

Mission: History

Studiorum Historiam Praemium Est



6 November 2000

★★★★★

Volume 2, Number 11

1775: Winter Woolens for Washington



John Paul Jones Captures Shipload Of British Uniforms

Helps Keep Troops Toasty at Trenton

Think of John Paul Jones and you think of "I have not yet begun to fight" and *Bonhomme Richard* engaging *Serapis* off Flamborough Head in a battle that left Jones in command of *Serapis* after his own ship sank.

But that was in September 1779, and Jones had been fighting the British since the beginning of the Revolution, and he had been successful from the outset. His earliest temporary command in 1775 was that of the modestly-named *Alfred*, a 20-gun ship-rigged vessel ambitiously described as a frigate, and he returned to *Alfred* for one of his first independent commands in the autumn of 1776.

In a letter of 17 October 1776 to Robert Morris, a member of the Continental Congress to whom he had ingratiated himself, Jones recommended that he lead a naval force to the island of St. Helena in the South Atlantic, there to prey on British shipping between India and England and on trade between West Africa and Britain. Commodore Esek Hopkins, an elderly sea captain who had been appointed "Commander in Chief" of the Continental Navy in 1775, had plans that would keep Jones closer to home. Jones would take *Alfred* and the brigantine *Hampden* to Cape Breton, the easternmost portion of Nova Scotia, where he was to release American seamen who had been taken prisoner and

JOHN PAUL JONES wrote in a 1779 letter to John Hancock, "I hoisted with my own hands the Flag of Freedom the first time it was displayed, on the *Alfred*..." That flag would have been the Grand Union Flag, the flag that flew over George Washington's headquarters in New York when the Declaration of Independence was read to his troops. *Alfred* was Jones' first independent command, and in her, in the autumn of 1776, he captured five British ships and stole one.

1943: Arleigh Burke Gets 3 Jap Ships and a Nickname As DesRon 23 Mixes it up with 5 Enemy Destroyers

Captain Arleigh Burke, commander of Destroyer Squadron 23, was on 24 November 1943 refueling his ships at Hathorn Sound in Kula Gulf, a small body of water separating the Solomon Islands of New Georgia and Kolombangara. Burke's ships, all new FLETCHER class destroyers, had been the busiest in the Pacific and were tired. He had complained that he could not steam in formation at more than 30 knots, even though the class was rated at 38 knots.

Burke was not as yet possessed of a

nickname.

DesRon 23 was composed of Burke's flagship *Charles Ausburne* (DD-570), Cdr. L. K. Reynolds; *Claxton* (DD-571), Cdr. H. F. Stout; *Dyson* (DD-572), Cdr. R. A. Gano; *Converse* (DD-509), Cdr. De W. C. E. Hamberger; and *Spence* (DD-512), Lt.Cdr. H. J. Armstrong. Cdr. B. L. Austin flew his pennant in *Converse* as commander of DesDiv 46 which included *Spence*, while Burke commanded DesDiv 45.

While the ships were filling their

(Continued on page 2)

(Continued on page 7)

Japs Were About to Move Men in Solomons; It was Burke's Job to Intercept Their Ships

(Continued from page 1)

tanks, Navy intelligence at Pearl Harbor learned that the Japanese planned a mission to Buka, an island just north of Bougainville. Buka was a major base and the Jap army believed it would be an objective of the American advance. An airfield on Buka had been rendered superfluous by U.S. mastery of the skies so the mission aimed at landing reinforcing troops and taking off about 700 aviation technicians. The Jap navy would handle the job with five destroyers, a perfect match for DesRon 23.

Admiral William F. Halsey ordered Burke to complete refueling rapidly and take his ships to a point off Empress Augusta Bay on the southwest side of Bougainville while intelligence determined whether the Jap mission was on.

Burke topped off his tanks and sailed from Hathorn Sound at top speed. En route, he reported to Halsey that he would arrive off Empress Augusta Bay at 2200. Someone with a slide rule calculated that DesRon 23 must be steaming at 31 knots. "Thirty-one knots!" exclaimed Halsey's operations officer Capt. R. H. Thurber, a former squadron mate of Burke. "He said he could make only 30 knots formation speed!"

Halsey's next order had a lasting effect – at least for Burke:

THIRTY-ONE-KNOT BURKE PUT
YOUR SQUADRON ATHWART THE
BUKA-RABAUL EVACUATION LINE
ABOUT 35 MILES WEST OF BUKA
XXX IF NO ENEMY CONTACTS BY
EARLY MORNING COME SOUTH TO
REFUEL SAME PLACE XXX IF
ENEMY CONTACTED YOU KNOW
WHAT TO DO XXX HALSEY

Thirty-one-knot Burke figured he would be more likely to make contact on the western side of the St. George Channel, rather than the eastern side and, at 0130 on 25 November turned due north and began his patrol at 23 knots. He did not have long to wait.

