end up in the upright position with me seated in it. This had the desired effect. Our Executive Officer stood up, walked over, took

and placed by someone into the calculations which were being carried out on the plot. Unfortunately, despite the fact that I transmitted these ranges, no one even knew they were coming in on the counterdrum and no radar ranges were used by our gunnery people. We had had only one previous shoot, and had not developed any drill. This was unfortunate because I had three distinct echoes of three ships at 26,000 yards, clearly portrayed on the radar screen and A-scan with a linear blip. I was able to follow them in with complete accuracy and complete detail, religiously giving the range as I have described. The third ship turned out later, on investigation, to have been a supply vessel in company with the *Bismarck* and the *Prince Eugen*. I have never seen any reference to this supply vessel in anything I have subsequently read.

There are many interesting features, some of which I can recount from personal experience, some only from accounts from fellow officers, as I was in an enclosed office did not see the *Bismarck*. A good friend of mine was a HA Director Control Officer and he watched the engagement from his station. Since he was not being used at this particular time for that range, he watched five salvoes of *Bismarck's* fall of shot; the first was roughly a hundred yards beyond the *Hood*, the second was a straddle of *Hood*, with the third he saw a fire occur on *Hood*, the fourth he did not detect and on the fifth *Hood* blew, just exploded. Bits of her fell on our deck. He watched the foretop, the whole mast structure, go hurtling through the air for a great distance. Only three survivors were picked up by escorting ships.

Here the fallacy of our Admiral is indicated, as far as I am concerned. The range for *Prince of Wales* was almost identical with *Hood*, and *Bismarck* was able immediately to turn her fire on us, causing severe damage. Our whole compass platform was shot away and of the ten or so personnel normally stationed on the Compass Platform, seven were killed; the three most important people surviving, the Captain, the navigator and the Cox'n. A number of our Air Defence people were killed.

An interesting story is that Esmond Knight, the actor, was an RNR lieutenant who was a shipmate and was an Air Defence Officer. He was seriously injured, losing one eye and badly

damaging the second. Several days later we dropped him off at Iceland thinking he would not live. Many years later he appeared in many shows including "Henry the Eighth" and he was the actor who portrayed the Captain of the *Prince of Wales* in the movie "*The Bismarck*."

The *Prince of Wales* continued to engage the *Bismarck* for twenty minutes before our Y turret seized by jamming of the loading trays so that the turret could not be trained. We did manage to fire a good number of rounds at *Bismarck* and we subsequently found through other accounts that damage was done to *Bismarck*, seriously disrupting her control of armament.

That engagement in which *Hood* was sunk lasted twenty minutes and the plot shows that we broke action with *Bismarck* and that both ships proceeded on a parallel course at roughly fifteen miles separation. As stated we had suffered severe damage to our Compass Platform. In my own case, I lost five of my personnel in the after 285 radar office who were killed when an 8" shell exploded there. I well remember going to the plotting office which was directly below the compass platform and our Schoolmaster, the senior plot officer, was adamantly and religiously plotting the course of ourselves and accompanying ships with the blood dripping on the navigational chart from the compass platform above. That's a gory detail but it's true. In all we lost fifteen to twenty men killed and a number injured.

From the radar point of view I think there were two points worth mentioning. While operating the 281 I was able to observe the blip of the sixteen inch shells that were being fired at us come towards us on the radar screen. Also, a certain amount of interference occurred. None of the ships in company had radars of the same frequency as the 281 on the *Prince of Wales*, yet I was able to lock onto radar transmissions of some kind which I reported to Admiralty. Their scientists visited the ship later to discuss what I had seen. Subsequently, the decision was that *Bismarck* had some form of radar of comparable frequency to our 281, which was operating at 86 megacycles.

The damage done to the radar systems was extensive. As my 281 receiver mast had been shot away, I was denied the use of 281 as a

surface set or as an air warning set. The after 285 office containing two sets had been seriously damaged, killing five persons. I was left with a 284 with its antenna mounted on the director control tower; two 285s mounted on HA/LA directors, one port, one starboard; and four 282s which were relatively useless. This becomes important later when we consider what happened during the night.

The main problem *Prince of Wales* had encountered was that Y turret loading trays had jammed, preventing it from being trained. Work commenced on that; we were fortunate in having some of the dockyard maties on board. By roughly four o'clock in the afternoon we were ready to re-engage the *Bismarck*. We did so for a number of rounds, but before I go into that I would like to mention one other happening.

The weather had been worsening very seriously, with poor visibility occurring most of the afternoon. We were steaming on a parallel course, roughly fifteen miles from *Bismarck*, when suddenly steaming in the opposite direction another ship was detected. And all wheels, all gears, started to turn around to engage this new target, going 180 degrees in the opposite direction to the two of us. Just as we were about to engage and open fire the Gunnery Officer in the DCT said, "Cease fire. That is the US Coast Guard vessel, such and such". It happened that he had been reading the messages some time during the day, had seen this ship was in the vicinity and it had steamed right up between the *Bismarck* and ourselves, going in the opposite direction. They probably didn't even know that they passed between these two ships.

