

' During the night the British destroyers appeared once more, coming in

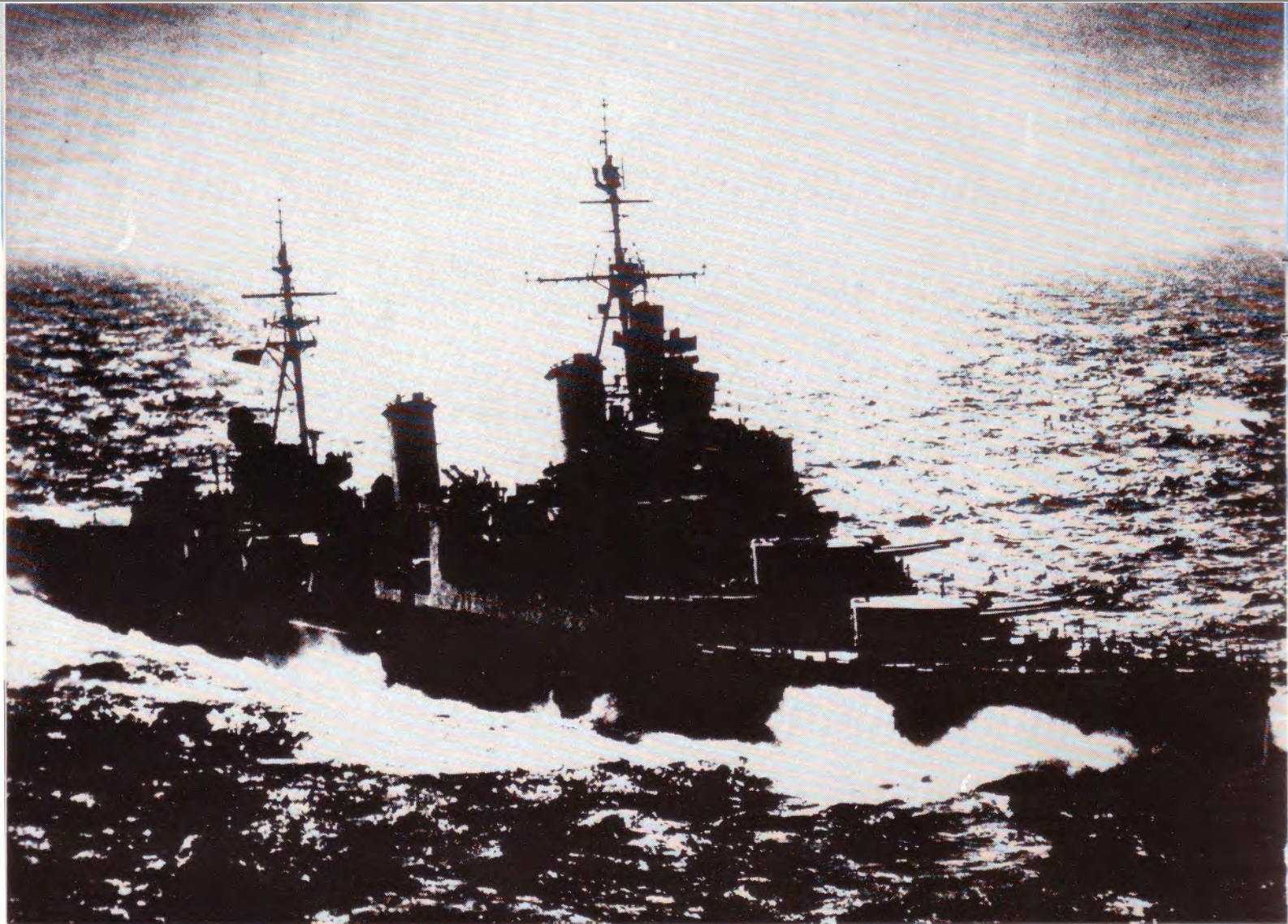
*close to deliver their torpedoes again and again, but the Bismarck's gunnery was so effective that none of them was able to deliver a hit. But around 08.45 hours a strongly united attack opened, and the last fight of the Bismarck began. Two minutes later, Bismarck replied, and her third volley straddled the Rodney, but this accuracy could not be maintained because of the continual battle against the sea, and, attacked now from three sides, Bismarck's fire was soon to deteriorate. Shortly after the battle commenced a shell hit the combat mast and the fire control post in the foremast broke away. At 09.02 hours, both forward heavy gun turrets were put out of action. A further hit wrecked the forward control post: the rear control post was wrecked soon afterwards... and that was the end of the fighting instruments. For some time the rear turrets fired singly, but by about 10.00 hours all the guns of the Bismarck were silent'*