The Jap destroyers had landed their troops and taken on the aviation techs between midnight and 0100 and were sailing on a course that would intersect that of the American destroyers. At 0141, three of Burke's ships made radar contact with targets eleven miles to the

east. Bingo. Burke's message over TBS was succinct:

HELLO DS 23 HANG ONTO YOUR
HATS BOYS HERE WE GO

The commodore then instructed Austin to "hold back until you get your proper bearing...that is 225." The squadron then turned to meet the Japs and, at 0156, the enemy ships were 50 degrees off its port bow, about 6,000 yards distant. Burke's plan was for his division to make the first attack with Austin covering and then switch places with Austin making the second attack with Burke providing cover.

American radar had two targets at first, which turned out to be two ships screening for three others – five in all. The enemy screen, under Captain Kiyoto Kagawa, consisted of the destroyers *Onami* and *Makinami*. The three others, commanded by Katsumori Yamashiro and carrying the valuable aviation tech-



DESRON 23 fishtailing through The Slot. Burke employed the same maneuver while dodging fire during a stern chase in the Battle of Cape St. George.

nicians, were *Amagiri*, *Yugiri* and *Uzuki*. Five destroyers against five – an even match, except for the Burke factor.

When the Americans were in position for a 4,500-yard torpedo run to the Jap screen, DesDiv 45 launched 15 torpedoes and promptly made a 90° right turn. Kagawa, who had no previous night action experience, was taken by surprise. By the time he spotted Burke's ships, the torpedoes had been in the water for about four minutes and they hadn't been



CAPT. BURKE as he appeared about the time of the Battle of Cape St. George.

Detail from a painting by Cdr. Albert K. Murray

launched from where Burke was now. Kagawa turned right into the path of the fish.

Just before the torpedoes hit, *Ausburne's* radar found the other three Jap destroyers, and Burke changed his plan. He would go after those three and leave Austin behind to polish off Kagawa. The torpedoes found their marks. The destroyermen saw three flashes followed by three explosions. A ball of fire shot hundreds of feet into the night sky as *Onami* exploded. She went down almost immediately with few survivors. *Makinami* suffered major damage but remained afloat. Both Jap destroyers were new – less than a year old – and were large – about the same tonnage as DesRon 23's ships.

Sinking a pair of modern destroyers would make any squadron's night a success, but Burke wanted more. Leaving *Converse* and *Spence* to finish off *Makinami*, he took DesDiv 45 after the three other enemy ships.

Yamashiro, though, wanted no part of the Americans. His decks were crowded with aircraft mechanics, which seriously impeded his ability to fight his ships and his first obligation was to get those people to Rabaul. Moreover, when he saw what happened to his screen, he suspected that there might be more to contend with than a handful of destroyers. He turned and ran, with Burke about 12,000 yards behind him and bending on all the speed he could muster. Some reports say he was able to get all of 33

(Continued on page 3)

Action 'May be Considered a Classic,' Says Naval War College President

(Continued from page 2)

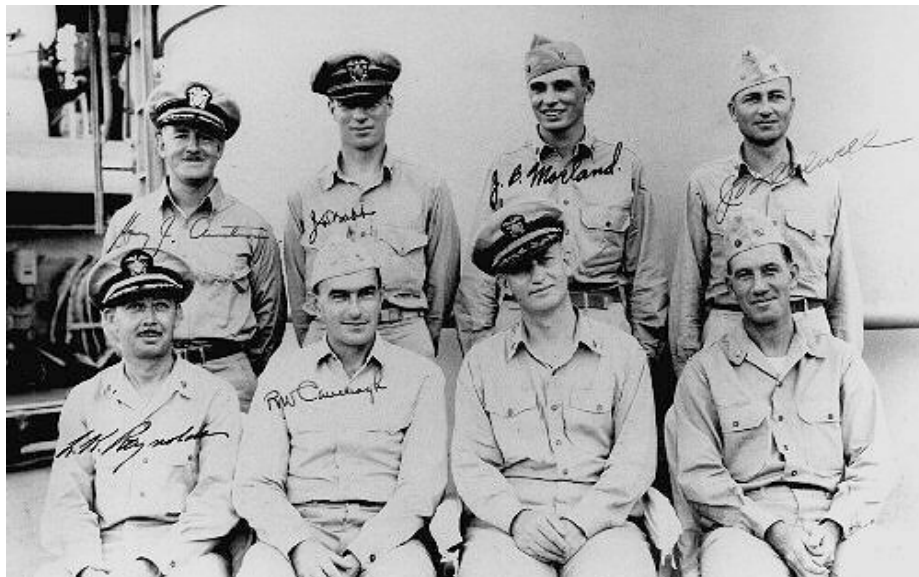
knots from his weary FLETCHER class destroyers.

A stern chase is a long chase, and at 0212 Burke made it longer by turning 45° to course 60 degrees before returning to course 15 degrees after a full minute. He later said that the jog was made on a hunch, and a provident hunch it was. As the three American ships returned to their N by E course, all hands heard three tremendous explosions behind the division. They were torpedoes launched by *Yugiri* exploding in *Ausburne's* wake. Burke himself admitted in his report that the three explosions caught him by surprise.

