

THE WAR AT SEA

A SERIES OF
PAINTINGS

by

NORMAN WILKINSON, O.B.E., P.R.I.



ONE SHILLING

1945

This collection of official war pictures has been made available by the British Ministry of Information in Australia for the United Kingdom. It is being exhibited under the direction of the Board of Management, Australian War Memorial, in co-operation with the Trustees of the National Art Galleries.

FOREWORD

By the First Sea Lord
ADMIRAL OF THE FLEET SIR ANDREW B. CUNNINGHAM,
BART., G.C.B., D.S.O.

It is a great pleasure to me to write a foreword to this catalogue of sea pictures.

We are of necessity a nation of seafarers and it is therefore important that our ships and the men who man them should be truly and well presented to the peoples of our Empire in art as well as in literature and music.

Good pictures of ships proceeding about their business are rare, with the result that the Navy and the Merchant Service suffer in some respects compared with other Services. It is all the more fortunate that in Norman Wilkinson the Navy has a friend who has interpreted the life at sea with such a sure hand and fine realism. He has always loved the sea and been deeply interested in the work of the Navy, and he served throughout the last war as an officer in the Royal Naval Volunteer Reserve.

The fifty-four pictures now being shown to the public present two and a half years' work and range over the work of the Navy, the Merchant Navy and Coastal Command, all partners in the war at sea. It is typical of Norman Wilkinson that he should give these pictures to the nation, and I know I express the appreciation of the Navy when I thank him for this most generous and welcome gift.

The public will be no less anxious than the Navy to enjoy the pictures and pay tribute to their superb artistry and to the generosity of the artist. I sincerely hope they will be shown and appreciated widely both at home and in the Empire overseas.

10 August, 1944.

Andrew Cunningham

NORMAN WILKINSON, O.B.E., P.R.I., began his art studies with a short period in Paris, but decided not to become a figure painter, and left on a number of voyages which were to provide him with the maritime subjects he preferred. At the outbreak of the Great War he gave up the position he then held as a marine illustrator to join the Royal Naval Reserve as an Assistant Paymaster. In this capacity he served five months in the Dardanelles, and eight months on anti-submarine patrol in the Mediterranean. Later, as a lieutenant in the Royal Naval Volunteer Reserve, he commanded a minesweeper in the English Channel. During this service he evolved the "Dazzle" system of ship camouflage, which was adopted by every Allied country.

He has published an illustrated book on the Dardanelles campaign: *The Dardanelles: Colour Sketches from Gallipoli*. He was engaged for a time as Art Adviser to the L.M.S. Railway, and in 1936 was elected President of the Royal Institute of Painters in Water Colours.

When the present war began he was acting as Adviser on camouflage to the Air Ministry, with the rank of Honorary Air Commodore, but he left in 1942 to begin the series of pictures now on exhibition. He made various trips to sea, and the sketches for the paintings of the Normandy landings were done on H.M. Destroyer *Jervis* which took part in the action.

The series was completed in August, 1943, and first exhibited at the National Gallery, London, a month later.

NOTE BY THE ARTIST

THIS series of pictures of the War at Sea has been painted with a view to giving some idea of the work of the Navy, the Merchant Service and Coastal Command. Naval subjects predominate, but a number of pictures of the two latter Services are included.

The subject is a vast one and a whole series could be devoted to the work of the Merchant Service, and yet another to that of Coastal Command, so that while only the fringe of the sea war has been recorded, it is hoped that it may give some idea of the achievements of the three Services.

One feature, and a most important one, which is not shown is the great work of our submarines. A submarine when making an attack on an enemy vessel is submerged with nothing but her periscope showing, and that only prior to firing her torpedoes. A periscope is a small thing in an expanse of sea, and almost unseen in broken water, so that a picture would only show the explosion of a torpedo on the enemy ship and, from the standpoint of showing a submarine in action, would have little interest.

The pictures have been painted from many sources, those showing Naval actions being reconstructed from descriptions supplied by participants in the actions concerned. It is difficult for a single member of a ship's company to give a comprehensive idea of a Naval action in which he is engaged. Funnel smoke and gunfire may at times completely mask the field of vision of one observer, while in another vessel an observer may be so placed as to see this area clearly. I have therefore tried to build up the pictures from a number of independent and authentic sources. As a result, it has been found that in the main one has been able to satisfy those engaged in the actions that the pictures do give a reasonably true impression of the events portrayed.

Some of the pictures are painted from direct sketches, those for instance of A Northern Port, some of the Convoy pictures, and those of the Navy's part in the invasion of Normandy.