As the day progressed, at about four o'clock, we did engage *Bismarck* at roughly thirty thousand yards. Our maximum range on our fourteen inch guns was fifteen to twenty miles, firing two thousand pound (roughly a ton) projectiles. We had three turrets, with four guns in A turret, two in B and four in Y. Thus we had ten 14 inch guns capable of a broadside of ten tons of metal, every thirty seconds.

When we engaged *Bismarck* at four o'clock, she replied, but not at us. She seemed to aim at either *Norfolk* or *Suffolk*, one of the escorting cruisers, I forget which. And her fall of shot was well off target. This led us to believe that she

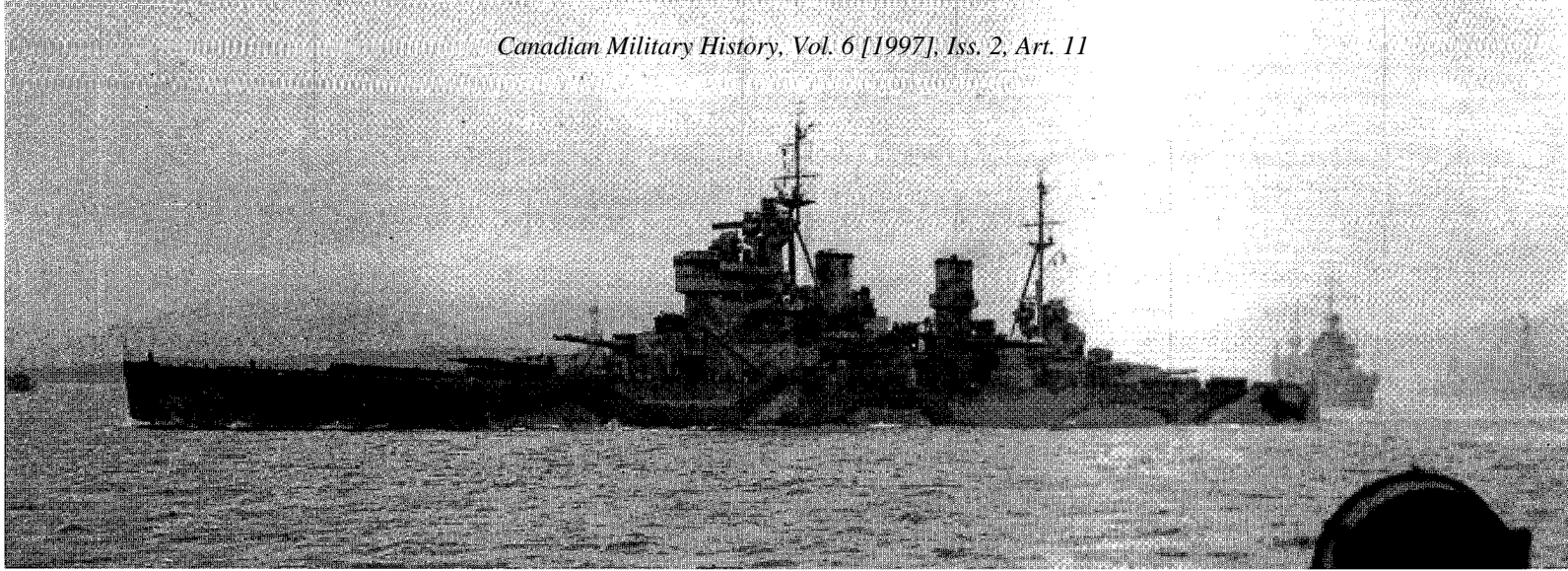
had trouble with her fire control. We were proceeding with this engagement when we were suddenly directed to disengage in order that a flight of torpedo bombers from the aircraft carrier *Victorious* (I'm not sure where she was) might attack. We disengaged and watched some twelve, fifteen, eighteen Swordfish carry out a torpedo attack on the *Bismarck* with fatal results to them, not to *Bismarck*. I don't believe any damage occurred to her from the results of that attack.

As the afternoon went on the weather got worse. I kept a watch on the type 284 and the gunnery people manned the director control tower and we were tracking *Bismarck* with the DCT, which is almost impossible from a mechanical point of view, because of the very great weight of the antenna and the director combined. In the long run we lost *Bismarck* during the night.

We were forced to return via Iceland after, we buried our dead at sea, a very impressive ceremony, and delivered our wounded to Reykjavik or was it Valfjord, including Esmond Knight whom I mentioned earlier. The only other feature that comes to my mind is that as we proceeded then to Rosythe for damage repairs, we were still able to steam at thirty knots, although we had suffered some damage by an underwater hit of a sixteen inch projectile, which had caused us to take in a large volume of water, the tonnage of which I can now not remember. During our subsequent refit at Rosythe an unexploded sixteen inch projectile was found in one of our underwater spaces and we cleared the drydock while this suspicious looking animal was removed from the ship.

As an aftermath to the *Bismarck* show: I had mentioned earlier that we had a scientist from HM Signal School. He and I cleaned out the after 285 office and by that I mean we extracted portions of people from the equipment. With the transmitter of one type 285 and appropriate connections to the antenna and with the receiver of another 285, we got one system functioning in the HA/LA 5.25" Control System. It was not a pleasant task. We had five people distributed through there. Not a happy memory.