The explosions were so heavy the ships were badly jarred and the Squadron Commander could not resist the temptation to look at the bow to see whether or not it was still there. *Charles Ausburne* did not slow, and it was felt that at least one of the ships astern had been hit by torpedoes. Each one of the ships astern thought that one of the other ships had been hit. Fortunately the explosions were merely Japanese torpedoes exploding at the end of their runs or as they crossed our wakes. It may be that the short jog to the right threw the Division out of torpedo water. If so, it was one of the most fortunate of the many lucky breaks the Squadron experienced.

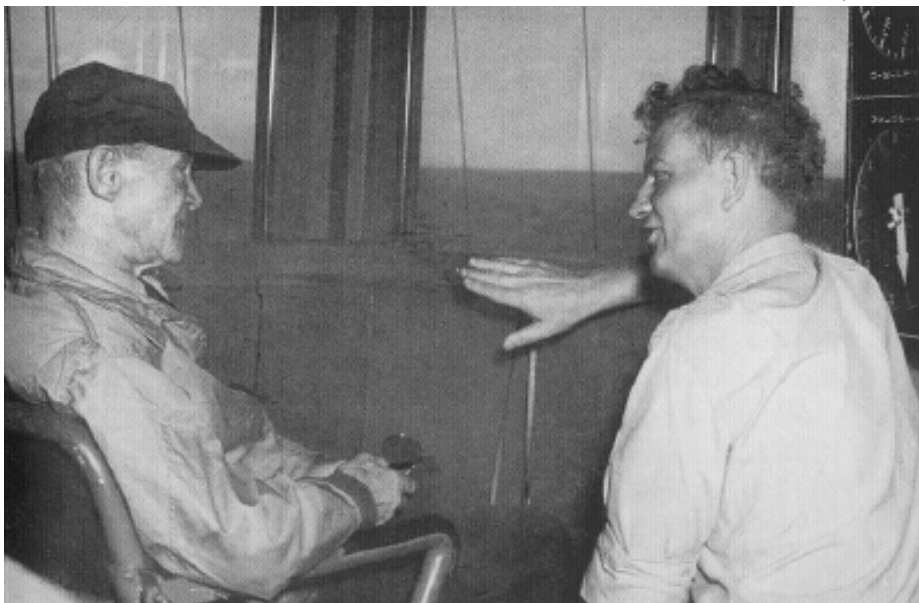
By 0222, Burke had closed range to about 8,000 yards and ordered his ships to open fire with their forward mounts only. This was hazardous, for all *Yamashiro* had to do was make a 90° turn to cap Burke's T and bring all his guns to bear on the Americans. But the Japs chose to exchange fire using their rear batteries. The shooting on both sides was good, with Burke fishtailing to dodge splashes, some of which were close aboard.

At 0225, *Yamashiro* ordered his ships to separate courses, about 45° apart. Burke kept his ships together and settled on *Yugiri* as his target. That was unfortunate for *Yugiri*, as she had about 300 of the mechanics on her decks. During the stern chase, *Yugiri* had received several damaging hits from the forward guns of the three American destroyers – now she would suffer the full weight of their broadsides. One by one, *Ausburne*, *Claxton* and *Dyson* passed *Yugiri* and poured fire into her. At 0305 a large explosion



CAPT. ARLEIGH BURKE, Commander of Destroyer Squadron 23, with officers of the squadron, about the time of the Battle of Cape St. George. Sitting, left to right, are: Cmdr. L. K. Reynolds, commanding officer of *Charles Ausburne* (DD-570); Cmdr. R. W. Cavanaugh; Capt. Arleigh Burke and Cmdr. R. A. Gano, commanding officer of *Dyson* (DD-572). Standing, left to right, are: Cmdr. Henry J. Armstrong, commanding officer of *Spence* (DD-512); Lt. J.W. Bobb; Cmdr. J. B. Morland and Cmdr. J. B. Calwell.

U.S. Navy Photo



APPOINTED CHIEF OF STAFF to R. Adm. Marc Mitscher, Burke was greeted warily by his new boss. Eventually, the two drew close and here Burke appears to be explaining what airplanes do, to the naval aviator who won his wings in 1916.

was observed in the Jap ship and she began to circle. *Yugiri* defiantly, but without effect, fired her remaining torpedoes and sank.

About 30 miles south, *Converse* and *Spence* had taken care of *Makinami*, sinking her with gunfire at 0254.

