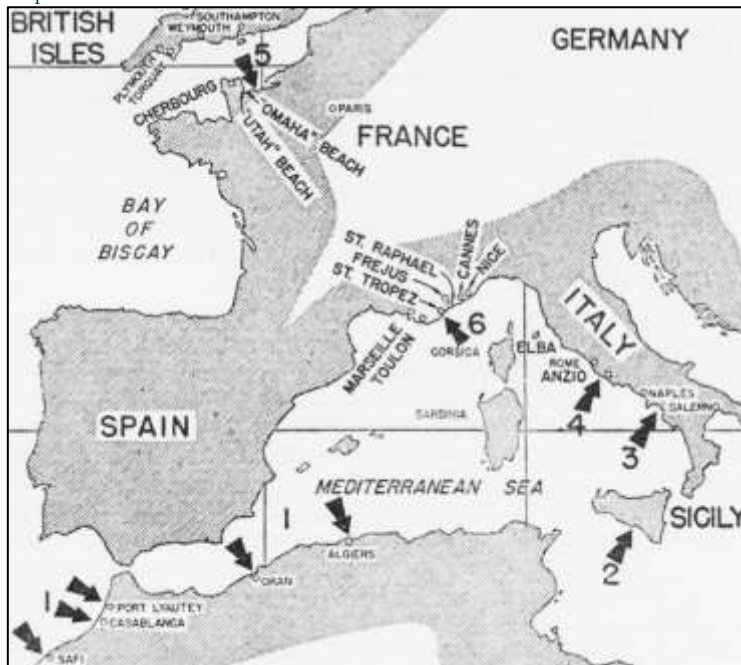


Preface

We make this wide encircling movement in the Mediterranean, having for its primary object the recovery of the command of that vital sea, but also having for its object the exposure of the underbelly of the Axis, especially Italy, to heavy attack.

—British Prime Minister Winston Churchill, in a speech in the House of Commons on 11 November 1942, following the invasion of French North Africa by British and American military forces.

Map Preface-1



Naval Operations in the North African, Mediterranean and European Theatres
<https://www.ibiblio.org/hyperwar/USN/USNatWar/img/USN-King-p83.jpg>

- | | |
|---|---|
| 1. North African Landings 8 - 11 Nov 42 | 4. Anzio Landings 22 Jan 44 |
| 2. Sicilian Landings 10 Jul - 17 Aug 43 | 5. Invasion of Normandy 6 Jun 44 |
| 3. Italian Landings 9 Sep - 1 Oct 43 | 6. Invasion of Southern France
15 Aug 44 |

ODE TO “SMALL BOY” SAILORS

An all-High Navy would be so expensive that it would not have enough ships to control the seas. An all-Low Navy would not have the capability to meet certain kinds of threats or perform certain kinds of missions. In order to have both enough ships and good enough ships there had to be a mix of High and Low.

—Adm. Elmo Zumwalt Jr., USN, in his memoirs *On Watch*. As Chief of Navy Operations (1 July 1970-1 July 1974), he was the architect of the High-Low Navy concept. Zumwalt recognized that no country, not even the USA could build such vessels “only of exquisite cost and large size for long.”¹

Rolling – since this report is written at sea it is difficult to describe with reticence the nauseating movement of these vessels in the open sea....

The violent “lurching” is the principal controlling factor in efficiency. As gun platforms these ships are satisfactory only under the most favorable weather....

Depth charge reloading is possible in a moderate heavy sea pounding the ship.... Under average conditions however it must be an even bet whether the throwers lob their charges vertically upwards and on to the quarter deck or immediately alongside propellers....

... these ships present no problem at all as to damage control. There is none.

—Unhappy commanding officer of an American-built destroyer escort transferred to the Royal Navy under Lend-Lease.²

Construction of warships, and their subsequent fitting out, armament, manning, operation, and maintenance is expensive. For maritime nations, possession of a fleet of highly capable warships is desirable, particularly in war. Although the common perception may be that standard fleet destroyers are the smallest warships included in the fleets of many navies, operational and economic factors dictate otherwise. Fiscal realities—and recognition that sometimes, having greater numbers of hulls on the ocean (including some lower-cost ships) is more desirable than fewer “topline warships”—result in the acquisition of warships of lesser capabilities than fleet destroyers.

These “small boys” in World War II, in general order from largest to smallest, might be: frigates, USN destroyer escorts or RN escort destroyers, corvettes, and sloops or smaller anti-submarine vessels such as sub-chasers. Smallest of the anti-submarine vessels were those of the South African Naval Force. Two of these ex-whalers sent to the Med to aid the Royal Navy, despatched an Italian submarine.

