

R.N.A.

NEWS



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In this newsletter I have researched and written an article about HMS Speedy which was the adopted ship of the Wigston Council and the citizens of Wigston during Warship Week in World War two. It is a very interesting story and I am sure that you will enjoy reading it. The story of Speedy is concerned mainly with a convoy that was formed to take supplies to the beleaguered island of Malta GC under the name of "Operation Harpoon" which was only partly successful because of the terrible attacks from the Axis Air Force and the Italian Navy whilst it was en-route.

Welcome Shipmates to the June meeting of our branch. It is nice to see you all again.

There is not a lot of news for my column this month other than to tell you about an article that I am preparing for you to read in the July issue.

The main article in today's issue relates to "Operation Harpoon" which was an east bound supply convoy to Malta from Gibraltar but at the same, time there was a larger west bound supply convoy from Alexandria to Malta named "Operation Vigorous." The two simultaneous convoys were designed to supply Malta with life saving supplies. Read how this worked out next month.

David.

No social report this month.

Welfare Corner by S/M's Sheila & Roy.

Good morning Shipmates, not a great deal to report this month so we shall give you a verbal update during the meeting.

Don't get sunburned please "Cover up"

Diary Dates for July 2010.

4th Mo Potter, birthday.
 18th David Baker, birthday.
 22nd David Simpson, birthday. (Now OBE)

Have a nice day.

HMS SPEEDY

(J 17)



There were nine ships named HMS Speedy who served in the Royal Navy. The first one was launched in 1782 as a 14 gun 'Sloop of War.' Other ships bearing the name HMS Speedy were classed as a Gunboat, a Brig-Sloop, a Six Gun Cutter, a Torpedo Gunboat, an S Class Destroyer, a Halcyon Class Minesweeper and a Jetfoil.

In this article we shall read about the HMS Speedy which was a Halcyon class minesweeper launched in 1938. She was officially classed as a 'Fleet Minesweeping Sloop' and was built by William Hamilton & Co and J.S. White & Co at Port Glasgow. Speedy displaced 815 tons (1,370 tons burthen) her length was 245 feet, beam 33, feet & six inches, draught 9 feet, speed 16.5 to 17 knots, range 7,200 N- miles, compliment 80.

At the outbreak of World War Two Speedy was stationed at Scapa Flow in the Orkney Islands with the Home Fleet and sailed mainly in home and northern waters on minesweeping duties. In October 1941, she was engaged on escort duties with (PQ2) which was a convoy to Archangel in North Russia. Speedy was accompanied on the convoy by HMS Bramble, HMS Eclipse, HMS Gossamer, HMS Hussar, HMS Icarus, HMS Leda, HMS Norfolk, and HMS Seagull. The convoy arrived at Archangel without loss. Speedy was then based in Murmansk for some time and was engaged on minesweeping and anti U-boat patrol duties in North Russian waters.

On the 12th December 1941 whilst engaged on anti U-boat sweeps she and other ships were attacked by four German destroyers. Speedy was hit but managed to make good her escape in poor visibility. Later, she sailed back to Scapa Flow and arrived there in January 1942. There then followed repairs and a refit

On the 26th March 1942 she escorted another Russian convoy to Murmansk with ships loaded with freight for our Russian Allies (PQ14) but on the 12th April she was damaged by ice and returned to the UK for repairs. Following her repairs Speedy was to join yet another convoy to Murmansk but more important work for her was planned and her orders for sailing with the Russian convoy were cancelled. HMS Speedy was ordered to sail in a very important convoy to Malta.

OPERATION HARPOON.

"Operation Harpoon" was a very large convoy and its task was to carry vital supplies of food, oil, ammunition and other essential supplies to the beleaguered island of Malta in the Mediterranean. The composition of the convoy was as follows:

HMS Cairo (Light Cruiser AA) HMS Welshman (Mine layer) Destroyers, HMS Bedouin, HMS Marne, HMS Matchless, HMS Ithuriel, HMS Partridge.

Escort Destroyers, HMS Blankney, HMS Badsworth, HMS Middleton and the Polish ship Kujawiak.

Mine sweepers and escorts, HMS Hebe, HMS Speedy, HMS Rye and HMS Hythe.

Mine sweeping motor launches, ML 121, 134, 135, 168, 459, 462.

(3)

Merchant navy transport ships were: Burdwan, Chant, Tanimbar, Troilus, Orari, and the tanker Kentucky (She was owned by the Texas Co, brand new, and displaced 10,000 tons, she carried 13,000 of oil on this journey)

Battleship, HMS Malaya. Aircraft Carriers, HMS Eagle and HMS Argus.

Light Cruisers, HMS Kenya, HMS Liverpool and HMS Charydbis.

Destroyers, HMS Onslow, HMS Icarus, HMS Escapade, HMS Antelope, HMS Wishart, HMS Westcott, HMS Wrestler and HMS Vidette.

Fleet Tanker, Brown Ranger. Corvettes, HMS Coltsfoot and HMS Geranium.