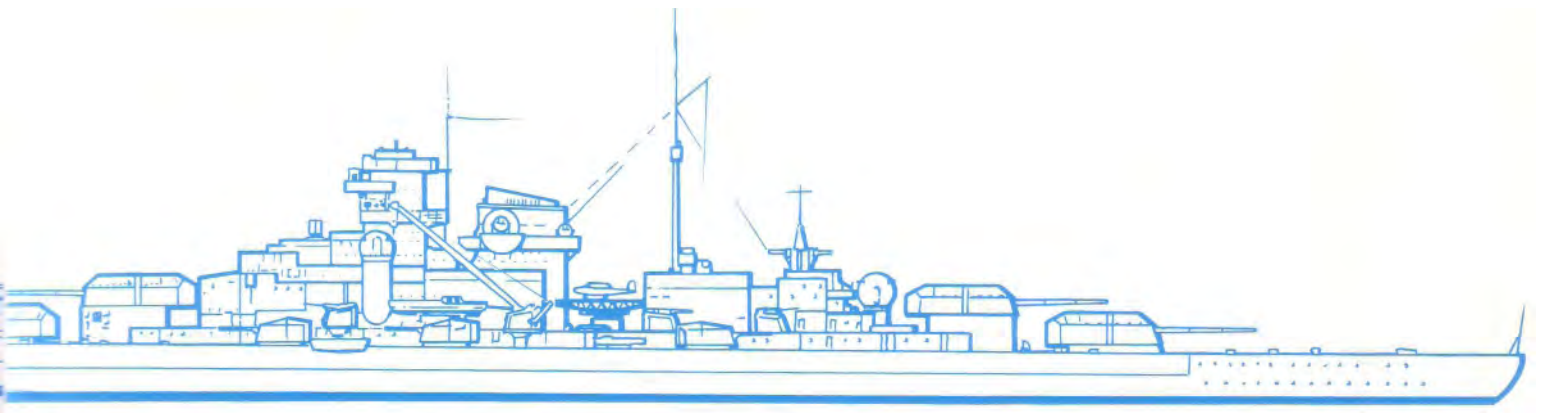


Gerhard Junack, Lt Cdr (Eng),  
Bismarck, writing in Purnell's '  
History of the Second World War'

# SINK the Bismarck'

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Desperately fighting the U-boat war and fearful lest the Scharnhorst and Gneisenau might attempt to break out from Brest, the Royal Navy had cause for concern in late May, 1941. Air reconnaissance had detected the new German battleship BISMARCK and the cruiser Prinz Eugen in an unfrequented Norwegian fjord near Bergen. There was little doubt that, sooner or later, they would make a dash for the Atlantic. The stage was being set for the most dramatic sea chase of World War II.

Early information of the sailing of the German ships was of vital importance to Admiral Sir John Tovey, Commander-in-Chief of the Fleet based at Scapa Flow. He could not keep his patrol cruisers constantly at sea; he did need his ships to be ready to intercept once the break-out had been made.

By 22nd May the weather was deteriorating fast. The Commanding Officer of a naval air station in the Orkneys, aware of the urgency of the situation, called for volunteers to man an aircraft to fly over Bergen. Four men volunteered at once and, despite the 'impossible' meteorological forecasts, flew close to the surface all the way to Norway, only to find the fjord empty. The hunt was on.

HM ships Suffolk and Norfolk were ordered to patrol the Denmark Strait; the battleship Prince of Wales — so new that she had not really completed her acceptance trials — and the battlecruiser Hood were ordered to take up a strategical position west of the Strait. Admiral Tovey himself put to sea with the battleship King George V. On the evening of 23rd May, Suffolk and Norfolk sighted the enemy ships and, despite bad visibility, shadowed them throughout the night. As a result the Prince of Wales and Hood made contact early on 24th May and at once attacked. The Hood was blown up when a broadside hit her magazine; the Prince of Wales was slightly damaged and the BISMARCK was hit — and at one time

was on fire — but she continued to steam to the south west.