In Burke's mind, the battle would not be over until his ships were out of harm's way, and the fight had taken him

to within minutes flying time of Rabaul. He fully expected a daylight attack from everything the Japs could throw at him. To the relief of the destroyermen, the aircraft they saw at daybreak were those of Air Solomons Command, the Army-Navy co-op that flew everything from transports and flying boat rescue planes to bombers and fighters. The aircraft Burke saw at dawn on 25 November

(Continued on page 6)

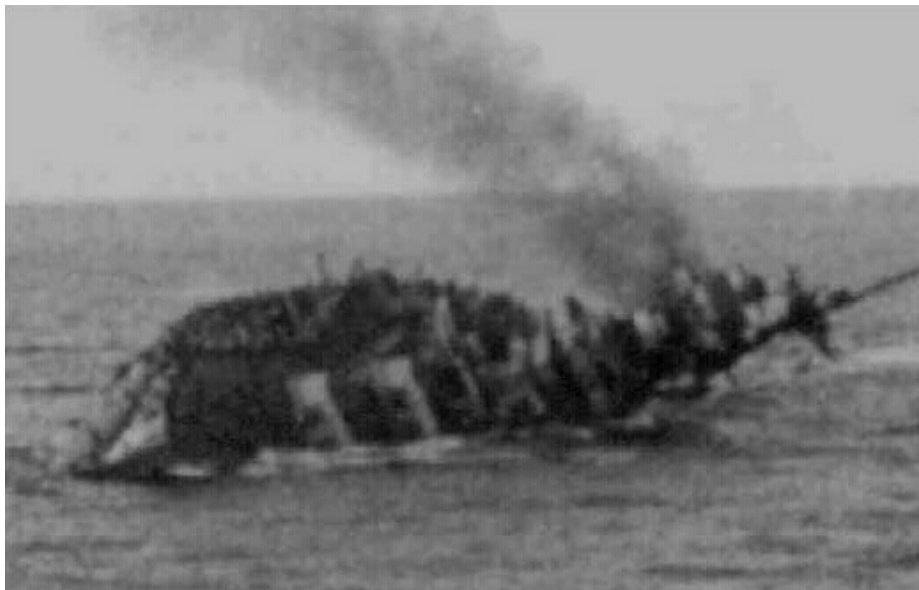
1941: German U-boat Penetrates British Screen, Sinks HMS Barham



THE PRE-WAR (pre-First World War) battleship HMS *Barham* at rest, her number three turret of two 15-inch guns trained to port. At the Battle of Cape Matapan in March of 1941, *Barham's* big guns had in a period of three minutes put five salvos into the Italian eight-inch cruiser *Zara* and two into the destroyer *Alfieri*. *Barham* was still a valuable old lady.



THREE TORPEDOES from *U-331* spelled the end for the QUEEN ELIZABETH class battlewagon. In less than a minute, she was settling by the stern and beginning to roll.



ALL HANDS SCRAMBLE up *Barham's* vertical deck and onto her side in this blurry photo taken from her sister ship HMS *Valiant*, but 862 of them didn't make it.

On the Prowl for a Convoy, *Barham* Meets a Prowler

On 24 November 1941, three QUEEN ELIZABETH class battleships of the Royal Navy with an escort of eight destroyers sailed from Alexandria in Egypt, on the prowl for Italian convoys reported to be transporting men and materiel to Benghazi in Libya.

Admiral Sir Andrew B. Cunningham commanded the group. He had been successful in the Mediterranean, notably in the Battle off Cape Matapan in March 1941, where his ancient battleships sank three Italian cruisers and two destroyers and chased the modern battleship *Vittorio Veneto* from the scene. A.B.C. expected no problems now for *Queen Elizabeth*, *Barham* and *Valiant*. Those ships were old – laid down before the First World War – but the eight 15-inch guns in each packed a wallop.

It was a pleasant autumn day on 25 November, typical for the eastern Mediterranean, with sun dappling the sea through broken clouds. The Germans and Italians knew where Cunningham was, and enemy aircraft shadowed the flotilla, always at a safe distance. The ships were not at battle stations, but every anti-aircraft gun was manned. The forenoon and afternoon watches went by without event and the sailors looked forward to returning to Alexandria the following morning.

At 1640, Cunningham was bringing his ships into a line abreast formation when three loud “whumps” were heard, and heads turned expecting to see smoke billowing from the heavy guns of one of the battleships, or perhaps the billowing seas thrown up by a destroyer’s depth charges. Instead, word passed quickly through the ships that “*Barham's* been torpedoed.”

R. A. Hobbs, a crewman onboard *Valiant*, recalled “We all rushed up on deck expecting to find her unable to make any headway and a slight list, but the three explosions were too much at short range for any water-tight doors. After rolling to starboard, she turned over to port, with a list of about 15 degrees and increasing.”

A German submarine, *U-331*, had penetrated the destroyer screen unde-

(Continued on next page)

Barham Rolls, Explodes In Less than 3 Minutes; 862 Lost in Catastrophe

(Continued from previous page)

tected and had fired four torpedoes, three of which had struck Barham on her port side between her funnel and the number three turret. Kapitän-Leutnant Hans-Diedrich Freiherr von Tiesenhausen reported that his vessel took a terrific beating from the British destroyers, but he managed to slip away and return safely to Salamis, Greece.