The convoy "Harpoon" arrived safely at Gibraltar after sailing from the UK. It was then refuelled, reassembled and made ready for sailing on the 12th June to Malta. The Merchant Navy ships were carrying 43,000 tons of cargo and oil which was absolutely essential for the survival of the population and members of the Army, RAF and Royal Navy who were stationed on the island defending it from German and Italian forces. On the 12th June HMS Speedy joined the convoy

In the early hours of June 12th 1942 the convoy departed from Gibraltar and set sail in an easterly direction towards Malta. It is more than probable that the German and Italian Air force and Navy had already been made aware of the convoy's presence and destination whilst it was in Gibraltar, by Axis spies and agents providing information who were operating in Spain which meant that 'Harpoon' would soon be under attack by enemy air and sea forces.

On the first day out of Gibraltar (June 13th) no enemy activity was seen by the convoy and each ship continued to steer a zig zag course to try to foil any U-boats lurking in the area. It must have seemed like 'The lull before the storm' to many of the ships crews?

At first light on the 14th June, there was a lot of enemy aerial activity visible which was possibly, reconnaissance aircraft surveying the convoy and reporting back to their bases.

About 10.30, enemy bombers attacked the convoy mainly with 'Stuka' dive bombers which screamed down on individual ships and at the last minute pulled out of their dive and released their bomb load. At this time the whole convoy started 'ack-ack' firing and the sky was clouded with brown and black smoke from the shell bursts however, this did little to deter the enemy pilots who were determined to sink as many ships as possible because, if this convoy and others that followed, were successful in reaching Malta, then the supply of arms, ammunition and petrol to Field Marshal Rommel and the 'Afrika Korps' who were trying to defeat the British army and her Allies in North Africa would be stopped and the Germans would be defeated (This is exactly what did happen)

Also at this time, a large formation of torpedo bombers was seen forming up to attack the convoy. The situation was serious and unfortunately the freighter 'Tanimbar' and HMS Liverpool were both struck. Tanimbar burst into flames and sank but HMS Liverpool was able to return to Gibraltar under her own steam although damaged.

During the rest of the day and in the evening high level and dive bombing attacks by JU 88's continued concentrating their attacks on the carriers HMS Argus, HMS Eagle and the tanker Kentucky. The whole day had been one of hard fighting but there was no rest for the crews because they had to make their ships ready for action the next day. About 22.00 the heavy ships withdrew from the convoy and sailed back to Gibraltar.

During the early hours of the 15th June Cruisers and Destroyers of the Italian navy found the convoy and started to attack it. About 06.30, enemy planes returned to bomb, torpedo and shoot at the convoy. As the battle to get the convoy to Malta continued, HMS Cairo was hit; HMS Partridge was hit and stopped. HMS Bedouin's superstructure was almost shot away and she was also stopped on fire. Relays of German and Italian bombers and several Italian Cruisers continued to attack the Tanker Kentucky and she was on fire.

During the early afternoon the SS Chant was hit by three bombs on her deck and caught fire – she quickly sank. Orders were signalled that the crews of the tanker Kentucky and the SS Burdwan were to be taken off and their ships to be sunk by gunfire. Later the stopped HMS Bedouin was torpedoed and she rolled over and sank.

HMS Cairo and the Minesweeper HMS Hebe received hits from Italian gunfire as they protected the remaining ships of the convoy which unfortunately, entered a minefield off Malta later in the evening. As a result, HMS Badsworth, HMS Matchless and the freighter SS Orari hit mines and were damaged and the Polish Destroyer Kujawiak also hit a mine and sank. Only the freighters Orari and Troilus reached the beleaguered island fortress and were able to unload their cargos which were very welcome but quite insufficient. Perhaps the biggest loss was that of the Tanker Kentucky which was carrying many tons of high octane fuel for the RAF fighter planes which were based on the Island for defence and attack.

For more than twelve months Speedy remained at Malta doing important sweeping and escort duties which included assisting the American Tanker “Ohio” into Malta harbour after being attacked with the convoy “Pedestal.” After the Allied invasion of North Africa (Operation Torch) in November 1942 she assisted in sweeping the supply routes for that operation.

On the 15th May 1943 whilst engaged in sweeping the Malta North-Eastern Channel, Speedy struck a mine four miles off St Elmo Light and had to be towed into Malta harbour with several seriously injured crewmen, two fatalities and two men missing.

After temporary repairs, she returned to England and spent a considerable period in dockyard hands. In the summer of 1944 Speedy was attached to the First Minesweeping Flotilla out of Portsmouth sweeping supply channels to France.

After the European War had ended she worked in the North Sea on mine clearance operations and was paid off in June 1946 and sold to the Merchant Service in November. Speedy was renamed “Speedon” and scrapped in Aden in 1947.

HMS SPEEDY AND WIGSTON.

Wigston council adopted the Minesweeper HMS Speedy during World War II and raised cash in response to National Warship Week, which ran from March 26th to 28th, 1942. “Without doubt, the kind and generous people of Wigston at that time contributed freely to being a part of this famous little ship and full credit is due to them that she was able to continue to fight in the war and help in the defeat of Nazi tyranny.”

The late Lieutenant Peter Shankland RNVR MBE, was a Lieutenant on HMS Speedy during World War 2 and saw a lot of action in her including ‘Operation Harpoon.’ Peter was a visitor to the Wigston Royal Naval Association and made a number of close friendships during his visits. He was a personal friend of the late Shipmate Cliff Lea and his wife Shipmate Irene whom he donated a copy of his Autobiography to and which is available for all branch members to read.

So ends a brief description of HMS Speedy. The little ship that did so much to help bring about victory for our country and our Allies, against Germany and her supporters in World War two. It was a long hard road but well worth the effort.