I was fortunate in being present at the invasion on D-Day, and on a number of subsequent days, in the destroyer *Jervis*, one of the war's veterans. Sketching in a destroyer in action is not too easy; so much is going on it is difficult to concentrate on one incident. It therefore becomes a matter of rapid shorthand notes until a moment comes when the notes can be elaborated in colour and in more detail.

While the group of invasion pictures cover only a fraction of this great operation, it is hoped that they may give some impression of the part played by the Navy in the landing.

No attempt has been made to reconstruct features of the landing that were not actually witnessed. Weather conditions were carefully noted and an attempt made to put down with truth what was seen. No effort has been made to dramatize events, and by treating the subjects with simplicity it is possible that they may have some value as records in the future. If Naval Officers and others with technical knowledge find certain features missing in some of the ships they will understand that for these apparent lapses security reasons must be blamed.

NORMAN WILKINSON.

CATALOGUE OF PICTURES

LD 4310. ENEMY SUBMARINE SURRENDERING TO A HUDSON.

On August 27th, 1941, a Hudson aircraft of Coastal Command sighted a U-boat in bad weather in the Atlantic and attacked with machine-gun fire. Panic prevailed in the enemy vessel, and a white shirt was displayed as a token of surrender. The submarine was kept in view by relays of aircraft until dusk when a Naval trawler arrived, to be followed at dawn by a destroyer. The submarine was brought safely to Iceland.

LD 4306. THE END OF THE *Bismarck*.

The sinking of the German battleship *Bismarck* was the outstanding event of the sea war in 1941, and afforded an admirable illustration of co-operation between surface vessels and aircraft. Sighted on the evening of May 23rd by the cruisers *Suffolk* and *Norfolk*, she was shadowed throughout the night. At daylight she was brought to action by *Hood* and *Prince of Wales*. The action was inconclusive and the chase continued. During the night of the 24th, an attack was made by Fleet Air Arm Swordfish and Fulmars from H.M.S. *Victorious*. A torpedo hit was made and the *Bismarck's* speed reduced. In the bad weather contact was lost and it was not until some twelve hours later that she was sighted by a Catalina flying-boat of Coastal Command.

She was finally brought to action and destroyed on the morning of May 27th.

LD 4316. *San Demetrio*.

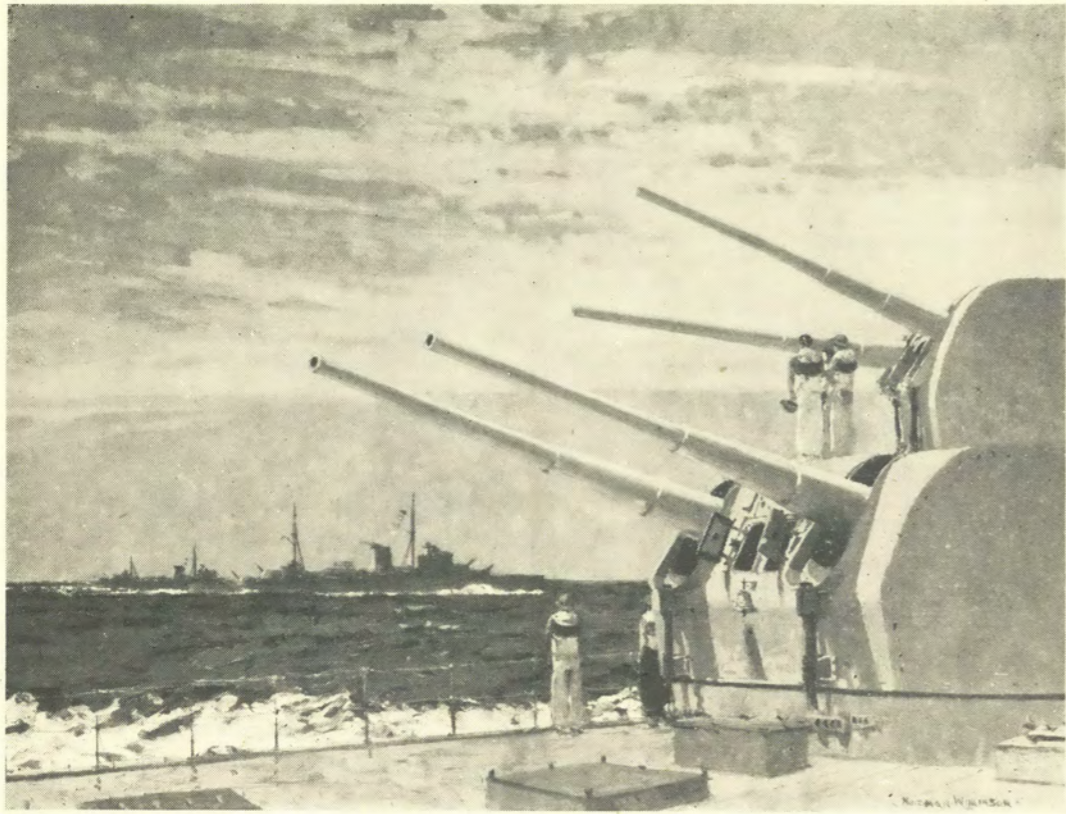
San Demetrio, an oil tanker with a full cargo of oil, was damaged and set on fire during the action in which the armed merchantman *Jervis Bay* was sunk. She was abandoned but was sighted some thirty-six hours later by the second officer's boat containing the chief engineer and fourteen of the crew. It was decided to reboard her. After an heroic struggle the fire was extinguished and she was brought back to England under her own power.