It was imperative that the BISMARCK be sunk before reaching harbour. The aircraft carrier Victorious; the battleships Rodney and Ramilles; the battle cruiser Renown and the cruiser SHEFFIELD, were all ordered into the Atlantic. The aircraft carrier Ark Royal; the cruisers Edinburgh, Norfolk and Suffolk, and a destroyer force... all these were moving in remorselessly to block the BISMARCK'S route to France.

Hanging on relentlessly, Suffolk and Norfolk reported that the enemy had slightly reduced speed. A Coastal Command aircraft reported oil showing in the BISMARCK'S wake and, on the evening of 24th May, HMS Prince of Wales made contact. After a short exchange of broadsides the BISMARCK turned away and altered course. That night, torpedo carrying aircraft launched by the Victorious made a long distance attack and scored one hit.

At 3 a.m. on 25th May the shadowing cruisers lost contact for the first time. The BISMARCK was then 350 miles SSE of Greenland. An extensive air search was organised, but it was not until 10.30 a.m. on 26th May that the German was found heading east and about 550 miles west of Lands End. The Prince Eugen had parted company with her and was not sighted again. At 11.15 a.m. aircraft from the Ark Royal sighted BISMARCK, and HMS SHEFFIELD was ordered by Admiral Somerville to make contact and shadow. The same afternoon, aircraft from the carrier made an unsuccessful sortie. Shortly after 5.30 p.m. SHEFFIELD contacted the BISMARCK and proceeded to shadow her, under fire. It was in this action that the ship received her most treasured battle scar. Straddled by a salvo from the BISMARCK, the cruiser was hit by splinters. Some passed through the side of the wardroom piercing

the picture of the Duchess of Kent in a number of places. That picture was left in its battered condition for the remainder of SHEFFIELD'S war service.

Facing the enemy was dangerous enough, but when aircraft from the Ark Royal made a further sortie, poor visibility resulted in a torpedo attack being made on the SHEFFIELD by mistake. Luckily for her the newly-adopted magnetic pistols failed to explode. A further attack with better torpedoes was made on the BISMARCK later and she was hit. BISMARCK was then seen to turn two circles and when she resumed her course it was clear that she was partially crippled and that her speed had been much reduced.

That night it was the turn of Captain PL Vian and his Tribal Class destroyers Cossack, Maori, Sikh and Zulu to attack. Cossack, by coincidence, had been building at Walker Naval Yard when SHEFFIELD was launched, and SHEFFIELD was there shadowing the enemy when Cossack and Maori each obtained a hit with torpedoes. An hour later HMS SHEFFIELD reported that BISMARCK was stopped, 400 miles west of Brest and 1750 miles from the position in which the first sea contact had been made.

The ship was still fighting. The shadowing destroyers and the cruiser Norfolk were fired on at daylight on 27th May. About 9 a.m. that day, the King George V and the Rodney, who had awaited full daylight, opened fire. BISMARCK was hit and silenced and the cruiser Dorsetshire was ordered in to sink her. At 11 a.m. on 27th May, the BISMARCK action was over. More than 100 officers and men were picked up from the sunken ship.

The whole epic story — the story of a strategical and tactical triumph — is now written in one word among the battle honours of HMS SHEFFIELD... BISMARCK, 1941.



Sheffield was the first warship to carry 6" guns mounted in triple turrets, two forward and two aft. She was capable of maintaining a succession of 23-gun broadsides with a total output of 96 rounds per minute.





# The ship with a charmed life

*There can be no doubt that the first SHEFFIELD bore a charmed life. Certainly her crew swore by her as a lucky ship. She had, for instance, captured the German merchant ship Gloria in October 1939; had landed her Marines at Namsos to secure the harbour and road bridges and permit a large British force to land; she had taken part in a bombardment of Genoa and shadowed the Bismarck. By the end of 1941, six of her battle honours had been hard earned with no serious damage.*

Rejoining the Home Fleet, HMS SHEFFIELD found herself on that most onerous of wartime naval duties escorting convoys to Russia. Making a turn in darkness, and in a rising gale North East of Iceland, she struck a floating mine which blew a hole in her port quarter, 40 feet long and 20 feet deep. She was 1 000 miles from the nearest repair base and the story of her successful return was an epic in itself.

