

JS/50/41/5

SINKING OF THE BISMARCK

23-27 May 1941



At 06.37 hours on the 24th May 1941, after a short action with the Bismarck H.M.S. Hood was hit close to X turret. A colossal explosion followed which literally tore the ship to shreds. Only three men from the Hood's complement of 1418 were saved.

LIEUTENANT COMMANDER W.J. DUNDAS (Deceased 1964)

Midshipman W.J.Dundas was Action Midshipman of the Watch on the Compass Platform

John Briggs

LIEUTENANT A.E.P. BRIGGS MBE

Ordinary Signaller A.E.P.Briggs was at action stations with the Flag Lieutenant on the Compass Platform

Bob Tilburn

LEADING SEAMAN R.E. TILBURN

Ordinary Seaman R.E Tilburn was second captain of the twin 4" AA gun



Officer Commanding
Royal Air Force
St. Mawgan

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Group Captain W. S. O. Randle
J.S.P.C.C.



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THE ROYAL AIR FORCES ASSOCIATION ON BEHALF OF THE EAGLE LODGE APPEAL

Flown in Hercules XV294 of No.30 Squadron on Task No.5190 from Royal Air Force Lyneham to RAF Gutersloh, then over the Graveyard in the Denmark Straits where on 24th May 1941 H.M.S. Hood was sunk by the German battleship Bismarck and back to land at RAF Aldergrove. From there returned to RAF Lyneham

Captain: Squadron Leader C. Barter RAF
Co-Pilot: Flight Lieutenant A. Sell RAF
Navigator: Flight Lieutenant A.C. Simpson RAF
Air Engineer: Master Engineer F. Maclean RAF
Air Loadmasters: Master Airloadmaster H. Desmond RAF
Master Airloadmaster I.M. Broome RAF

Total Flight Time: 5hours 5minutes



THE SINKING OF THE BISMARCK

On the 18th May 1941, the 35,000-ton German battleship "Bismarck", flying the flag of Admiral Lutjens, and a new 10,000-ton cruiser, the "Prinz Eugen" were observed at Bergen making ready for sea. Their departure was spotted by the RAF and the alert was sent to the Home Fleet. The probable course of the ships was round the north of Iceland and down the Denmark Strait. A careful watch on this channel was necessary, but made very difficult in the prevailing conditions of fog and poor visibility. This work was entrusted to the cruisers HMS "Norfolk" and HMS "Suffolk".

On 23rd May, with poor visibility and heavy weather, they spotted the enemy off the north-west coast of Iceland at about 6 miles range. The alarm was sent out and the cruisers began shadowing, in spite of the real chance of their both being blown out of the water.

British ships immediately began concentrating, coming in from all directions. The first contact was made with the Germans by the battle-cruiser HMS "Hood" and the new battleship HMS "Prince of Wales". They found the enemy in the early morning of the 24th. After a short action, HMS "Hood" was hit close to X (the third) turret. A colossal explosion followed which literally tore the ship to shreds and, in a few moments, she was gone with only three of her complement of 1,418 being saved. The "Prince of Wales" received slight damage and the "Bismarck" was observed to have a fire on board. Contact was then lost, although "Prince of Wales" did engage for a short time in the evening.

At 12.20 am on the 25th, HMS "Victorious" launched an aircraft torpedo attack and scored one hit. After, it was a question of shadowing the enemy in conditions of low visibility but in which British radar equipment played a significant part.

By this time Admiral Lutjens had decided to make for Brest. The British battleships HMS "Rodney" and HMS "Ramillies" left the convoys they had been escorting to join in the hunt. The battle cruiser HMS "Renown" and the aircraft-carrier HMS "Ark Royal" put to sea from Gibraltar. For most of this day the British were kept more in less in the dark.

An RAF Catalina sighted the "Bismarck" again on the morning of the 26th and shadowed her until driven off, having been hit many times. The "Prinz Eugen" had meanwhile sought her own safety in Brest. HMS "Ark Royal" was then ordered to attack "Bismarck" to slow her down until the main battle units could come up. The first strike launched from the "Ark Royal" found and attacked the cruiser HMS "Sheffield" by mistake in desperate weather conditions. Fortunately this attack failed because of defects in the magnetic exploders of the torpedoes. Simple contact types were substituted for the second strike of 15 Swordfish which found the correct target and scored two hits. One hit wrecked the German battleship's steering and practically brought her to a halt. During the night "Bismarck" was further harried by torpedo and gunfire attacks from five British destroyers.