LD 4299. A DESTROYER SMOKESCREEN.

LD 4311. A RAIDER IN SIGHT. CONVOY DISPERSING.

LD 4315. ADMIRAL VIAN'S ACTION.

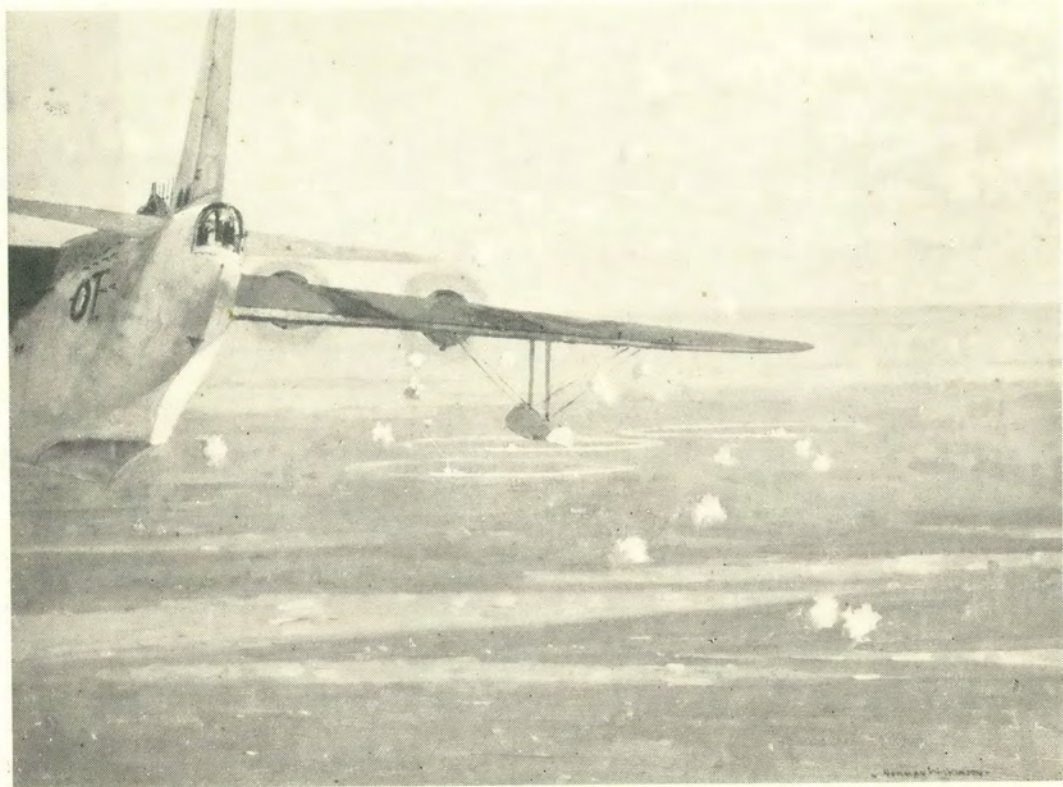
On March 22nd, 1942, while an important convoy was on its way to Malta, an attempt at interception was made by a number of Italian war vessels, among them the battleship *Littorio*. Admiral Vian, in command of the escorting cruisers, made an immediate attack on the enemy, using a heavy smokescreen to great tactical advantage. In the resulting action the enemy ships were driven off, suffering considerable casualties. The convoy got safely through to Malta with the loss of only a single merchantman.



LD 4395. SIX-INCH GUN CRUISERS



LD 4302. THE NIGHT ACTION, MATAPAN



LD 4297. SUNDERLAND ATTACKING A SUBMARINE PACK
IN THE BAY OF BISCAY

LD 4325. THE RAFT.