On two other occasions the ship was damaged by heavy weather in the Arctic. During terrific storms in February 1943, the wind reached hurricane force and the waves reached a height of 50 feet and

more. Driving spray brought visibility down to less than 200 yards and so great was the pressure of the wind on the ship that she was compelled to heave to, her engines running at a minimum speed to give steerage way. The seas stove in the starboard whaler, submerged the forward gun turret and swept part of the turret roof overboard. HMS SHEFFIELD rode out that storm for three days before being able to set course for port. In another gale there was further damage by heavy seas and the ship was hove to for 17 hours. At the end of that time she found herself 40 miles further downwind than when the gale first started.

1942, SHEFFIELD suffered a head-on collision with another ship at a combined speed of 30 knots. The fatal casualties were few and those aboard the ship that day had cause to be thankful to the Royal Corps of Naval Constructors who had designed her, and Vickers-Armstrong who had built her.

For three months between September and December 1942, there were no convoys to Russia. The landings in North Africa had drained the Home Fleet of ships and there had been a certain anxiety as to the safety of Arctic convoys after the mauling given to PQ-17 in June 1942. German anxiety about British activity in Arctic

waters might well be explained by Hitler's obsession, in the early months of 1942, that he was to be attacked via Norway.

The Russian convoys began again in December 1942 with plans to sail 30 ships in two operations — 15 in convoy on the 18th and a further 15 in convoy on the 22nd. The plans were that Northbound convoy JW-51A would arrive at Murmansk

miles away from the convoy's reported position, caused the Admiralty to send a warning to Captain R Sherbrooke, Captain (D) of the 17th Destroyer Flotilla. Later that day, the Lutzow and Hipper and their screening destroyers put to sea. The two ships were to attack JW-51B from north and south. The Hipper group was to drive the convoy towards the Lutzow. Subsequent evidence suggested that the

Sherbrooke was severely wounded, but his tactics worried the Hipper and kept her from the convoy.

Around 10 a.m. that day, Sherbrooke received a radio message indicating that Force 'R' — Jamaica and SHEFFIELD — heading towards the noise of battle, were approaching him on a course of 170 degrees. This put Force 'R' to the north,



so that escorts could return with home-bound convoy RA-51 on the 30th December.

Admiral J C Tovey, C-in-C Home Fleet, decided that he would not only sail the convoys with their fighting escorts of destroyers, but he would also have a separate force of two cruisers — Force 'R' — covering the movements. JW-51A sailed on 18th December and arrived safely as planned, covered by Force 'R' — the 6-inch gun cruisers SHEFFIELD and Jamaica commanded by Rear Admiral R L Burnett.

Convoy JW-51A was not attacked, but the German Naval Staff had plans. They had drawn up Operation Regenbogen (Rainbow) which provided for the pocket battleship Lutzow, the heavy cruiser Hipper and an escort of six destroyers to sail from Altenfjord to attack some unspecified Arctic convoy. Convoy JW-51B, which sailed from Scotland on the 22nd December, gave the Germans the chance they wanted. Hit by a gale, the 22 ships and their escorts, well to the north of North Cape, were driven well south of their intended route. Ships lost contact; some made Murmansk alone and some even steamed past the convoy without sighting it. On the 29th December the minesweeper Bramble was sent to make a radar search for missing ships. She was never seen again by British eyes.

Next day the intensity of German radio activity with Altenfjord less than 200

Germans were afraid of meeting big ships. As things turned out, much depended upon the character of individual commanding officers. On the morning of the 31st December 1942, the Hipper sighted two ships at 7.25 a.m.; then several more. The stage was set for the Battle of the Barents Sea.

The Germans knew that there was a convoy on the move because U-354 had sighted the ships on the 30th December and had reported their position. The British anticipated some sort of attack by surface ships and at 8.30 a.m. on the 31st December, one of the look-outs aboard HMS Hyderabad reported two destroyers due south and, on the convoy's starboard beam, HMS Obdurate reported them as they passed astern. That was fortunate, because the Hyderabad had thought they were Russian ships. The Obdurate was ordered to investigate. At 9.15 a.m. she sighted three destroyers and challenged. There was no reply, and then one of the German ships revealed her identity by opening fire. The battle had begun.