One happier memory is that I was granted some leave while we were in Rosythe and I took



HMS Prince of Wales leaving Placentia, NFLD, after the Churchill-Roosevelt meeting, August 1941.

£52, the pound then being worth \$4.47 and went to London for two weeks' leave; at the end of one week I had one pound left. I came back to my ship, went down to my cabin and in my bunk was a body; they were not expecting me. I shook this body and said, "What the hell are you doing in my bunk?" A Canadian voice said, "Well Christ! Who the hell are you?" And I said, "I'm the guy who owns this bunk." The body was a Canadian, Ralph Ripley, who had joined the ship from *King Alfred*, while I was away. He became a close and fast friend but unfortunately he was lost, not when we were sunk off Malaya, but when Singapore fell. A fine, fine friend, and he was in my bunk when I got back from leave in 1941.

During the time we underwent damage repairs, I got a type 273 radar, a warning set of ten centimetres wavelength. The antennas were well up the foremast and the equipment was directly under them in a housing about the office. It was maybe ninety to a hundred feet about water level.

The next event worth mentioning was that we were very surprised to receive Mr. Winston Churchill, whom we transported to Placentia Harbour in Newfoundland, where he met Roosevelt for what is now called the Atlantic Charter meeting. We were a private ship, no flag officer carried; however we had a tremendous amount of brass present on this occasion: all the Chiefs of Staff and a myriad of staff officers who were in Churchill's entourage.

On the approaches to the Canadian area, or at the time the Newfoundland area, we were met by three Canadian destroyers. This was my first

opportunity to see the Canadian Navy at work. They escorted us into Placentia Harbour.

I have a host of memories of this occasion. One of these was going over to HMCS *Restigouche* to buy some Canadian cigarettes, which I had been without for too long a period. I knew none of the Canadian officers, but I was well received in the Wardroom and asked to join in a crap game in progress on the deck. The person at my left turned out to be Franklin Delano Roosevelt Jr., then a young ensign in the US Navy. He had been invited to this occasion, along with his brother who was in the Army, in order to meet Churchill. I purchased ten thousand Buckingham cigarettes and this occupied two huge cartons. I was intending to call my ship to send a boat when FDR Jr. suggested that he take me back in the boat allocated to him. I was duly delivered to my ship along with my ten thousand cigarettes.

On another occasion, all the officers of the *Prince of Wales* were introduced to Mr. Roosevelt. He took a particular interest in me because I was at that time one of only two Canadian officers in the wardroom, the other being Ralph Ripley. As a matter of interest, a midshipman, Dick Leir, was also aboard the ship at that time; he had joined during the repair period as well.

Each evening during the crossing both going over to Newfoundland on the way back to the UK, Churchill would come directly into the wardroom after deck, over the upper deck to the bridge structure. At one point, the Sub placed his hand on Churchill's elbow as if to help him along, and was told in no uncertain terms, to keep his hands off him. Mr. Churchill was

perfectly capable of looking after himself. He'd been to sea before this boy was born and would he please just lead him up to the bridge.

We finally left Newfoundland and proceeded back on our own as we could do thirty knots. I remember very well, at one point, we passed through a huge convoy of ships, which I would guess was doing about eight or ten knots, and at this time Churchill made his famous V sign to many of the merchant ships as we passed them. I have seen pictures of him so doing on many occasions in later years. He finally left us with his group at Iceland, at Rejkavik. We then returned to Scapa Flow. I presume he took passage in some other smaller ship back to England from Iceland.

The Admiralty decided to send *Prince of Wales* on a Malta convoy into the Mediterranean to test it against aircraft attack. We proceeded to Gibraltar where I bought seven pairs of silk pyjamas. And among other things, more importantly I believe, we took the first ten centimetre radar into the Mediterranean. This becomes important later as we had occasion to detect the presence of a submarine in the early hours of the morning at two or three o'clock on two consecutive nights. We had the *Ark Royal*, *Nelson*, *Prince of Wales*, six or eight cruisers, about twenty destroyers, and we were escorting fifteen to eighteen merchant ships. On the occasion I make mention of now, one of my leading seamen was the 273 operator at two in the morning. I was safely asleep in my bunk when he detected (at some fourteen thousand yards) what he classified as a possible submarine. This echo was tracked continuously, a very nice plot, until it entered the ground wave and clutter of the ships in company. There were suddenly three explosions. By this time, of course, I had been routed out of my bunk and I was up in the plotting office. The Admiral whom we were carrying was the admiral in charge of the cruiser squadron, but he was riding with us. He sent a message off to all twenty or twenty-five destroyers: "Report the result of your depth charge attack." By morning all destroyers reported they had carried out no such attack. All depth charges were intact - none had been dropped. The staff then decided that this had been a submarine and that it had fired three torpedoes. I was told, though I had no personal knowledge, that the, Italian torpedo of that day,

surfaced at the end of its run and exploded. The staff concluded that the three detonations which had been heard were three of these torpedoes.