When war broke out with Germany in 1939, Adm. Andrew B. Cunningham, RN, was Commander-in-Chief of the Mediterranean Fleet. In WWII, as in other wars dating back to ancient times, the Mediterranean would be the setting for an epic struggle, particularly after Italy entered the war on the side of Germany on 10 June 1940, followed twelve days later by the surrender of France.

From June 1940 until November 1942, when America entered the war in Europe, the Royal Navy fought mostly alone against Italian naval surface forces, and Italian and German air forces and their submarines in what Italian dictator Benito Mussolini called *Mare Nostrum* (our sea), a Roman name for the Mediterranean. The phrase “mostly alone” is used here in recognition that the Royal Navy was aided by small naval forces from Australia and South Africa, as well as some Free French ships, and those of other Allied nations including Greece and Poland.³

The Greco-Italian War began on 28 October 1940, when Italian dictator Benito Mussolini launched an invasion of the Albanian-Greek borders. This action precipitated Greece’s joining the war on the side of the Allies. The earlier torpedoing of the Greek cruiser *Elli* on 15 August 1940, by the Italian submarine *Delfino* , was the first act of World War II against Greece.

The preceding year, five Polish naval units (three destroyers and two submarines) had made their way to Britain when Germany invaded Poland in September 1939. Two other vessels which had been outside the Baltic joined them. During the war, the Royal Navy loaned an additional ten ships to the Poles, as well as some smaller craft. Chapter 11 is devoted to the Polish Navy, whose exploits in World War II are little known to most naval history enthusiasts.

THE “SCRAP IRON FLOTILLA”

Surface vessels of war, the standard displacement of which is greater than 600 tons (610 metric tons) and does not exceed 1,850 tons (1,880 metric tons), and with a gun not above 5.1 inch (130 mm) calibre. Vessels that are designed for a speed of less than 30 knots, do not carry torpedoes, and do not mount more than four guns above 3 inch (76 mm) calibre are not considered to be destroyers.

—Destroyers as defined in the 1930 London Treaty.⁴

The five destroyers of the Royal Australian Navy (RAN) Destroyer Flotilla—HMAS *Stuart*, *Vampire*, *Vendetta*, *Voyager*, and *Waterhen*—which arrived in the Mediterranean as a new year broke in 1940, met the 1930 London Treaty criteria. More importantly, despite being elderly World War I vintage ships, laid down in British yards in 1916-1917, they gained much fame in fleet actions against the Italian Navy, and for “Tobruk Ferry Service” runs. The latter operations required braving enemy air attacks, sea mines, and submarines, while escorting ship convoys from Alexandria or Mersa Matruh, Egypt, to Tobruk, Libya—carrying reinforcements and desperately needed supplies to the besieged Australian garrison isolated there. Because of their age and obsolete armaments, they became known as the “Scrap Iron Flotilla,” for, if the war had not intervened, that is what they would have become. As is later elaborated, this moniker was awarded them by their German opponents.

Photo Preface-1



Crew of HMAS *Voyager* at Stockbridge, England, in 1933. They were there to bring *Voyager*, one of the members of the “Scrap Iron Flotilla” lent to the Royal Australian Navy, back to Australia. The destroyers arrived at Sydney, in December 1933. Australian War Memorial photograph P01476.001

Photo Preface-2



HMAS *Stuart*, of 1,530 tons displacement, was armed with five 4.7-inch guns and smaller anti-aircraft guns, six 21-inch torpedo tubes, and depth charges, and could make a top speed of 36 knots.
Australian War Memorial 066092

Map Preface-2



Eastern Mediterranean and surrounding areas

Photo Preface-3



Drawing by Frank Norton of the British minelayer HMS *Latona* on passage to Tobruk, with one of the destroyers in the convoy, HMAS *Nizam*, shown crossing her bow, 17 October 1941. *Latona* was employed during the siege of Tobruk for the transport of men and stores from Alexandria to Tobruk. The stores carried on this particular trip were mainly winter clothing, packed in bales and stowed along the upper deck and in mine storage. Men in battledress and life belts sleep, in preparation for work unloading during the night, following arrival. Eight days later, HMS *Latona* was attacked on a similar run, on 25 October, by a German Junkers Ju87 dive bomber, and sank. Australian War Memorial photograph ART21740

Photo Preface-4



German Ju87 Stuka dive bomber at Acroma, Libya, December 1941. Australian War Memorial photograph 022183

Capt. Hector M. L. Waller, RAN, the commander of the Mediterranean unit comprising the Australian destroyer flotilla augmented by some Royal Navy destroyers, was, in the words of Adm. Sir Andrew Cunningham (Commander-in-Chief, Mediterranean Fleet), “one of the greatest Captains who ever sailed the seas.” Sadly, Waller died later in the war in the Battle of Sunda Strait in the Dutch East Indies, in which his ship, HMAS *Perth* (D29), together with USS *Houston* (CA-30) fought bravely and defiantly against overwhelming odds before both cruisers were sunk by superior Japanese naval forces.