Captain Sherbrooke saw the gun flashes; ordered his five ships to the position determined before the convoy sailed, and transmitted an 'enemy' report. Then, as he left the port side of the convoy, he sighted a large black shape among the snow squalls. The shape was the Hipper, approaching from the north, and what followed from that sighting developed into a classic destroyer action. Captain

whereas it should have been to the south. Fearing a German ruse, he ordered two destroyers back to the convoy. He fought on with Onslow and Orwell, his ship suffering severe damage before falling back to the convoy and homing Force 'R' by radio. Hipper had broken off the action and, as things later proved, drawn off the convoy escort such that, unwittingly, the convoy had run straight towards the Lutzow; yet a little later, the Hipper was attacking the destroyers again. She finally turned away for fear of a torpedo attack.

The Hipper had just signalled the Lutzow that she was in action and that there was no cruiser with the convoy when 24 six-inch shells burst around her. SHEFFIELD and Jamaica had arrived and caught the Germans by surprise. So complete was that surprise that the Hipper's guns were still trained in the opposite direction.

Force 'R' had been steaming north-west when Obdurate first sighted the three German destroyers. Rear Admiral Burnett thought he was in a good position to intercept raiders, but found himself 60 miles to the north of JW-51B. At 8.58 a.m., SHEFFIELD'S radar picked up two echoes — one larger than the other. They were 7½ miles ahead, to the northwest and steering eastwards. Were they raiders or stragglers? SHEFFIELD tracked them by radar and found them to be the trawler Vizalma and a merchantman. Both

had lost the convoy. At 9.32 a.m. Burnett saw the reflection of the gun flashes from the German destroyers firing at HMS Obdurate to the South.

With 40 or 50 miles to go, SHEFFIELD and Jamaica steamed south for nearly an hour. The men on their bridges were almost frozen stiff by the biting wind until at 10.30 a.m. SHEFFIELD'S radar picked up a large ship 10 miles ahead — the Hipper. A few minutes later and 15 miles away, there was another — the Lutzow. Rear Admiral Burnett decided to attack the nearest and both SHEFFIELD and Jamaica fired broadsides at a range of eight miles. A shell from SHEFFIELD'S fifth and one each from Jamaica's fourth and fifth salvos hit the German ship. Damaged and on fire, Hipper turned into a smoke screen laid by her attendant destroyers. Two of them — the Friedrich Eckholdt and the Richard Beitzen — mistook the SHEFFIELD for the Hipper and steered straight for her. SHEFFIELD hit the Friedrich Eckholdt with seven salvos and left her smothered in smoke and flame. The Jamaica engaged the destroyer Richard Bietzen, which managed to escape.

At 11.37 a.m. the battle was over. Admiral Kummetz aboard Hipper broke off the action and ran for Altenfjord. For the Germans, Operation Rainbow had been a complete failure. Hitler's fury when he heard of the battle and its

result virtually ended the German Navy as a big ship force. The only ships of any size that it was allowed to keep were the battleship Tirpitz and the battlecruiser Scharnhorst.

In early September of 1943, HMS SHEFFIELD was back in the Mediterranean. It was there that she took part in the allied landing in the Gulf of Salerno, an operation which met stiff opposition and which required strong naval support for the eight convoys carrying the armies to the beaches. The action in and around the Gulf earned the 'Salerno 1943' honour.

On Christmas Day 1943 the Scharnhorst sailed to attack convoy JW-55B. In the convoy's escort were the Onslow and the Orwell. Covering the convoy were the SHEFFIELD, Jamaica, Belfast and Norfolk and the battleship Duke of York. On the 26th December, in the half light of an Arctic dawn, Rear Admiral Burnett's cruisers sighted the Scharnhorst steaming at high speed towards the convoy. The cruisers opened fire and the Scharnhorst turned away. A few hours later she attempted to close the convoy again and was headed off once more.