The following night at roughly the same time, the same operator was again on duty. He again detected the presence of what he classified as a possible submarine. A plot commenced, however the Admiral immediately caused the Fleet to take evasive action, with all ships going in all directions at great rates. I remember this very well, because I still argue with Terry Burchell, whether he or I had the first mention in dispatches for any of our personnel. The seaman who had been my operator on the two occasions was mentioned in a dispatch that this Admiral made to Admiralty which read something like, "It has been conclusively proven that this new device called RDF can be used effectively against a submarine if that submarine is surfaced." This message recounted the events of the two nights and made mention of this operator who had been at the set at the time. Burchell and I have never resolved our argument about who was first to get one of his staff mentioned-in-dispatches.

The Admiralty's wishes were granted. We were subjected to a series of air attacks, none of which were massive by any means. *Ark Royal's* aircraft were in company. On one occasion when it was fairly hectic, we had engaged an approaching enemy aircraft and succeeded in knocking it down. We rapidly changed target to another aircraft in close pursuit and unfortunately we shot down one of *Ark Royal's* fighters. If I remember correctly the pilot of the *Ark Royal* fighter was rescued, picked up by an escorting destroyer, but it does show the mix-up that occurs when you're busy in the middle of an attack. The only other event of importance was when *Nelson* received a torpedo in the bow. She suffered no real apparent damage, other than that she had been holed. I believe it was a submarine torpedo, but on this point I'm not certain. As far as I am aware, we were able to deliver the convoy of merchant ships intact to Malta. We then returned to Scapa Flow.

Again I'm uncertain of my timetable, but I believe it would be sometime in October 1941 when we were told we would be leaving for somewhere. Our first port of call after Scapa Flow was in the Clyde where Admiral Toni Phillips and his staff of some 20 or 30 officers joined the

ship. This was the first time we had become a flagship as such, except for carrying an Admiral on our Mediterranean Malta cruise. We sailed immediately. What impressed me was, within the hour I was called to the Admiral's sea cabin, introduced to the Admiral who told me that he wished to visit every radar office in the ship, sit in the operator's chair and have explained to him what the operator had to do in each set aboard. This I did. I have read many criticisms of this Admiral over ensuing years, but as a first impression it was very encouraging to me that he took such an interest that, within an hour of joining the ship, he took the time to visit every radar office.

It was not until we were some days out of the Clyde on our way to the East that we got any impression of where we were going. Our first port of call was at Freetown, which was my first opportunity to see an African port. I must admit it was a real eye opener to see how some of our African friends lived. Then we stopped in for a very pleasant two or three days' stay in Cape Town, where again the lights were on and the food was magnificent. We proceeded from Cape Town to a small island which was a strategic place for refuelling by the British navy.

We had a pleasant stopover in Colombo in Ceylon. At the time I did not realize our stay was abbreviated, presumably by some intelligence I was not made aware of, and that we left one day earlier than planned. I recall this because I had purchased a very, very nice gown for the girl who later became my wife, but I was unable to pick it up due to unexpected sailing. However, later I picked this gown up and interestingly enough it was being held for me, under the counter in the store with my name on it. Although the price had doubled, because at that time there were many Americans in the area, I still paid what was agreed upon originally.

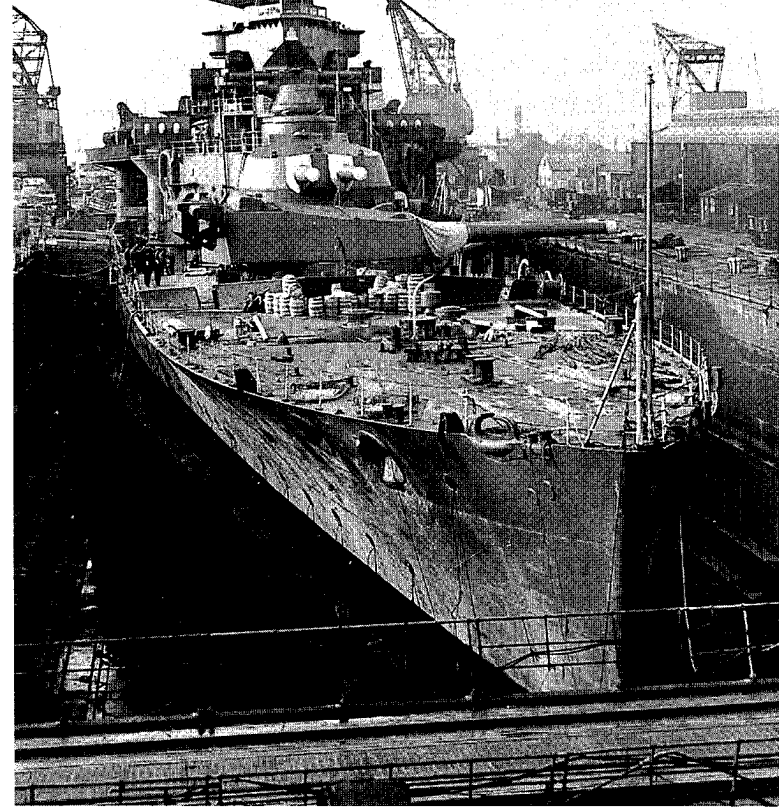
We left Ceylon, proceeded to Singapore and the impressive harbour, although *Prince of Wales* went to the Dockyard which is a different location on the island. We were there five or six days before things began to happen.