Photo Preface-5



Lt. Comdr. Rodney Rhoades, DSC RAN (left), commanding officer of the destroyer HMAS *Vendetta*, and Capt. Hector M. L. Waller, DSO RAN (right), Flotilla commander, in conversation on the open bridge of a destroyer.
Australian War Memorial photograph 005002/12

The members of the “Scrap Iron Flotilla”—HMAS *Stuart*, *Vampire*, *Vendetta*, *Voyager*, and *Waterhen*—as well as four other RAN ships sent to the Mediterranean, earned Battle Honours LIBYA for working dangerous inshore waters between Port Said and Benghazi on the North African coast. The other four RAN ships were the destroyers HMAS *Napier* and *Nizam*, and sloops *Parramatta* and *Yarra*. (Some of these ships also earned battle honours for other duty or specific actions in the Mediterranean.)

Nazi Propaganda Minister Joseph Goebbels termed Australia’s first ships sent to the Mediterranean, “scrap iron.” He welcomed them to the Med in that bleak, cold December of 1939 as a “consignment of

junk” and “Australia’s Scrap Iron Flotilla,” ridiculing their fighting power, and scoffing at their age and infirmities. In later testament of the service of the five elderly destroyers, Admiral Cunningham, in a message read in Australia’s House of Representatives, stated:

Nobody will appreciate the “scrap” better than the officers and men of the Australian destroyers.⁵

SOUTH AFRICAN SEAWARD DEFENCE FORCE

If you constantly hide yourself in spray, we shall come and depth charge you.

—A tease signaled from a larger Royal Navy vessel to HMSAS *Southern Sea*, one of a group of South African whaling vessels converted for naval use, and despatched to the Mediterranean. These small ships, possessing very little freeboard, were regularly “under water” in rough weather.⁶

Photo Preface-6



HMSAS *Southern Isles*, one of the four South African Southern-class anti-submarine vessels (converted Antarctic whalers) assigned to the Tobruk Ferry Service after joining the Mediterranean Fleet in January 1941. (Du Toit Collection)

South Africa was the second Commonwealth country to send Navy ships to the Mediterranean to assist the Royal Navy. They were anti-submarine vessels, former whale chasers called the “Southern,” and included HMSAS *Southern Floe*, *Southern Isles*, *Southern Maid*, and *Southern Sea*. After the outbreak of war, retired Royal Navy admiral Guy Waterhouse Halifax, residing in South Africa, formed a Sea Defence Force (SDF). When constituted, on 15 January 1940, it consisted of fifteen vessels, a few supporting shore establishments, and a total of 432 (74 officers) personnel.⁷

Halifax, upon receipt of a message from the British Admiralty that Admiral Cunningham was in urgent need of anti-submarine patrol vessels, suggested to the South African government that it deploy the SDF’s four newest and largest vessels. What he had in mind were four modern Antarctic whalers under conversion, which would soon be ready for commissioning. As later mentioned, South Africa also contributed minesweepers to the operation.⁸

Halifax’s proposal was duly accepted and subsequent to their commissioning the whalers were despatched through the Suez Canal to Alexandria. Following their arrival there, on 11 January 1941, the “Southern” were assigned to the “Tobruk Ferry Service.” This duty involved helping to sustain “The Rats of Tobruk,” soldiers of the Australian-led Allied garrison holding the Libyan port of Tobruk, by protecting supply convoys carrying supplies and reinforcement troops. The garrison in Tobruk was besieged by the Afrika Corps (a German-Italian army commanded by General Erwin Rommel). This siege began on 11 April 1941, and lasted until 10 December 1941.⁹

Photo Preface-7



Leaflets dropped by enemy aircraft over the Australian 9th Division area at Tobruk. Australian War Memorial

British traitor William Joyce (nicknamed Lord Haw-Haw), the most notorious broadcaster of Nazi propaganda during World War II, opened his weekly radio program with the words “Germany calling, Germany calling” in an upper-class English accent. During the siege of 1941, Joyce scoffed that the men at Tobruk were caught like “rats in a trap.” The Australian troops embraced the term as a badge of honour, and took great pride in calling themselves the “Rats of Tobruk.”¹⁰

While destroyers of the RAN “Scrap Iron Flotilla,” and many units of the Royal Navy assigned “ferry” duties, also took part in fleet actions, the “Southerns”—being smaller and slower than every other type of warship, and only of modest armament—restricted themselves to convoy escort or patrol duties.