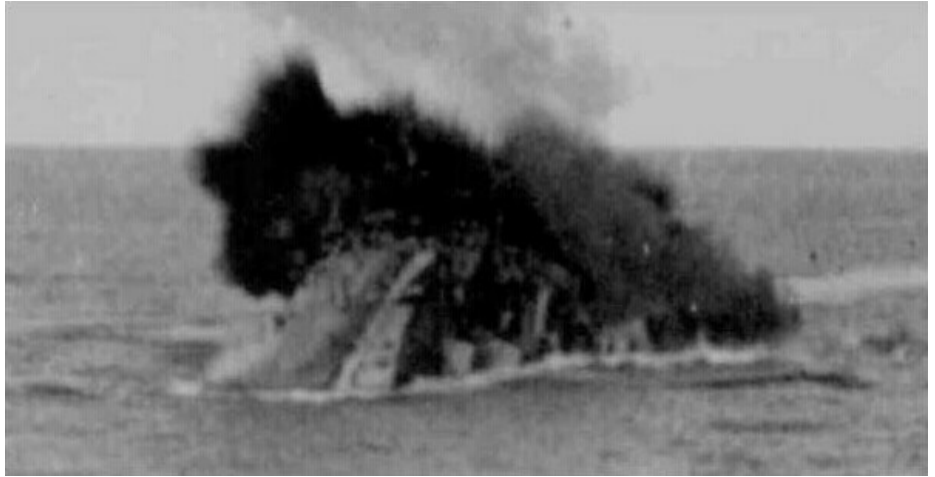
Hobbs said the sub surfaced after firing its torpedoes and *Valiant* tried to ram her, but was unable to do so owing to the turning evolution she was in. *U-331* immediately dove and was not seen again, though she was harried by the Royal Navy's destroyers.

Barham's list continued and, abandon ship having been ordered, men were taking to the sea. Hobbs said "A remarkable sight it was to see the officers on the bridge hanging on as if on parallel bars." When the ship's funnel reached the water there was a large explosion, tossing a 15-inch turret a hundred feet into the air. Debris was scattered everywhere by the blast and when the smoke cleared the ship was gone. *Barham's* death had taken two and one-half minutes, and now destroyers searched the sea for survivors.

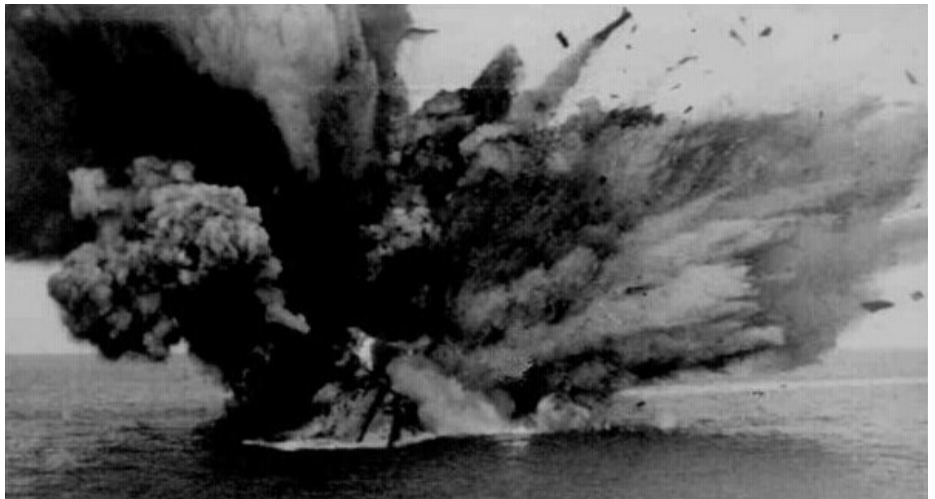
Queen Elizabeth and *Valiant* continued on, their mission not interrupted by the loss of their sister. *Barham's* commander, Capt. G. C. Cooke, went down with his ship, as did 55 other officers and 806 ratings.

Reflecting on the sinking three years ago, retired Vice Admiral N. D. Brodeur of the Royal Canadian Navy wrote "It is very sobering to realize that in a space of only a few minutes Kapitän-Leutnant von Tiesenhausen and his 57-man *U-331* destroyed a warship forty times its size and killed about the same number of military as Canada lost in a much longer battle, against a far larger force, at Dieppe."