The courage of our merchant seamen is proverbial. At the mercy of the sea in sinking ships, torpedoed, bombed, machine-gunned, and cast away on rafts, these men have never faltered in their duty of keeping the life-line open.

LD 4326. RESCUE TUG.

The rescue tug service has done splendid work in salvaging damaged vessels. Many thousands of tons of invaluable shipping have been put back into service through its aid.

LD 4303. MOTOR TORPEDO BOATS.

M.T.B.s leaving a torpedoed enemy vessel after an attack on coastal shipping.

LD 4327. SWORDFISH OF THE FLEET
AIR ARM ATTACKING THE
Scharnhorst AND *Gneisenau*
IN THE CHANNEL.

This episode has been put on record in memory of the superb gallantry of the crews of the six Swordfish who in the face of terrific fire pressed home their attack with torpedoes. All six were shot down. There were only five survivors, of whom four were wounded. Among those lost was their gallant leader, Lieut.-Commander Esmonde. He was awarded a posthumous V.C.

LD 4328. THE *Jervis Bay*.

The long story of gallantry in the Navy has no finer example of heroism and self-sacrifice than that shown by Captain Fegan of the *Jervis Bay*.

An armed merchantman, she was the sole protection for a convoy of thirty-nine ships. Towards dusk the convoy was attacked by a heavily armed raider, probably a pocket battleship. The *Jervis Bay*, armed only with 6-in. guns and without armour, turned immediately towards the raider, at the same time ordering the convoy to disperse. When last seen she was heavily on fire and firing every gun that would bear, and so passed to her glorious end.

LD 4294. *Ohio* IN THE MALTA
CONVOY.

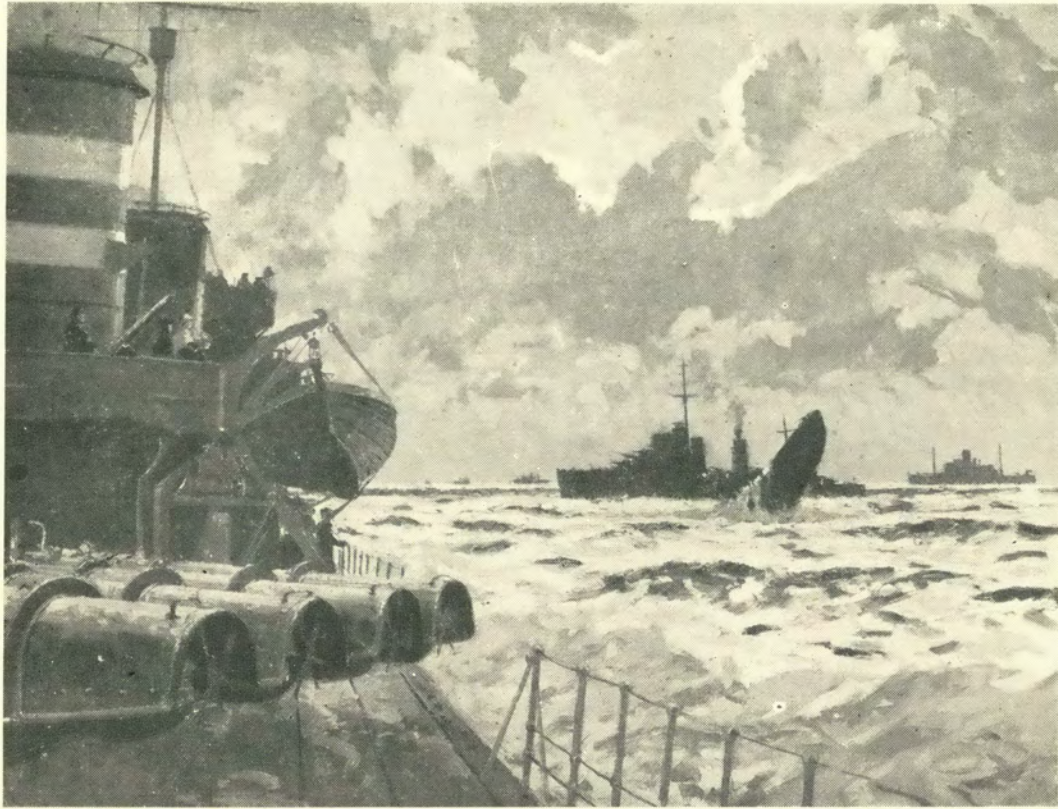
In August, 1942, an important convoy was dispatched to Malta with urgently needed stores. It was imperative that this convoy should get through if the island was to survive. The oil tanker *Ohio* carried the main oil supply, and it was upon this vessel that the enemy concentrated its attacks. Although heavily damaged by torpedo and bombing, she succeeded in reaching Malta with her precious cargo intact.