This was an upsetting period in a way, because we found the population there almost completely unaware that a war was going on. We visited the Singapore Swimming Club (where I

ran up a small bill, which I don't remember paying) and the Raffles Hotel. There seemed to be a complete lack of feeling towards the war. This was rudely interrupted on quote "December 7th"; I say quote because I do not know how the International Date Line comes into play. What I do know is that on the same Sunday that Pearl Harbour was attacked, Singapore was also attacked. It was at night and we fired at the intruding aircraft, without any success, I might add. The attack was not a severe one, but it did wake up the local residents a bit.

We sailed the following day and our mission, it was later revealed, was to sweep into the Gulf of Siam, to lay waste a large flotilla of transports which were reported to be in that area. We had *Repulse* in company and three escorting destroyers. Monday and most of Tuesday passed without any significant event. On the Tuesday evening just before dark, we detected the presence of a snooping aircraft which would come up over the horizon and take a look and go back down. This was reported, of course, to the Admiral. This would be as I recall, sevenish to eightish at night. I believe it would have been about ten o'clock at night that word was passed that the Admiral, realizing the presence of a ship, decided to abandon the mission and return to Singapore.

We remained at what I would call secondary degree of readiness, not action stations, but sufficiently so that I stayed close to my action station. Some time in the night I was called to my action station in the office of the 284 radar which controlled the main armament. I had no sooner closed up there when it was reported that a scow or some form of small vessel had been detected. I assume it had been detected by our 273 radar, but I do not know that for certain. I have since read in the book called *The Battleship* that a squadron of Japanese ships passed us during the night, at a range of eight or nine miles. All I can say is I do not believe the navigator would not have had the 273 radar on. If it was not functioning I would have heard about it very quickly. If those ships had been within seven or eight miles we would have detected them. There is no question in my mind that they would not have been detected. I did not know of the presence of that squadron until about six months ago, when Admiral Pickford recommended that



HMS Repulse undergoing refit at Portsmouth, ca. 1936.

warning radar on and almost immediately we were under attack by Japanese aircraft. I should mention that we had received some report that there had been a landing of Japanese ships, transports presumably, at some unpronounceable name up the Malayan Coast and the Admiral had decided to investigate it. He flew off the two Walrus, one from the *Prince of Wales* and the other from *Repulse* and sent a destroyer in to check out this reported landing. The two Walrus never did return to the ships but flew back to Singapore. No sign of Japanese landings was found at the point of inspection.

In the meantime, we were lying offshore, 20 to 25 miles, waiting for the destroyer to join us, when we suddenly found ourselves under attack. When I did put the air warning set on, we found aircraft approaching from something less than twenty miles. When they broke clear of the land echoes, there showed in relatively small numbers in groups of nine or ten per group.

My air defence station was on the after part of the bridge, aft of the air defence control position, where I watched several attacks of aircraft come in on us. They concentrated on *Prince of Wales* initially, without paying too much attention to *Repulse* as I remember it. I watched three torpedoes hit *Prince of Wales* on the starboard side, without any apparent effect. Suddenly there was a very heavy shock in the ship, as if she had been picked up fifty feet and then dropped. When we stopped bouncing around we had a list to port of roughly fifteen degrees. I now understand that this was one or possibly two hits on our port shaft and as we were doing a good speed, the high revolution rate of the shaft, on being hit by a torpedo, caused a great deal of destruction in the shaft tunnels. Most of the engine room and so on, on the port side was inundated with water and we lost power throughout most of the ship. This would now be approximately eleven-thirty.

With the list we had, we were unable to bring our starboard armament to bear on the low flying torpedo aircraft that were coming in from the starboard side so we were powerless to do much of anything.

I read the book, *The Battleship* so this still remains a mystery in my mind. During the night the 281 air warning radar had been shut down by a policy of radar silence.

So Many conflicting things come to my attention: the same book, *The Battleship* mentions that breakfast was served on the *Prince of Wales*. I remember vividly that there was no breakfast served in the wardroom, because Ralph Ripley and I broke into the wardroom locker and took out some fruit which resembles a grapefruit but bigger, about twice the size of a grapefruit. We went out and stretched out on the quarterdeck and we were peeling this very large piece of fruit when I saw an aircraft, high in the sky above us. This would have been about eight-thirty to nine o'clock in the morning of the Wednesday. Ralph Ripley being the second air defence officer went to an adjacent phone and called the bridge to see if they had seen the aircraft. They reported that it was friendly.

About ten or thereabouts we were suddenly called to air warning stations, I put the air

At some point during this period when we were unable to combat the enemy, I was detailed along with Ralph Ripley, the other Canadian, the assistant air defence officer, to accompany the Captain, John Leech, on a tour of the ship, aft. We arrived at the cinema flat, the largest open area in the ship, directly above the armoured deck and over the engine room spaces. A large number of people had been badly wounded by a bomb which had detonated on this deck where all the engine room personnel and so on had congregated after the torpedo had hit at an earlier point. Then the Captain returned to the upper deck, to the base of the bridge structure. He turned to Ripley and me and said, "Gather some men together and prepare some Carley floats in case of abandon ship".