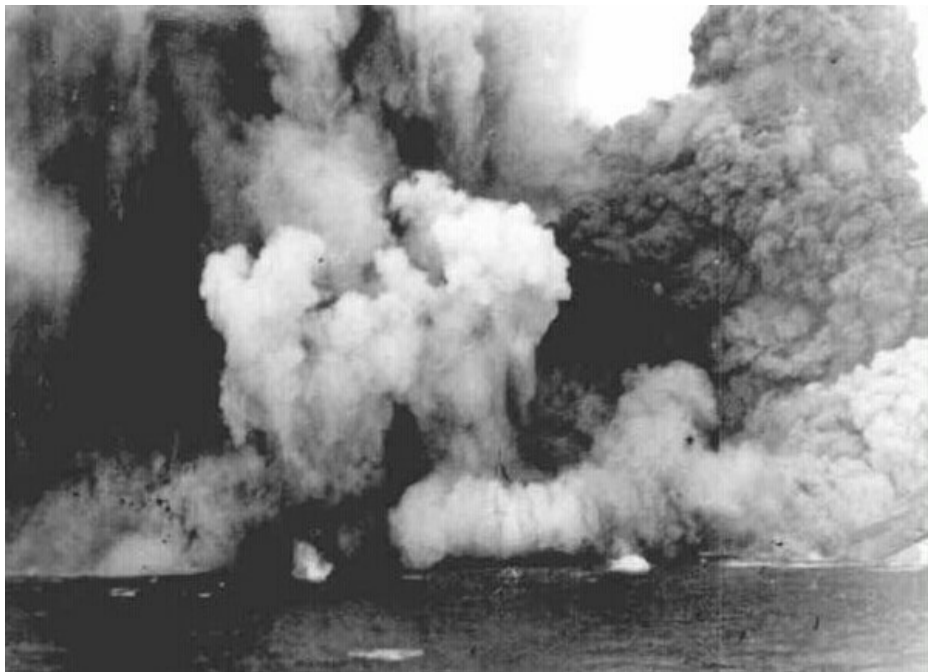
The year 1941 was not a good one for the Royal Navy's capital ships. *HMS Hood* was lost to a single salvo from *Bismarck* (and was, of course, avenged). When the aircraft carrier *HMS Indomitable* was grounded, *HMS Prince of Wales* and *HMS Repulse* proceeded without air cover, and were sunk by Jap aircraft.



AN EXPLOSION BEGAN the moment Barham's funnels touched the Mediterranean, and some thought it was seawater reaching her boilers. But there was fire in the ship, and it was racing toward her after magazines. Though difficult to see in this blurry photo, there are many men on the battleship's starboard side.



MEN STILL STAND on *Barham's* hull as fire reaches her stores of cordite. A rating on *Valiant* said he saw a 15-inch turret thrown 100 feet in the air.



WHEN THE SMOKE CLEARED she was gone, and *Queen Elizabeth* and *Valiant* sailed on.

Burke's Remarkable Letter to the President

Though best remembered for his World War II command of Destroyer Squadron 23, which rolled up a record of one enemy cruiser sunk, nine destroyers sunk, one submarine and several small vessels sunk, plus some 30 planes shot down, Arleigh Burke served an unprecedented three terms as Chief of Naval Operations from 1955 to 1961. He is considered one of the best CNOs, and must be recognized as the funniest. In 1959, President Eisenhower, thinking Burke was working too hard, sent him a bottle of Scotch and told him to take a day off. Here is the CNO's thank you note.

CHIEF OF NAVAL OPERATIONS

18 February 1959

My dear Mr. President:

My deepest appreciation for the bottle of Chivas Regal. Your thoughtfulness and kindness in sending it to me will remain in my memory for a long time to come. It is my exceedingly good fortune to be able to accept it on behalf of the many capable and loyal Navy people who have contributed to the Vanguard program. This latest success is a deserved reward for all those whose patience and resourcefulness have been so sorely tested.

In keeping with your thoughtful suggestion that I take a day off for relaxation and enjoyment of this superb gift, I have done just that. This day, free of the Pentagon turmoil will give me a needed rest, allow me to devote objective thought to some of our problems and above all permit me to extract maximum enjoyment from this wonderful scotch. It is very tasty indeed. (Excuse me while I pour myself another one.)

Your suggestion was a wonderful thing. As I sit here sipping this marvelous stimulant, all the problems of the Navy seem to take on a clearer perspective. It is difficult to express my true feeling of gratitude for this superb Scotch. It's real good. Thanks alot. We have a lot of problems ahead but our programs are sound. Our Navy has a tremendous job to do and we'll doer by golly. We could sure use a few more submarines, our carriers are getting old and we ain't got enough of them; we need more aircraft; cloz in up some bases is making a lotta people awful mad. And people, boy, oh boy, live boddies are scarce. Sure could use a few bucks for general expenses to.

Shanks again for the bug juice. Besh damned bureau I ever had. Shuris good stuff. Jus like myappy uset to make. Shurdo tank you for this jug and the day off. Itch about time I add a day off to do some clear serious thimpering. Shur haz hellpt. Everthig ish clear as can be now. Mush quit now and fine another bottle of delicious booze.

Very respectfully,
s/ARLEIGH BURKE

Lightnings from Munda Shepherd DesRon 23

(Continued from page 3)

were Lockheed P-38 Lightnings, having flown all the way from Munda to shepherd him home.

The Battle of Cape St. George was at last over, with three enemy destroyers sunk and possible damage to two others. There were no American casualties, and not a hit on an American ship. On 13 January 1944, the president of the U.S. Naval War College, Admiral W. S. Pye, referred to the battle as "An almost perfect action," one that "may be considered a classic."

1917: USS *Fanning* Captures Crew of German Submarine

On the afternoon of 17 November 1917, USS *Nicholson* (DD-52) and USS *Fanning* (DD-37) put out of their Irish port for convoy duty.