A welcome interlude to escorting merchant vessels even slower than themselves came on 11 July 1942. Presented opportunity to hunt an enemy submarine, the converted whalers acquitted themselves well. In a laudable action, HMSAS *Southern Maid* and *Protea* (a replacement for *Southern Floe*, which had been sunk, believed by a mine) destroyed the Italian submarine *Ondina* with depth charges and naval gunfire from their 4-inch mounts and Oerlikon anti-aircraft guns. (See Chapter 8.)

South Africa also sent eight minesweepers and a salvage vessel (HMSAS *Gamtoos*) to the Mediterranean. The minesweepers were inferior to the “Southerns.” These small vessels were uncomfortable, particularly in the often “choppy Med” and, being top heavy with minesweeping gear, carried only light armament. Nonetheless, they became “maids of all duties,” and were soon in action. During the war, *Parktown* was lost to German E-boat (motor torpedo boat) attack, and *Bever* and *Treern* to mines.¹¹

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF, MEDITERRANEAN FLEET

The most important Allied naval commander in the Mediterranean during the war was Admiral Sir. Andrew Browne Cunningham, RN. He was the Commander-in-Chief of the Mediterranean Fleet when war broke out in September 1939, and twice served as the fleet commander firstly from June 1939 through March 1942, and secondly from 20 February 1943 to 15 October 1943. Cunningham was relieved by Adm. Sir Henry H. Harwood, RN, in spring 1942, in order that he might spend time in Washington, D.C., as the Royal Navy’s representative to the Anglo-American Combined Chiefs of Staff Committee. Following this duty, Cunningham returned to combat command as naval commander of the Allied expeditionary force in the Mediterranean.¹²

Photo Preface-8



Allied war leaders on 24 June 1943 in North Africa. Left to right: Air Chief Marshal Sir Arthur Tedder (commander, Mediterranean Air Command), Admiral of the Fleet, Sir Andrew Cunningham (Commander-in-Chief, Mediterranean Fleet), General Dwight Eisenhower (Commander-in-Chief, Allied Expeditionary Force) and General Sir Harold R. L. G. Alexander (Deputy Commander-in-Chief, Allied Expeditionary Force). Australian War Memorial photograph MED0006

The British Chiefs of Staff, and the United States Chiefs of Staff and their respective representatives, working together, constituted the Combined Chiefs of Staff. Their headquarters was in Washington, D.C., where the day-to-day problems of the war were under continuous review. Representatives of other Allied nations and dominions attended these meetings from time to time.¹³

Serving as U.S. Army General Dwight D. Eisenhower's naval deputy, Cunningham commanded the large fleet that covered the Anglo-American landings in North Africa (Operation TORCH, November 1942) and the naval forces used in the joint Anglo-American amphibious invasions of Sicily (July 1943) and Italy (September 1943).¹⁴

Commander-in-Chief Mediterranean Fleet

Adm. Sir Andrew B. Cunningham, RN

(6 June 1939 – March 1942)

Adm. Sir Henry H. Harwood, RN

(22 April 1942 – February 1943)

Adm. of the Fleet Sir Andrew B. Cunningham, RN

(20 February 1943 – 15 October 1943)

Adm. Sir John H. D. Cunningham, RN

(15 October 1943 – February 1946)¹⁵

CHANGES TO MEDITERRANEAN FLEET COMMAND

In the first half of 1943 the Mediterranean Fleet Command was split into a command of ships, and a command of ports and naval bases. The two commands and their assigned units were as follows:

Commander-in-Chief, Mediterranean Fleet

- 15th Cruiser Squadron
- Commander, Destroyers

Commander-in-Chief, Levant (renamed Commander-in-Chief, Eastern Mediterranean in late December 1943)

- Alexandria, Mersa Matruh, and Port Said in Egypt
- Haifa, British Mandate of Palestine (today part of Israel)
- Bizerta, Tunisia
- Tripoli and Benghazi in Libya
- Bone, Bougie, and Philippeville in Algeria
- Malta, British Crown Colony
- Aden, British Crown Colony (today part of Yemen)¹⁶

Following the death of the First Sea Lord, Admiral of the Fleet Sir Dudley Pound, Andrew Cunningham was appointed to the post on 21 October 1943. Returning to London, Cunningham served as First Sea Lord and Chief of Naval Staff, the highest post in the Royal Navy and one in which he reported directly to Prime Minister Winston Churchill through the Chiefs of Staff Committee. He was responsible for overall strategic direction of the navy for the remainder of the war, and continued to serve as First Sea Lord until his retirement in May 1946.¹⁷