Giving up the attempt, the Scharnhorst turned to a southerly course. Throughout the afternoon SHEFFIELD, Jamaica, Belfast and Norfolk shadowed her, keeping Admiral Sir Bruce Fraser aboard the battle-

ship Duke of York informed of her movements. The Duke of York was coming up from the south-west at high speed to intercept and, at 4.15 p.m. made contact. The Duke of York soon obtained a hit on the fast-moving German, and the Scharnhorst turned to an easterly course with the British fleet in chase. Another destroyer attack, this time by HM Ships Savage, Saumarez and Scorpion and the Norwegian Stord, scored three torpedo hits whilst under heavy fire. The Scharnhorst's speed was reduced; the Duke of York closed in and the battle was renewed. On fire and almost stopped, the Scharnhorst was sunk by a torpedo fired by HMS Jamaica, 60 miles NE of North Cape. That explains 'North Cape, 1943' the last of SHEFFIELD'S battle honours.

In 1944 the ship was earmarked to form part of the British Pacific Fleet and sent to the US Navy Yard at Boston for major overhaul. The work took much longer than was anticipated and VJ-Day came before she was ready for further operational service.

After the war had ended, the ship served in home waters; in the Mediterranean; on the West Indies station and East of Suez, until time caught up with her — despite two modernisation periods in dockyards—and she was relegated to the Reserve. Her long career came to an end in 1967 when she was towed to Faslane, on the Gareloch, to be broken up.