LD 4301. THE SECOND BATTLE OF
NARVIC.

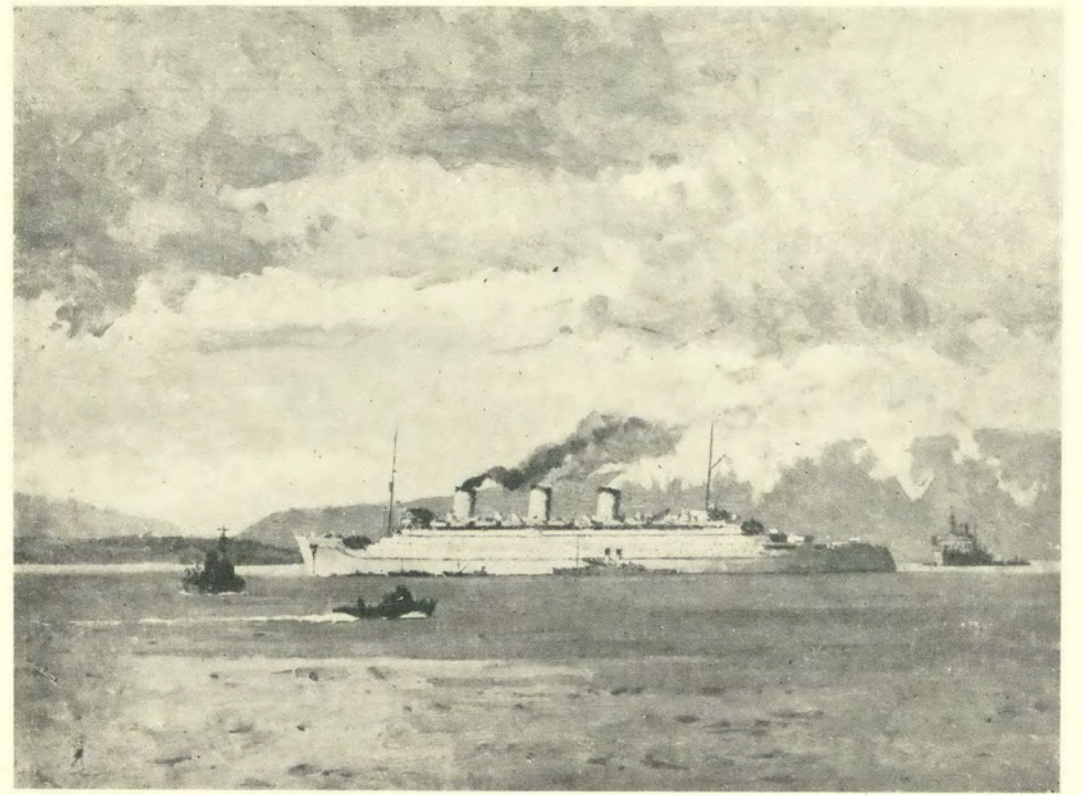
On April 13th, 1940, a Naval force under the command of Vice-Admiral Whitworth, consisting of H.M.S. *Warspite* and six destroyers, entered Ofot Fjord where a number of German destroyers were known to be harbouring. Seven large-type destroyers were engaged and put out of action.

LD 4329. THE END OF A FOCKE-WULF.