At daylight on the 27th another strike force of Swordfish set out from "Ark Royal" but failed to make contact because of the wretched visibility. However the cruisers kept in touch with the slowly-moving "Bismarck" until the battleships HMS "King George V" and HMS "Rodney" came up and started pounding. "Bismarck" fought back gallantly, but every turret was eventually silenced, and she was well on fire when the cruiser HMS "Dorsetshire" was ordered to close and finish her with torpedoes.



Ted Briggs joined the Royal Navy at the age of 15 and was trained at HMS Ganges from March 1938 until July 1939 when he was drafted to HMS Hood as Signal Boy. He was rated Ordinary Signaller on 1st March 1941. On 24th May 1941, together with Midshipman W Dundas and Able Seaman R Tilburn he was the only other survivor from HMS Hood when sunk by the German battleship Bismarck. He was Mentioned in Despatches and, after survivor's leave, he joined HMS Mercury on 18th Jun 1941.

For the remainder of the war he first served at HMS Royal Arthur, a shore establishment and then was drafted to HMS Hilary, a converted merchantman, operating as a Combined Operations Headquarters ship, and took part in the Sicily, Salerno and D-Day landings. He was loaned to HMS Kingsmill for the Walcheren Island landing. He was made a Leading Signaller on 30th March 1942 and a Yeoman of Signals on 30th March 1943.

His appointments after the war were:- 1 June 1945...HMS Mercury as Fleetwork Instructor; 14 October 1945...HMS Brissington on Palestine patrols; April 1948...HMS Mercury as Fleetwork Instructor; 4 February 1949...HMS Maidstone, Second Submarine Squadron; 17 October 1949...HMS Mercury as Cryptographic Instructor; 4 February 1951...HMS Ceylon on station for the Korean War; 22 July 1952...HMS Mercury for Signal Instructors Course. Rated Chief Yeoman of Signals 7 January 1953 at Northwood forming the C in C Eastlant Comm. Centre. 19 November... HMS Indefatigable and HMS Theseus Training Squadron; 2 December 1955...HMS Mercury for Commissioned Communication Officer Course. Promoted Commissioned Communication Officer on 20 July 1956 (converted to Sub Lieutenant (SD)(C) on 1 January 1957); 3 September 1956...HMS Ceylon as Signals Officer. Took part in the Suez operation; 12 May 1958...HMS Mercury; 7 January 1959...HMS Sea Eagle (Londonderry) as Assistant Base Signals Officer; 22 December 1960...HMS Mercury as New Entry Signals Officer. Promoted Lieutenant (SD)(C) 1 April 1961; 7 February 1963...HMS Loch Killisport as Signals Officer Far Eastern Station; June 1964 ...Whitehall Wireless Station as Rating Control Officer; 31 October 1966...HMS Ganges as Signals Officer; 10 June 1969...HMS Drake (Devonport) as O/C Signals Training Centre; 18 January 1971...HMS Excellent (Whale Island) as O/C Leading Rates Leadership School; 2 February 1973...Placed on Retired List; 1973...Awarded MBE in the Queen's Birthday Honours List.



MR R E TILBURN

Bob Tilburn joined the Royal Navy as a boy in 1937 and was drafted to HMS Hood in September 1938.

On the 24th May 1941, together with Midshipman W Dundas and Ordinary Signaller A E P Briggs, he was the only other survivor from HMS Hood when sunk by the German battleship Bismarck. He was Mentioned in Despatches and, after survivor's leave, he was posted to HMS Victory where he stayed until May 1943. From then he served aboard HMS Queen Elizabeth in the Far East. From June 1946 until December 1947 he operated on Air Sea Rescue boats from Columbo harbour.

In January 1948, Leading Seaman Tilburn was drafted back to HMS Victory where he stayed for a short while. From September 1948 until March 1949 he was aboard HMS Rifleman, a minesweeper on station in the Mediterranean. He served on HMS Howe in the Home Fleet until December 1949 and then returned to HMS Victory on duty there until January 1951.

From January 1951 until August 1952 he was on HMS Warrior carrying aircraft and supplies to Singapore, Hong Kong and Japan during the Korean War.

Leading Seaman Tilburn retired from the Royal Navy on 31st August 1952.