NORWAY 1940

ATLANTIC 1941-43

MEDITERRANEAN 1941

ARCTIC

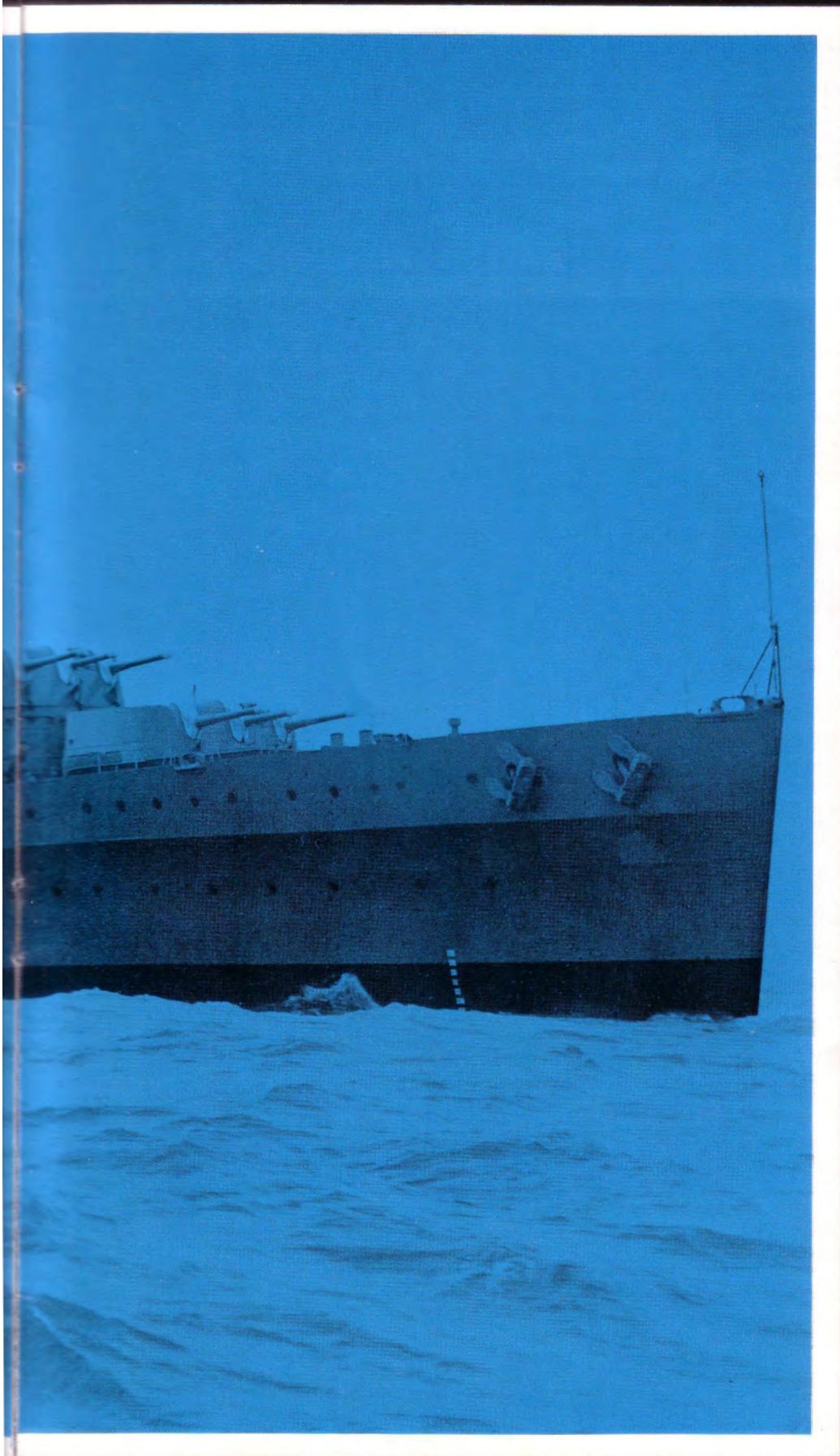
SPARTIVENTO 1940

BISMARCK 1941

MALTA CONVOYS 1941



1941-43      BARENTS SEA 1942      SALERNO 1943  
NORTH AFRICA 1942      BISCAY 1943      NORTH CAPE 1943



# HMS Sheffield



'A cruiser of the Southampton Class ordered under the 1934 Naval Estimates and the first ship in the history of the Royal Navy to be named after the city.'

1936~1967



# A new Sheffield — a new age

In July 1967, the British Government introduced its plans for the Navy of the 1970's. One of the three new ships then announced was a new class of destroyer designed to carry the SeaDart missile and incorporate gas turbine propulsion.

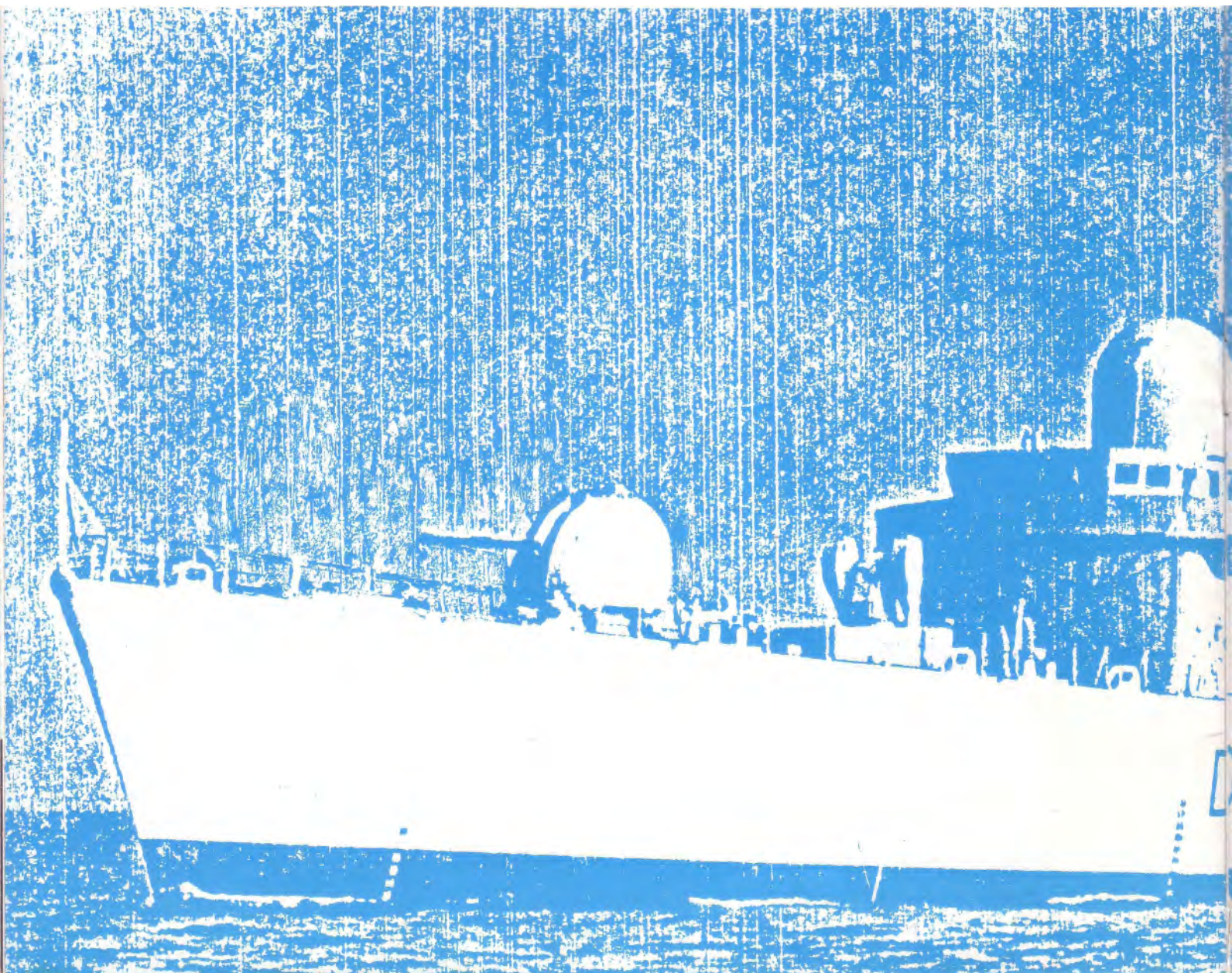
When Mr John Morris, Labour MP for Aberavon and the then Minister of Defence (Equipment) visited the Barrow-in-Furness works of Vickers Shipbuilding Group on Tuesday, 14th November 1968, history was made. He had travelled North especially to announce the order for the first of these new guided missile destroyers, and, with this announcement, the Royal Navy entered the new era of 'jet age' ships.