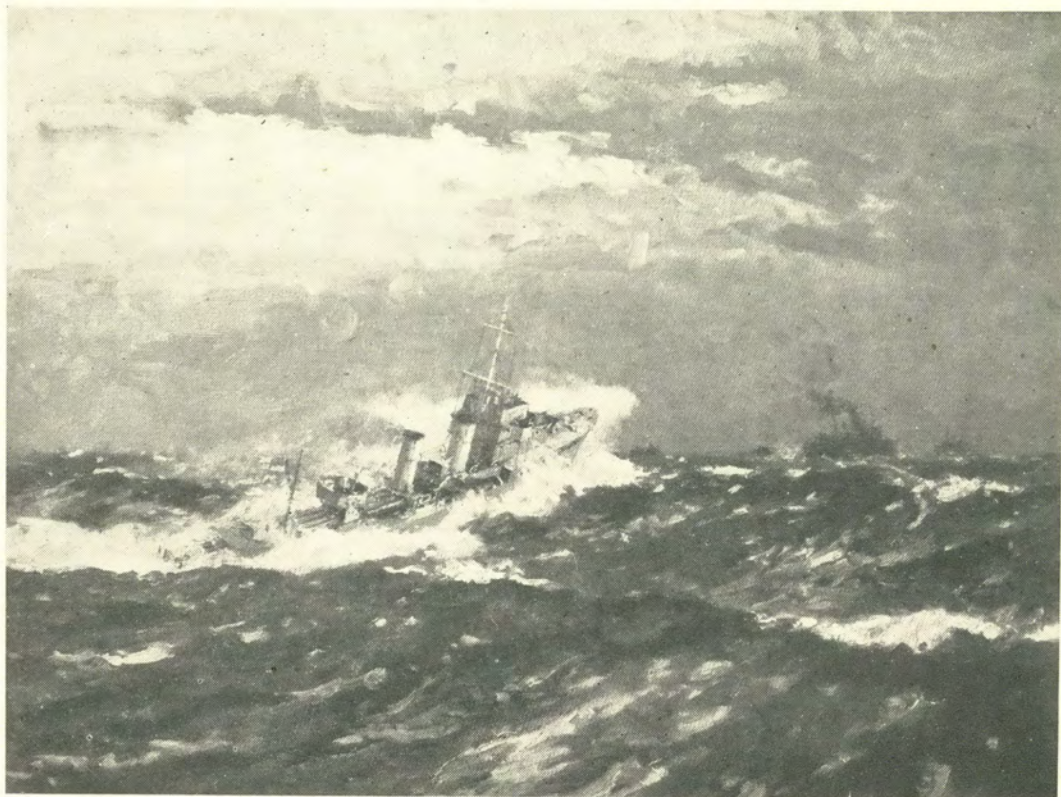
These aircraft have been extensively used by the Germans for long distance raids on Allied shipping in the Atlantic.



LD 4321. THE END OF A U-BOAT



LD 4336. *Queen Mary* RAISING STEAM



LD 4312. ATLANTIC CONVOY

LD 4302. THE NIGHT ACTION. MATAPAN.

On the night of March 28th, 1941, an Italian squadron was encountered by British war vessels under the command of Admiral Sir Andrew Cunningham. The resulting action was highly successful, a number of Italian cruisers being sunk without damage or casualty on the British side.

The Australian destroyer *Stuart* was on the screen of the battle fleet during this action and one of her observers described the action as "a dog fight on a pitch-black night in which collisions were narrowly averted and only a quick and snap judgment could distinguish friend from foe in the weird light from star shells and the glare of burning ships".

LD 4320. AIR BATTLE BETWEEN A SUNDERLAND FLYING-BOAT AND EIGHT JU.88s.

Coastal Command Sunderlands have had many successes in sinking U-boats in the Bay of Biscay. To counter this the enemy employed Ju.88s in large numbers in an endeavour to keep the Bay open for the passage of their submarines bound for the Atlantic convoy routes.

The battle shown was fought between a Sunderland flying-boat and eight Ju.88s. The Sunderland succeeded in shooting down three into the sea, three were damaged and the remainder fled.

LD 4305. CATALINA FLYING-BOAT SIGHTING THE *Bismarck*.

As soon as it was known that the *Bismarck* had broken out of her Norwegian base, bent on raiding Atlantic convoys, the Admiralty and Coastal Command concentrated on her de-

struction. She was shadowed by war vessels and aircraft, but in the thick weather prevailing succeeded in eluding her pursuers for a time. On May 26th she was sighted by a Catalina flying-boat of Coastal Command, with the result that she was brought to action and sunk on the following day.

(The story of her end is given more fully under the title "The End of the *Bismarck*".)

LD 4293. BEAUFIGHTERS ATTACKING AN ENEMY CONVOY.