FALL OF TOBRUK TO ROMMEL'S AFRIKA KORPS

The Allied garrison at Tobruk fell on 21 June 1942, after and despite the heroic defence conducted the year before by the Rats, when Maj. Gen. Hendrik Balzazar Klopper, commander of the South African 2nd Infantry Division, surrendered to Lt. Gen. Erwin Rommel and his Afrika Korps. It was sad news to the Australian 9th Division, whose last unit (the 2/13th Battalion) had been relieved in December 1941 when the siege was lifted. These troops had then joined their division ("The Rats of Tobruk"), which had preceded them to Syria to rest and re-equip, and were still there when they learned of the surrender of Tobruk.¹⁸

Rommel's continuous engagement with the British Eighth Army in battles around Tobruk had finally forced its retreat into Egypt. With Libya effectively devoid of British troops, the only Allied troops remaining there were the South African Division, which included the Eleventh Indian Brigade. Confronted by Rommel's overwhelming artillery, dive-bombers, and panzer forces, Klopper, facing annihilation, ordered his officers to surrender early on the morning of the 21st.¹⁹

UNITED STATES ENTERS THE WAR IN AFRICA

In order to forestall an invasion of Africa by Germany and Italy, which, if successful, would constitute a direct threat to America across the comparatively narrow sea from western Africa, a powerful American force equipped with adequate weapons of modern warfare and under American command is today landing on the Mediterranean and Atlantic coasts of the French colonies in Africa.

The landing of this American army is being assisted by the British Navy and Air Force, and it will in the immediate future be reinforced by a considerable number of divisions of the British Army.

This combined Allied force, under American command, in conjunction with the British campaign in Egypt, is designed to prevent an occupation by the Axis armies of any part of northern or western Africa and to deny to the aggressor nations a starting point from which to launch an attack against the Atlantic coast of the Americas.

In addition, it provides an effective second front assistance to our heroic allies in Russia.

—With these words, President Franklin D. Roosevelt announced the landing of American troops on African soil on Sunday, 8 November 1942.²⁰

Following a meeting between the Russian Minister of Foreign Affairs and Franklin D. Roosevelt in Washington, D.C. in June 1942, a press release was issued stating that the American president agreed on the “urgent task of creating a second front” that year. Inaction by the Allies in Europe had enabled Germany to concentrate her army on the eastern front, and it was questionable whether Russia could hold out unless something was done quickly to divert German forces elsewhere, via an operation in Europe or Africa. On the heels of this announcement came news of the fall of Tobruk, as mentioned earlier, with the advance of German General Erwin Rommel’s panzer division into Egypt. It was a key port city on Libya’s eastern Mediterranean coast, near the border with Egypt.²¹

Rommel, known as the Desert Fox because of his cunning tactics, was poised to take Alexandria, gaining control of the Suez Canal, and pushing the British out of Egypt. The Allies already threatened with the defeat of Russia were thus facing the cutting of the vital Suez Canal lifeline. Occupation of Morocco and Algeria by Allied forces, followed by movement into Tunisia would help preserve this sea route and provide bases for safeguarding Mediterranean convoys. Otherwise, the route to the Middle East would have to be the dramatically longer one around the Cape of Good Hope.²²

Map Preface-3



As part of Operation TORCH, assault troops of the U.S. Western Task Force landed on the west coast of French Morocco, on 8 November 1942.

The United States was to have responsibility for the military and naval operations on the Atlantic coast of Morocco. Oran and Algiers, cities on the Mediterranean on the northern coast of Algeria, were to be captured by two joint British and American forces. For the joint landings, the British were to supply all the naval service except for a few transports while the landing forces were to be partly American and partly British. Allied occupation of French North Africa was to be achieved through simultaneous assaults by three attacking forces against Casablanca, Oran, and Algiers. Lt. Gen. Dwight D. Eisenhower was given command over all the forces, with the exception that British naval units, permanently assigned to the Mediterranean, would remain under the control of the British Admiralty.²³

Task Force 34 (Amphibious Forces, U.S. Atlantic Fleet) under Rear Adm. Henry Kent Hewitt, USN, was the naval component of the Moroccan expedition. This force was later renamed U.S. Naval Forces, Northwest Africa Waters and, on 15 March 1943, was designated the United States Eighth Fleet. Hewitt was promoted to vice admiral following the invasion of North Africa, and later to admiral. From March 1943-April 1945, he was the top U. S. Naval Officer in the Mediterranean as commander of that fleet.