As the two U.S. destroyers were forming up with the merchantmen, *Fanning* spotted a periscope and made a perfect turn directly toward the German sub, which immediately dove. *Fanning* and *Nicholson* both dropped depth charges but no signs of a hit came to the surface. Just when the destroyermen had given up, the submarine broached stern first and lay peacefully on the sea — not a mark on her.

Astonished American sailors gaped at *U-58* — the pigboat's name was painted on her conning tower — as a rotund Kapitän-Leutnant Gustav Amberger appeared on the conning tower, his hands held high, and shouted "Kamerad! Kamerad!" Then a deck hatch opened and three officers and 35 men emerged, hands held high and imploring "Kamerad! Kamerad!"

The Germans had scuttled *U-58* and, as she settled, began swimming toward *Fanning*. All were brought aboard, but one man died on the destroyer's deck.

The reason the sub was unmarked was the ash cans had wrecked her motors, jammed her diving planes and broken internal oil lines. It was either sink to the bottom or surface and surrender.

King George V, at a Buckingham Palace ceremony, conferred the British Distinguished Service Order on *Fanning's* captain, Lt. Cdr. A. S. Carpenter.

1861: 'Trent Affair' Almost Brings Britain into Civil War On the Side of Confederacy

Charles Wilkes, born in New York in 1798, gone to sea at seventeen, appointed a midshipman in the Navy at nineteen, began an astronomical observatory that became U.S. Naval Observatory, though only a Lieutenant commanded the expedition that discovered the Antarctic continent in 1839, was awarded its Founders Medal by the Royal Geographical Society in 1847, and was promoted to captain in 1855.

So far, so good.



RADM CHARLES WILKES, USN, discoverer of Antarctica, abductor of Confederate diplomats from a British ship at sea.

At the outbreak of the Civil War, Wilkes was given command of USS *San Jacinto*. On 8 November 1861, he was cruising in the West Indies and, having word that Confederate diplomats were on their way to Europe to gain sovereign recognition for the South, halted the British mail steamer *Trent* by firing a shot across her bow. He then sent an officer on board this neutral ship, accompanied by armed Marines.

The Confederate emissaries, James M. Mason and John Slidell, and their secretaries were removed from *Trent* by force and carried to *San Jacinto*. Wilkes returned to Boston where he was met with wild acclaim and he was thanked by the U.S. House of Representatives. Mason, Slidell and their secretaries were interned at Fort Warren.

So far, maybe not so good.

In Britain, the act aroused public in-

Jones' First Objective to Interfere with Coal Shipments,

(Continued from page 1)

put to work in coal mines, to capture ships laden with coal for British General William Howe's army in New York and to attack targets of opportunity.

Jones set sail from Providence, Rhode Island, on 27 October but, before clearing Narragansett Bay, *Hampden* holed her hull on a rock and had to abandon the cruise. Her crew was shifted to *Providence*, a 70-foot sloop that Jones had turned down when he was offered her shortly after he was commissioned a lieutenant. *Alfred* and *Providence* sailed on 1 November.

Jones first made for the Elizabeth Islands, a day sailor's jaunt across Buzzards Bay, where he found the privateer *Eagle*. At the time, privateers were paying sailors up to twice the wages paid by the Navy, so Jones was not surprised to find two deserters in *Eagle's* crew. These he reintroduced to Navy discipline and, for good measure, he impressed another twenty of *Eagle's* men. The captain of the privateer sued Jones and, though Hopkins did "whatever is in my powers to excuse you in the matter," Jones thought the Commodore didn't do enough and execrated the old salt for the rest of his life. Jones exhibited many such flaws of character during his lifetime, often to his expense.

On 11 November, *Alfred* took her first prize – the brigantine *Active* carrying a mixed cargo to Nova Scotia from England. Jones put a midshipman aboard as prizemaster and sent her to port. The following day, *Alfred* encountered *Mel-*

lish, a large armed transport bound for Quebec with winter clothing for British troops there and carrying also about sixty British soldiers and members of their families. *Mellish* gave only token resistance, perhaps fearing harm to officers' wives and children, before surrendering. When the American captain learned of the ship's cargo, he wrote in his journal "This will make Burgoyne shake a cloth in the wind and check his progress on the Lakes."

Mellish was much too valuable to send on an unescorted trip to port, so Jones put Lieutenant Philip Brown aboard in command, gave him ten guns and 25 men of *Alfred's* crew, and ordered him to stay close.

On 16 November, *Alfred* and *Providence*, with *Mellish* in company, captured a brig-like vessel called a snow. The snow was the largest of the two-masted ships of the time and like the brig carried a large fore-and-aft sail abaft the mainmast. Unlike the brig, that sail was set on a vertical pole stepped on the deck and clamped aloft to the aftside of the maintop. This pole was called the trysail mast, a misnomer, for a mast it was not. The snow, named *Kitty*, was out of London and was taking a cargo of fish and oil from Gaspé to Barbados. Jones put an officer on board and sent her to Rhode Island.