Our Carley floats were attached to the bridge structure at various points, and our task was to get them free and ready for use. The Captain went back to his post on the Compass Platform.

Earlier, before the Captain and Ripley and I toured the ship, I had watched the *Repulse* sink. At the beginning of the engagement the Japanese had paid the greatest attention to *Prince of Wales*. When they found that they had pretty well put us out of action, they then turned a very concentrated effort on *Repulse*. At the time I was standing near the signal deck of the after part of the bridge structure and watched about eight or nine torpedo bombers approach *Repulse* from the stern. *Repulse* was still doing a good speed and I later heard that Captain Tennant managed to avoid seventeen or eighteen torpedoes, before the ship was hit. However, while I watched, the ship, in an attempt to avoid an attack which was then being carried out on her, made a turn to starboard from which she never recovered. As she went into the starboard turn she continued to move forward, went over on her starboard side and when I saw her last, her props were still turning, actually turning as she disappeared.

Her sinking was in great contrast to ours. *Repulse* went down so quickly that her loss of life was very great, much higher than we sustained. She sank at twelve-thirty, *Prince of Wales* sat for about an hour or so later and sank at one-twenty. During this interval we remained at this heavy list to port.

After making the tour with the Captain and while the ship remained at this very difficult list, I was carrying out the procedure of freeing Carley floats. Then the ship suddenly heaved up very rapidly and it was clear to everyone that this was it. She went down, rolling very rapidly to port.

I was on the starboard side of the big bridge structure, with the ship going very rapidly to port. The only thing I could do was scramble. I tried three times to climb the deck towards the starboard side and get off that side. On each occasion I slid back on the deck into the Bridge structure. I finally realized I couldn't get off the starboard side. Although my mind is confused, I remember sliding down what was probably one of the stays for the foremast. By the way, while I was scrambling I was probably the last to see both John Leech, our Captain, and the Admiral, "Tom Thumb" Phillips, because I saw the two of them attempting to get out of the hatch, in the deckhead of the Compass Platform. The two of them were climbing or trying to climb through that hatch, whilst I was trying to make my way over to the port side of the ship.

I was one of very few who managed to escape the ship by going over the port side, or what had been the port side, probably more likely part of the mast structure. In any case, at some point I saw clear water below and I dove. I was wearing a Mae West. For a moment I seemed to be entangled briefly by something around my foot, which I managed to kick free. I popped up and swam very rapidly. Finally I came across an emergency biscuit package ration from one of the ship's boats. I put my arm over this and looked around, there was no ship. It was gone. I was lucky not to have been sucked down by the ship itself.

Later on I managed to get to a catamaran, which had broken free from the ship. There were three or four others, one of whom was Commander Brown, the Staff Gunnery Officer on the Admiral's Staff. A number of us clambered up on this catamaran and sat there and watched the Japanese aircraft that were still above, watching destroyers moving, picking up survivors.

Some thing I should have mentioned earlier was that, the destroyer HMS *Express* was able

to come alongside the after portion of the quarterdeck of *Prince of Wales* before she sank and many of the battleship's crew were able to move from her quarterdeck directly onto the foc'sl of *Express*. Now this destroyer was so close, that when *Prince of Wales* actually turned over and went rapidly down, the stem or bow of *Express* caught momentarily on the sinking ship as she turned. Fortunately the CO was able to back off and free this destroyer and get clear. But something like five or six hundred of *Prince of Wales* personnel managed to transfer directly from deck to deck.

In my case, I remained in the water, I suppose, an hour and a half. During this period the Japanese aircraft did not make any attempt to bother the two destroyers picking up survivors, the third destroyer having left us some time that morning.

I saw my only friendly aircraft, a Brewster Buffalo, fly over while I was sitting in the water and I'm not sure that we waved hilariously at him at this point. I saw some reference in the book *Battleship* about raucous comments but I don't think any of that happened. I was not picked up by the *Express*, I was picked up by the *Electra* which, in the main, picked up survivors from the *Repulse*. Something like 800 personnel were aboard the *Electra*, and after she had picked up all the survivors that could be found, we proceeded back to Singapore where we were greeted by the shore staff.

In Singapore there was suddenly available to the authorities additional personnel from our survivors. Many of the officers were given special jobs; my friend Ripley was put in charge of a small boat, probably a patrol vessel of some kind in which he spent the next two or three weeks or longer going up the Malayan Coast and infiltrating personnel and ammunition behind Japanese lines. He and other officers from *Prince of Wales* and *Repulse* were engaged in this work.

One day I was in the Headquarters building and stood smartly aside to allow the Admiral to go by, when he looked at me and said, "Come into my office." I followed and he said, "I've got just the job for a young fellow like you," and then, almost immediately, "What is that green stripe for?" I said, "I was the radar officer of the *Prince*

of Wales, Sir." He said, "Oh, you will not be able to do this job then." And I was dismissed.