"In close competition with other shipyards, Vickers has won an order to build the first ship of this class; also to provide lead yard services for the new design...

This is very important news indeed for Barrow, and it must be a matter of great pride to Vickers that, in this highly competitive field, they have won an order to build the first ship of this very important class. This will be the first custom-built ship of gas turbine propulsion for the Royal Navy," said Mr Morris.

To the Royal Navy the order meant the first of a very sophisticated new class of ships, powered completely by gas turbines. To Vickers it meant guaranteed jobs for 1200 men over a period of years, and a design and technical involvement in the first ship of the type and the vessels which were to follow her.

So far as jet power was concerned, the Royal Navy had built a gas turbine propulsion system on an experimental basis and installed it in HMS Exmouth. "The Royal Navy takes great pride in the fact



that it leads the world in going over to this novel form of propulsion," Mr Morris told the Press.

The SHEFFIELD, first of six Type 42's to be ordered, proved a difficult ship to build. The Ministry of Defence had regarded her throughout as a highly sophisticated vessel and had planned along the modern concept of repair-by-replacement so as to ensure both economic operation and long periods in service at sea. In the event, the fitting-out rather than the construction of the ship was delayed by technical problems — understandable in that so much of the ship was entirely novel. The energy crisis, the three-day week and a national shortage of skilled manpower did not help the best efforts of builder and suppliers.

An example of the builders ingenuity followed a tragic accident which occurred

not long before the planned launch day. Two men lost their lives in an explosion and part of the ship was extensively damaged. Vickers had already won an order for two Type 42 Destroyers for the Argentine Navy and the first of these was already being built in the Yard. With the ready agreement of the Argentine Navy, Vickers — rather than delay the launch — repaired the RN vessel by direct replacement with the equivalent section from the Argentine ship. Valuable time was thus saved by a 'round-the-clock' effort, reminiscent of the 1939-45 war years.

Ship No.1084 was able to be launched as planned on 10th June 1971 and her sponsor, Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II was heard to express her sympathy to the families of the men who had lost their lives. To the waiting crowds, however, it was a joyous day as HMS SHEFFIELD took to her element without a hitch.

Contractors' sea trials took the new ship to the Firth of Clyde and the South Wales area early in 1974, and, on one occasion in the Firth, SHEFFIELD steamed in company with the first Type 21 frigate, HMS Amazon. The sea trials, designed to prove most things worth proving, were run in three stages up to August 1974 and were a marked success. On completing them the ship returned to Barrow-in-Furness to undergo final docking and tests before completing for commissioning. While her building took longer than was ever imagined when the work began, the Royal Navy now has a vessel built in the best Vickers' tradition of quality and in Barrow's best traditions of skill and craftsmanship.