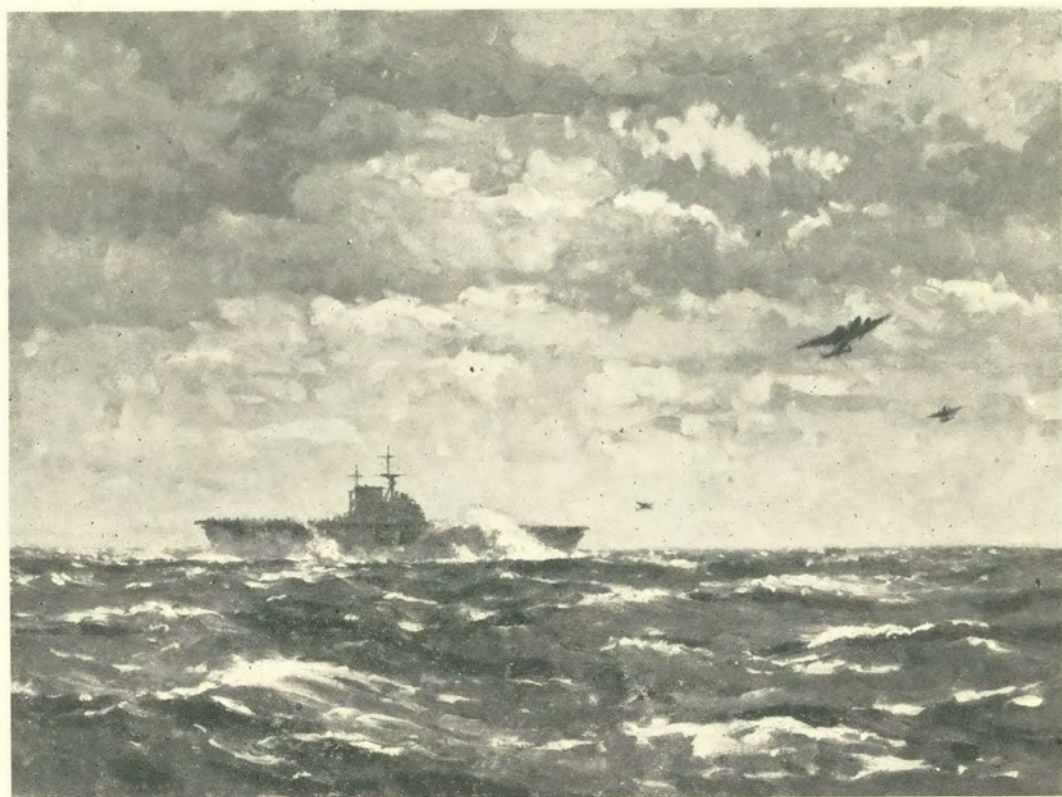
Coastal Command have played a large part in the disruption of enemy convoys off the Norwegian coast and in the narrow seas. The Germans are highly dependent on the transport of war materials by sea, and the constant and successful attacks on their convoys have seriously interfered with this traffic.

LD 4319. *Ohio* ENTERING MALTA HARBOUR.

Although badly damaged and deep in the water as the result of a torpedo hit amidships, and damage by bombs, the *Ohio* made Malta with her valuable cargo of oil. A wonderful tribute to the Navy, and to the gallant crew, in the face of heavy odds.

LD 4313. A LAME DUCK.

It sometimes happens that a vessel, through machinery defects, or from other causes, is forced to drop astern of the convoy. She then becomes a matter of considerable concern to the Commodore of the convoy. Enemy submarines are always on the lookout for stragglers.



LD 4304. MITCHELLS TAKING OFF FROM U.S. AIRCRAFT CARRIER *Hornet* TO BOMB TOKIO

LD 4312. ATLANTIC CONVOY.

No class of vessels has been engaged on more varied duties than the destroyer. In the early days of the war when escort ships were woefully short, it was largely on the destroyer that the duty fell of shepherding the convoys. At all seasons of the year, in every kind of weather, and with little rest in port, these ships kept to the sea

LD 4298. H.M.S. *Campbeltown* AT ST NAZAIRE.

Among many dramatic episodes the ramming of the lock gates at St Nazaire by the *Campbeltown* stands out as a feat of high courage and daring. Her bows filled with explosives, and steaming at full speed, she rammed the lock gates, destroying both of them and herself. The dry dock at St Nazaire was the only one on the French Atlantic seaboard capable of holding the German battleship *Tirpitz*.

LD 4330. H.M.S. *Cossack* AND THE PRISON SHIP *Altmark*.

The rescue of three hundred British merchant seamen from the German tanker *Altmark*, by H.M.S. *Cossack*, sent a thrill of delight throughout the Empire. The *Cossack*, commanded by Captain Vian, entered Josing Fjord at night, and in the face of considerable difficulties boarded the *Altmark*, rescued the prisoners and brought them back in triumph to Leith.

LD 4331. THE FRIGATE.

LD 4321. THE END OF A U-BOAT.

LD 4300. BEACHY HEAD. ATTACK ON A CONVOY.

LD 4332. MINESWEEPERS OFF THE COAST OF SCOTLAND.

LD 4314. DESTROYER SINKING A SUBMARINE.

LD 4308. A NORTHERN BASE.

LD 4317. CONVOY. AIR COVER.

LD 4334. H.M.S. *Malaya*.

LD 4335. DESTROYER PICKING UP SUBMARINE SURVIVORS.

While humanity to a beaten foe has always been a tradition of the sea among civilized nations, there is another side to the matter where submarines survivors are concerned. The Admiralty requires very positive proof before a claim for a sinking is allowed. The production of survivors is the most certain means of establishing such proof.

LD 4336. *Queen Mary* RAISING STEAM.

LD 4337. CONVOY ENTERING MURMANSK.