Photo Preface-9



Admiral Henry K. Hewitt, USN, with his mother, Mary Kent Hewitt, upon his return to America from the Mediterranean in April of 1945. Naval History and Heritage Command photograph #NH 49153

CANADIAN CORVETTES SENT TO MEDITERRANEAN

The term corvette is derived from the French word for “sloop,” a name suggested by Winston Churchill, who while filling the role of First Lord of the Admiralty remembered such a ship from the days of fighting sail. Originally, vessels in the class were named after types of flowers, such as HMS Gladiolus and HMS Tulip. The corvettes’ odd naming convention also retained an element of British cheekiness: It was thought “that one of Hitler’s sea wolves (U-boats) [having] been destroyed by a vessel named for a flower” would be a public relations victory in Britain and an embarrassment to the Nazis.

—From the article, “The Flower-Class Corvette – Nine Facts About the Tiny Warship That Played a Huge Role in WW2.”²⁴

Flowers don’t knit mittens.

—Admiral Percy Walker Nelles, Chief of Canada’s Naval Staff from 1934 to 1944, remarking on why the RCN named its corvettes after Canadian communities, instead of flowers, as was the the British practice. Nelles was alluding to development of community spirit aboard a ship resulting from naming it after the community of its members.²⁵

Photo Preface-10



Flower-class corvette HMCS *Riviere du Loup* (K357), 1944.
National Archives photograph 80-G-289820

In support of Operation TORCH, the invasion of North Africa, sixteen RCN and one RN corvette in Royal Canadian service were loaned to the Royal Navy, for the escort of convoys in the Mediterranean. With the stated exception, these ships were from amongst the 122 corvettes of the Royal Canadian Navy built in Canada, which although originally designed for coastal escort duties, repeatedly crossed and re-crossed the ocean. Most famous for their heroic work in the “U-boat wolfpack” war in the North Atlantic while shepherding their charges, the small ships sought out enemy submarines, and attacked them. In carrying out escort duties, the RCN corvettes collectively gained the moniker, “The Sheepdog Navy.”²⁶

The 205-foot corvette, by warship standards, was not very large, or very sophisticated, and could only make a top speed of 16 knots. However, while this speed may not have been great, it was faster than a submerged submarine. Based on the design of a whale catcher, the corvettes could turn inside the radius of larger ships, and thus easily chase U-boats and Italian submarines.²⁷

A typical corvette ship’s company consisted of about 85 personnel:

- A lieutenant commander RCN or RCNR commanding officer
- A lieutenant RCNR executive officer
- Four sub lieutenants RCNVR
- Two chief petty officers
- Eight petty officers
- Two cooks
- Two signalmen
- Three telegraphists (radiomen)
- One supply assistant
- One sick bay attendant
- Sixty leading, able & ordinary seamen and engine room stokers²⁸

The early built Canadian corvettes were fitted with a WWI vintage 4-inch gun on the bow, which had a range of only about 6 miles. With only visual sighting of the gun (no radar control), even at that modest distance, it was next to impossible to hit a small moving target from the deck of this rolling, yawing ship. However, gunfire could force an enemy submarine to submerge, requiring securing of diesel propulsion engines, and operating at a much slower speed on battery power.²⁹

The first corvettes were also fitted with WWI Lewis .303 machine guns (the same calibre as a hunting rifle). These guns were ineffective against targets even at close range, particularly the heavy steel hull of a

submarine. They were later replaced by 20mm Oerlikon machine guns, with more than twice the calibre, and greater muzzle velocity, accuracy, and impact/penetration for defence against aircraft and for attacking submarines at close range on the surface.³⁰

The ships also gained a Mk VIII quick firing 2-pounder weapon. Called a “Pom Pom” in reference to the sound the original models made when fired, it was located on the afterdeck of the ship in a circular gun turret or a tub (which sailors called the Band Box). The primary purpose of this manually-operated, rapid-fire gun was as an anti-aircraft weapon. It had a high angle of fire and could rotate 360 degrees, but could also cause considerable damage to submarines on the surface from its 40mm-calibre ammunition.³¹

Corvettes were also armed with four depth charge throwers mounted on the upper deck in pairs on both sides at the “waist” of the ship. Depth charges could be dropped from traps in the stern as well as lobbed by the throwers at the waist. In 1943, Hedgehog launchers came into service, which could fire twenty-four mortar type bombs ahead of the attacking corvette.³²

The ships’ Asdic (sonar) in the early years of the war was a 1920 vintage type 123A, and those with radar had the newly-designed SW1C A Scan, which proved to be unreliable. However, even given the shortcomings of this equipment, the Asdic and radar operators became adept at interpreting what they were hearing and seeing. When they acquired a contact, they guided the captain in his attack.³³

As corvettes were refitted with more sophisticated weapons and equipment (with priority given to those deployed to the Mediterranean, where the air threat was greater than in the Atlantic), ship manning was increased to about 100 personnel.³⁴