Providence, the sloop Jones once turned down, was by now leaking badly and her crew wanted nothing so much as to head back to Rhode Island, but Jones would not hear of it. Nevertheless, she slipped away during the night and Jones was left with *Mellish* for company. On 22 November, he raided Canso, the easternmost point of the main island of Nova Scotia, burning a British supply ship and an oil warehouse. He also made off with a fast schooner to take the place of *Providence* as *Alfred's* tender. While ashore, he was warned that three British frigates were looking for him.

On 24 November, Jones was cruising off Cape Breton when three strange sail were seen. They were not the frigates, but three colliers carrying Nova Scotia coal to General Howe in New York – the very ships Hopkins had sent Jones to capture. The colliers were escorted by

(Continued on page 8)

dignation and the British government wrote a stiff note demanding the release of the prisoners and an explanation. It seemed for a time that Britain might join the South in the Civil War. An apology was rendered and the four men released, cooling off the matter. During the rest of the Civil War, Wilkes often was at odds with Secretary of the Navy Gideon Welles -- to the extent he was court-martialed for disobedience, disrespect and conduct unbecoming an officer, and a promotion to Commodore was rescinded.

But he retired as Rear Admiral and is buried at Arlington National Cemetery.

Jones Gives Up on Miners, Heads Home with Prizes

(Continued from page 7)

the British frigate *Flora* which was hidden by fog. The ensuing capture of the colliers was hidden from *Flora* by the same fog and Jones made off with his prizes. He now had a sizeable fleet and Alfred's crew had been severely reduced by manning his prizes, so Jones decided to abandon the attempt to free the prisoner coal miners. With *Alfred*, the captured sloop, the valuable *Mellish* and the three captured colliers, he shaped course for Narragansett Bay.

The following day, *Alfred* came upon and captured the ten-gun letter-of-marque ship *John*. A letter-of-marque ship was an armed vessel whose main function was as a cargo ship but which was authorized to take prizes. Jones' fleet of seven ships was becoming unwieldy, so he set course for Boston, the closest American port.

Foul weather made keeping company difficult and Jones' ships were spread out when they encountered HMS *Milford*, a 28-gun frigate, east of Cape Cod. It was 8 December, freezing, and a fresh gale was blowing. The British commander was not sure what the strange ships were and Jones hoisted such deceptive signals that he was taken for *Flora* escorting the colliers to New York. But Jones had to sail past *Milford* to reach Boston.

It was dusk and Jones, unsure his subterfuge had worked, now pulled a rabbit from his hat. He hoisted a lantern to his main truck and, as darkness fell, allowed it to remain as if forgot. At about midnight, after ordering *Mellish* and his other prizes to proceed to Boston, Jones brought *Alfred*, her tender, and *John* to a course bearing northeast – and *Milford* followed, clearing the way to Boston for the other ships.

Here, the same valor that led to the taking of *Serapis* three years later, got the better of the American captain. Jones wanted a fight with *Milford*, but he wanted to get a look at her broadside before deciding whether to take her on. He ordered *John* to drop back and count the Englishman's guns, and it finally occurred to the captain of the British frigate that he was not in company with friendly ships. Accordingly, *Milford* took flight, pursued by *Alfred*, the



A SHIP JONES ONCE REFUSED, *Providence* sailed with him on 1 November 1776 but lasted only 15 days into the six-week cruise. She abandoned Jones on the 16th, sneaking off under cover of night. It was an improvident move for *Providence*, for Jones' men shared in a large packet of prize money at the end of the cruise.

schooner taken at Canso and *John*.

When Jones ranged close enough, he fired four cannon shot at the frigate and *Milford* turned to fight. Jones, now aware of the weight of *Milford's* broad-



JOHN PAUL JONES

side, decided not to fight and, in the faster ship, sailed away with his tender. *John*, which had never caught up with *Alfred* after dropping back to count the Englishman's guns, was not so lucky and was easily retaken.

Jones reached Boston on 15 December and learned that two of the colliers had been retaken, but *Mellish*, *Active* and *Kitty* were safe. The capture of *Mellish*

alone was enough to make the cruise a great success, and Jones and his crew shared in a large cash prize. Jones' share was sufficient for him to pay off the wages of his crew, whose one-year enlistment was up. He was reimbursed by Congress following the Revolution.

Also sharing in the rewards for the capture of *Mellish* were the troops of George Washington, who were preparing for what would be the Battle of Trenton on 26 December. When Washington crossed the Delaware to attack Howe's Hessians, his men were wearing the woolens that had been destined for the British troops in Quebec.

How to Get in Touch

Mission: History has been asked to provide an address for reader communications. E-mail may be sent to this address:

navhist@pacbell.net

Mail may be sent by conventional post to:

Ric Teague
2239 Wellesley Street
Palo Alto, CA 94306

Submissions are not encouraged because of constraints on the time available for editing. If such are sent, they should be sent as e-mail attachments in Microsoft Word 6.0 or as type-written copy, double-spaced, accompanied by a 3½-inch diskette containing the submission in Microsoft Word 6.0 for Windows.

Quite welcome are suggestions of events for coverage. Please offer suggestions two months ahead of the anniversary of an event.