Soon after I was transferred to Colombo, Ceylon where my job as Port Radar Officer at was very easy. I had a Petty Officer Technician, the first of his kind that I had ever seen. Although he had come from some ship, he had not been with us in the Singapore episode. Whenever a ship that had any radar came into port, the PO and I would go aboard to check whether they had any problems that required assistance. He would take the type 286, which was the set the destroyers were then carrying, and check it out. Some of the destroyers had a 285 by this time, and I'd check that out as I had had a lot of experience on that type of equipment. After roughly an hour's time, I would adjourn to the Wardroom, have a noggin with the ship's officers, and if there were no other ships coming in that day I would proceed to the golf course where I was an honorary and, I hope, also an honourable member. It cost me nothing and I enjoyed that Royal Colombo Golf course very much.

Among the things that happened when I was in Colombo, was that the *Royal Sovereign* was there and for the first time I met Bob Battles, its radar officer and a Canadian. Bob was having difficulty with his 284 Surface Gunnery Radar. Between us we refitted the whole antenna, a great big trough, with dozens of dipole elements in it.

My stay in Ceylon was rudely interrupted one Sunday morning as I was having a late breakfast. The Fleet Signal Officer came in and said, "Paddon, get your gear together," of which I had none by the way, "and you will join *Warspite* this afternoon at two o'clock." *Warspite*, after having been severely damaged at Crete, had proceeded to Bremerton Shipyard in the Pacific, in Washington State and was refitted. Among other things, she was supposed to have received some new radar, including two 285s, a 282, a 284, and a 273. The five sets as I recall.

At two o'clock that Sunday afternoon, I joined *Warspite*, 20 seconds after Admiral Sommerville joined. Sommerville was, if you recall, Commander Force "H," operating out of Gibraltar earlier in the war. There are many stories of him and Admiral Cunningham in their exchange of messages with biblical quotations. He was now

Flag Officer, Pacific Fleet, and *Warspite* his flagship. We had no sooner joined, he twenty seconds ahead of me, than I, being something I had never been before, Staff Officer on the Admiral's Staff, decided that I should go to the Admiral's bridge. As I'd never even been on the ship before, I wasn't even sure where that was. Anyway I got up on the after part of the Bridge, as soon as I was aboard. We sailed and I suddenly saw a long face with a brass hat turn around and look at me and say, "You, come here." So over I went. "Yes, Sir." "Who are you?" "Well I'm your radar officer, Sir." "What's your name?" "Paddon, Sir." Then as we were leaving harbour, he looked at *Illustrious*, or it might have been *Formidable*, and said, "What kind of interrogation equipment has *Illustrious*?" But he called the ship by its incorrect name, the ship he named was at Trincomalee. Now the answer was significant. The 281s required an interrogator, which was a 242. The 279s which *Illustrious* carried did not require an interrogator; it did its own interrogation by its propagation frequency. What do you tell an admiral: that he is calling a ship by its wrong name? Or do you try to explain the complexities of radar to him? At this point I don't remember what the hell I did but he appreciated me from then on because very shortly afterwards he found that I was the only one who knew the difference between *Ramilles*, *Royal Sovereign*, *Revenge* and the fourth "R," *Resolution*, because of some little differences in their radar suites. As I was the only one who could pick it out time after time, I would be called up by the Bridge and the Admiral would say, "Paddon which one of the "R" class battleships is that one over there?" I would look across at the suite of radar and say, "That's the *Ramilles*, Sir." I was at least useful on some occasions.

The Fleet at this time consisted of the Flag Ship *Warspite* and the four "R" class battleships, three aircraft carriers *Illustrious*, *Formidable* and one other, with something like 20 percent complement of aircraft. A number of cruisers and a variety of destroyers, some 30 ships probably in all.

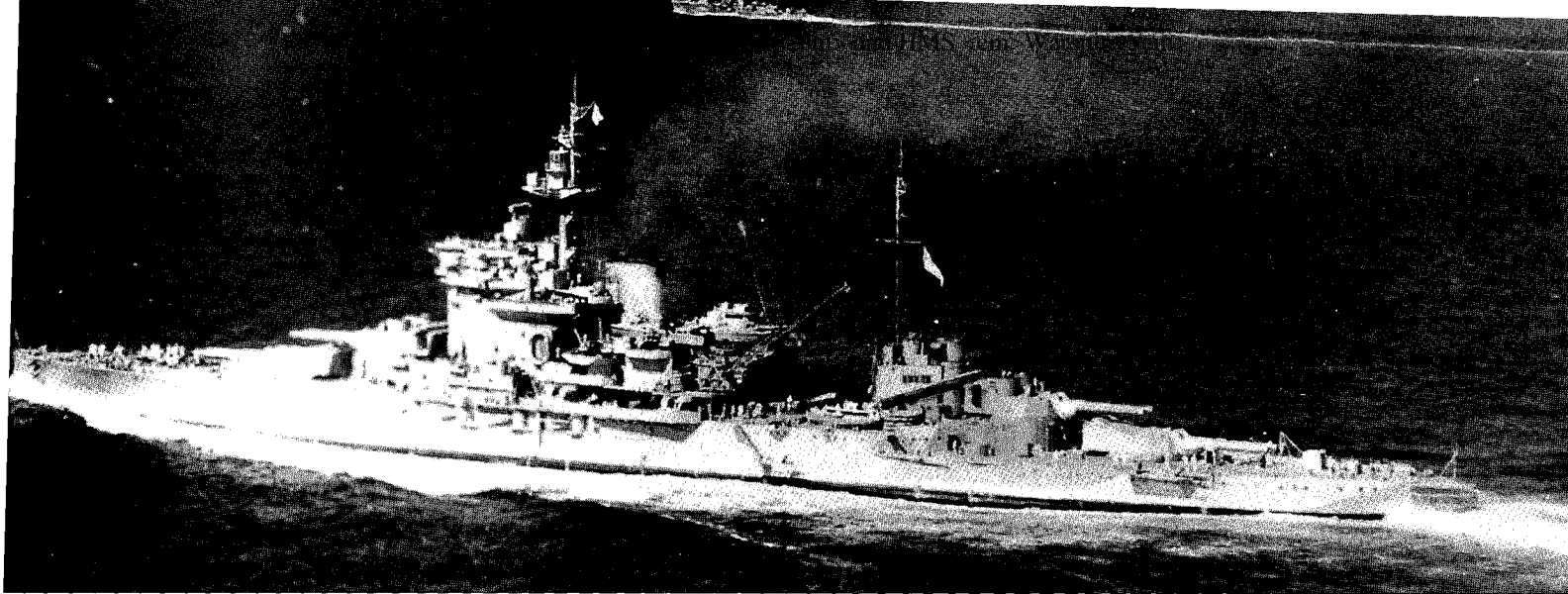
We were at sea for a week maybe, when the attack on Ceylon occurred. We got some warning of this but I'm not sure how. The Admiral sent off a search flight from one of the carriers, which was able to report back that the strength of the