IMPORTANCE OF GIBRALTAR

From the late 19th century onward, with the Suez Canal under British control, and Gibraltar developed as a Royal Navy base, the Med filled with colonial and oil-fuel trade, making the Strait of Gibraltar the world’s busiest oceanic point of passage. In war time, Royal Navy presence helped ensure the continued passage of merchant and military ships into, and out of the Mediterranean basin.³⁵

The Rock of Gibraltar, a limestone mountain rising from sea level, dominates the Strait of Gibraltar. Along its western side is Gibraltar Bay, where the Port of Gibraltar is located, with a breakwater and facilities almost half as large as the territory itself. The mountain, honeycombed with 34 miles of tunnels dug into the rock by the British

over the years, provided cover for numerous gun emplacements, hangars, storage facilities, barracks, hospitals, and thousands of troops.³⁶

The naval base was home port for Adm. Sir James Somerville's Force H, which gave the Royal Navy an extraordinary ability to project its power into the Western Mediterranean and successfully contest the Italian Navy's attempts to control the sea. When France surrendered to Germany, on 22 June 1940, and its Med fleet went under Vichy control, the British naval force filled the void left by the allied French naval power in the Western Mediterranean.³⁷

Photo Preface-11



Gibraltar Defence Corps guarding the entrance to the Mediterranean.
Australian War Memorial photograph 002893

Photo Preface-12



Wellington aircraft of No. 458 Squadron RAAF at Gibraltar
in February 1945.

Australian War Memorial photograph 128342

SUBMARINE THREAT IN THE MEDITERRANEAN

Photo Preface-13



View of the harbour at Malta, circa July 1943.
Australian War Memorial photograph MEC2155

Photo Preface-14



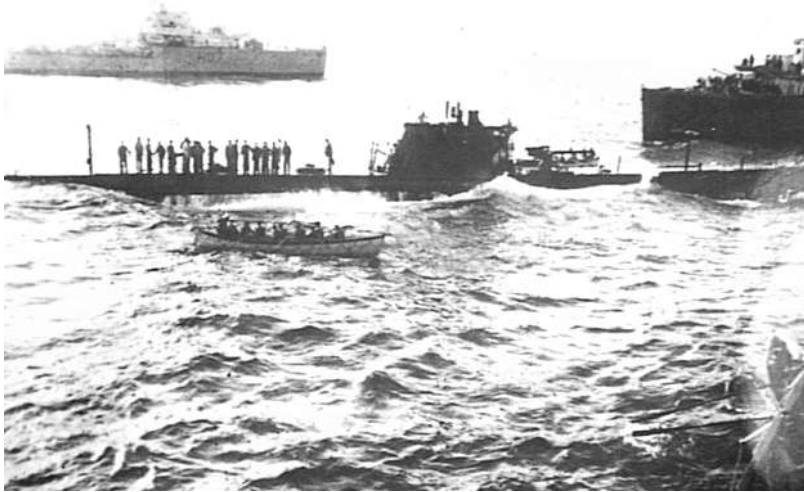
The British aircraft carrier HMS *Illustrious* and Australian light cruiser HMAS *Perth* under German air attack, on 6 January 1941, at Grand Harbour, Malta. *Illustrious* was being repaired from damage sustained in convoy duties, and was hit again, while *Perth* received underwater and internal damage, but no casualties, from a near miss.
Australian War Memorial photograph 128081

German U-boats needed to transit the Strait to support their Italian ally; to oppose the North African Campaign; and to blockade the British base at Malta, by sinking shipping bringing food and supplies to troops defending that besieged British Colony. Malta in the central

Mediterranean was essential to the Allied war effort as it offered a base from which to disrupt Axis supply lines to Libya, and for protecting convoys supplying British armies in Egypt. The German and Italian high commands also recognised the danger of a British stronghold so close to Italy and, between 1940 and 1942, the island faced relentless aerial attacks by the Luftwaffe and Italian Air Force.³⁸

Between 21 September 1941 and 16 May 1944, Adm. Karl Doenitz, *Befehlshaber der Unterseeboote*, or BdU (commander of the submarines), managed to send sixty-two U-boats into the Mediterranean. All had to navigate the British-controlled Strait of Gibraltar, protected by a defensive minefield in the approaches, and in the strait, hydrophones (listening devices) and other anti-submarine measures. No U-boats ever made it back into the Atlantic. Passage on the surface was required to leave the Mediterranean, as the currents were too strong for transit submerged on battery power.³⁹