LD 4307. BARRACUDAS BOMBING THE *Tirpitz*.

The bombing of the *Tirpitz* in Alten Fjord was a brilliantly timed and highly successful operation. The great battleship had just left her net-protected anchorage and appeared to be about to leave the Fjord. The attack was made by forty-two Barracudas with fighter cover. Sixteen hits were obtained and subsequent photographs show severe damage. There would appear to be little likelihood of the vessel being of any further use.

(The picture is based very largely on the Admiralty photographs. These are so good that there appeared to be little gained by reconstructing the attack from another angle.)



LD 4299. A DESTROYER SMOKESCREEN

LD 4292. DESTROYERS DROPPING DEPTH CHARGES.

LD 4338. THE SOLE SURVIVOR.

LD 4339. JAPAN SIGNS HER OWN DEATH WARRANT. PEARL HARBOR.

LD 4309. SUNDERLAND FLYING-BOAT RESCUING THE CREW OF A LIBERATOR AND THOSE OF ANOTHER SUNDERLAND WHICH HAD CRASHED IN THE BAY OF BISCAY.

LD 4297. SUNDERLAND ATTACKING A SUBMARINE PACK IN THE BAY OF BISCAY.

The sinkings of German submarines in the Bay of Biscay when leaving their bases for the Atlantic convoy routes became so serious that the enemy adopted the policy of sending them in packs of three with orders to fight it out on the surface when attacked by our aircraft. By circling when aircraft were sighted they presented a somewhat more difficult problem, but the fact that they stayed on the surface gave our pilots a far better chance of destroying them.

LD 4304. MITCHELLS TAKING OFF FROM U.S. AIRCRAFT CARRIER *Hornet* TO BOMB TOKIO.

The first bombing of Tokio by U.S. aircraft on April 20th, 1942, was a most daring exploit. The story of the bombing was not released until a year later. How the bombers had reached Tokio had until then been the cause of much speculation.

Sixteen Mitchell bombers under

the personal leadership of General Doolittle took off from the aircraft carrier *Hornet* 800 miles from Tokio. It was originally intended to approach within 400 miles. Unfortunately a Japanese fishing vessel was sighted and although she was sunk it was feared she might have disclosed the *Hornet's* position by wireless. The arranged plan was that the bombers should land on specified landing fields in China, but owing to the extra distance flown all but one made forced landings or crashed.

LD 4318. THE PURSUIT OF THE *Graf Spee* BY H.M.S. *Ajax* AND *Achilles*.

On the morning of December 13th, 1939, the British cruisers *Ajax*, *Achilles* and *Exeter*, under the command of Commodore Harwood, intercepted the German pocket battleship *Graf Spee*, which had crossed the South Atlantic after sinking eight merchant ships. The weight of gunnery favoured the *Graf Spee*, but the brilliant tactics of the British force finally drove the German to take shelter in Montevideo at midnight. Four days later the *Graf Spee* was scuttled and set on fire by her own company. At the time the *Achilles* was one of the ships of the New Zealand Division of the Royal Navy; later she was to become H.M.N.Z.S. *Achilles* when the King approved the designation of the Royal New Zealand Navy in September, 1941.

LD 4395. SIX-INCH GUN CRUISERS.

These handsome vessels of the *Leander* class have a wonderful record. Their names: *Ajax*, *Achilles*, *Neptune*, and *Orion*. They have fought in most theatres of war from the *Graf Spee* action to the landing in Normandy.

THE NAVY'S PART IN THE
INVASION

The group of pictures of the invasion of Normandy are from sketches made by the artist who was present in the destroyer *Jervis* on D-Day and for some days subsequently.

LD 4340. June 6th. Landing craft going in to the beaches.

LD 4296. Destroyers bombarding shore batteries. Landing craft waiting to go in.

LD 4341. Air raid on the anchorage. Flak going up.

LD 4322. *Rodney* and *Warspite* firing on inshore targets.

LD 4295. *Rodney* steaming through the anchorage.

LD 4342. Vice-Admiral Vian's flagship *Scylla*.

LD 4394. Minesweepers sweeping ahead of destroyers. Early morning D-Day.

LD 4291. The road to Normandy.

LD 4396. THE LIFE-LINE.

The present war has again demonstrated in more dramatic fashion than ever before that the key to our national existence is sea power.

The submarine, on which the enemy based his hopes of cutting our life-line, brought many anxious moments. Had numbers of heavily armed surface vessels been added to this menace our channels of supply both of food and weapons from abroad would have been ceaselessly harassed and possibly closed.

Neither heroism, self-sacrifice, nor hard work could have saved us had this one factor of overwhelming sea power been absent.