enemy was formidable. I must admit that this being my first time at sea after having just been sunk, I was very pleased when discretion became the better part of valour, and the Admiral decided to take his whole Fleet up to Bombay where we spent eight delightful days.

Before this happened *Cornwall* and *Dorsetshire*, who had been in Colombo with us, were ordered to join the Fleet, and it was during their approach to join us, that they were sunk by Japanese aircraft. As a matter of fact, on the 281 in *Warspite*, we watched the aerial activity over the ships, during the time of their sinking.

An interesting by-product. Again the radar officer of the *Cornwall* was a Canadian, who's name escapes me. I met him back in Colombo weeks later, and he said that the two ships were sunk in less than ten minutes by the Japanese aircraft. He also mentioned that when they had sunk the two ships, the formations of Japanese aircraft formed up and dipped and saluted the survivors in the water. They did not fire at them which was the same as my own experience with the *Prince of Wales* when we were sunk. This type of story is in such contrast to the horror stories one heard of the Japanese Army that I think it is worth mentioning. Maybe there was a different ethic in the Japanese Navy.

Of many events in the happening in the Indian Ocean, one that comes to mind, is when the decision was made to take over Madagascar from the Vichy French. This was an unbelievable sight, a vast armada of merchant craft with Commandos. All the strength of the Far East Fleet, including the aircraft carriers and *Warspite* and all the "R" class battleships assembled one morning one mile off a little village called Tamatave, which is about half-way down the coast of Madagascar. Other ships had moved into the beautiful harbour of Diego Suarez and had landed and taken possession of the harbour, which is one of the most beautiful harbours in the world. On this morning of the so-called Battle of Tamatave, we sailed up and down about one mile off the shore. Apparently we had all the information on gun emplacements and where they were located and each of the ships had been given appropriate targets. The Admiral was very much inclined not to bombard. He sent an envoy ashore to say, "If you do not surrender within twenty minutes, I will be forced to open fire."



HMS Warspite, November 1942.

Twenty minutes after the envoy had returned the French had not surrendered. The Admiral sent the envoy ashore again and said, "If you do not surrender within twenty minutes, I will open fire this time." The time, of course, passed by and still the French did not surrender. Just at that moment when the morning watch was turning over to the forenoon watch and gunlayer A was not in his seat, the French fired one shot. Of course, none of *Warspite's* guncrew were in a position to fire at this moment, but as soon as the French had fired the one shot, a myriad of white flags went up ashore and they surrendered. That was the battle of Tamatave. One shot was fired by them and that was all.

The other most significant event that occurred in this period in the Indian Ocean is that I was promoted to the very senior rank of Lieutenant, I think it was the 24th of April 1942. Somewhere around November 1942 or thereabouts I was informed that I would be relieved and returned to Canada before long. That was a very vague timing. As a matter of fact, I finally left the ship in early January of 1943 at Durban in South Africa.

Rear-Admiral Stuart Edmund Paddon was born in October 1917 in St. Thomas, Ontario. Following the events described in this article, Paddon served in the signals directorate at Naval Service Headquarters in Ottawa and was demobilized in 1945. Paddon joined the regular navy as a lieutenant in June 1946. Apart from two years as electrical officer aboard HMCS *Ontario*, Paddon spent the balance of his career as a staff officer at shore bases, retiring at the rank of rear-admiral in July 1972. He passed away in November 1989 at the age of 72.



Canadian Forces Photo Unit Photo O-13663

Captain S.E. Paddon, May 1961.

This article has been adapted from the original version printed in *Salty Dips*, Volume 1, 1983. It has been reproduced with the permission of the Naval Officers' Association of Canada, Ottawa Branch.

Special thanks to Ken Macpherson for providing the ship photos.