Photo Preface-15



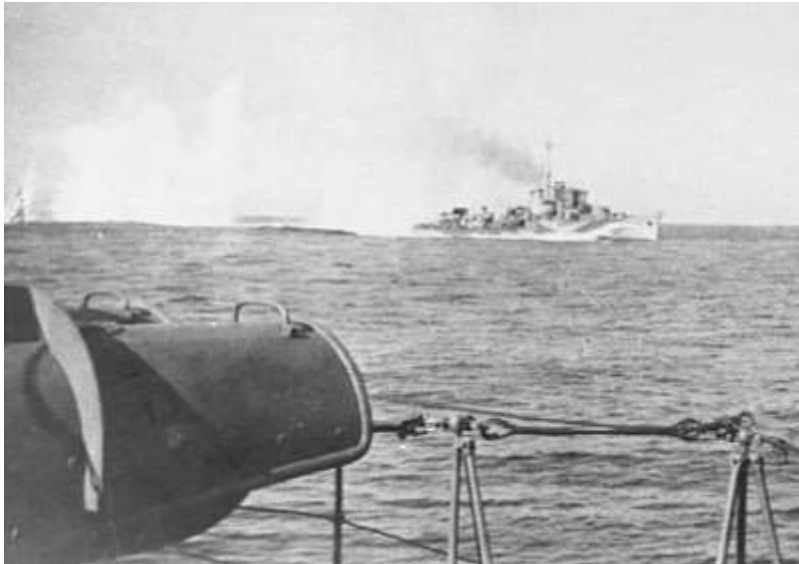
Italian submarine *Linzqi*, after she was forced to the surface by depth charges from the destroyers HMS *Ilex*, HMS *Defender*, and HMAS *Voyager*. She was sunk by gunfire from the destroyer HMS *Dainty*, following the rescue of her crew, circa June 1941. Australian War Memorial photograph P01915.011

The *Regia Marina* (navy of the Kingdom of Italy) had an even larger force of submarines in the Mediterranean than those sent in by the Germans. Having devoted significant resources to strengthening this capability, it entered the war (on 10 June 1940) with 117 submarines, of which only seven could be categorized as obsolete.⁴⁰

ROYAL NAVY HUNT-CLASS DESTROYER ESCORTS

One of the re-armament measures taken by Britain when the possibility of war with Germany was reluctantly recognised by Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain, was the authorization of a new class of escort destroyers. Modern destroyers like those of the 377-foot Tribal-class were too expensive to be built in the numbers required for escort of merchant shipping. Economical ships, which could be built rapidly, available for service without an inordinate delay, were needed. The result was the svelte 279-foot Hunt-class escort destroyer, conceived for use in coastal convoy escort and patrol operations.⁴¹

Photo Preface-16



A Royal Navy Hunt-class type III escort destroyer (in the background) carries out a depth-charge attack against a German submarine. The U-boat had attacked an Allied convoy, approaching Algiers to support the Allied landing in Northwest Africa. Australian War Memorial photograph 072916

Eighty-six of this new class of escorts were built between 1939 and 1943—named after Foxhunts mainly in the British Isles (one was in Gibraltar). The Hunts were smaller and slower than a destroyer, with good all-around armament of 4-inch and lighter anti-aircraft guns, and depth charges. Twenty-seven type III Hunts, intended specifically for duty in the Mediterranean, sacrificed their gun mount farthest aft for a pair of 21-inch torpedo tubes amidships. The Type III ships could be easily identified, as they had a straight funnel (stack) with a sloping top and the foremast had no rake.⁴²

Photo Preface-17



A torpedoed tanker, victim of a submarine attack in the Mediterranean.
Australian War Memorial photograph 128179

The new ships' endurance (fuel storage capacity) was insufficient for trans-Atlantic escort work, but adequate for operations in the North Sea and Mediterranean. The eighty-six ships were similar, apart from differences in gun and torpedo fits, and had the same type of propulsion machinery with a shaft horsepower of 19,000 driving two shafts. A larger ship's complement of 168 was required in the Hunts with three twin gun mounts, and also for those fitted with torpedo tubes.⁴³

U.S. NAVY DESTROYER ESCORTS ARRIVE IN THE MEDITERRANEAN FOR CONVOY DUTY

The [U.S.] Navy did not obtain adequate means to deal with the U-boat until late in 1943.

—Ernest J. King in *Fleet Admiral King, A Naval Record*, 1952.

Despite a desperate and continuing requirement for large numbers of American Navy destroyer escorts (DEs), to protect coastal and transatlantic merchant shipping from German U-boat attacks, none joined the Fleet until 1943. Ironically, the U.S. Navy obtained its first DEs by building them for the Royal Navy, then retaining many for itself instead of transferring them to Britain under the Lend-lease Act passed by Congress on 11 March 1941.⁴⁴

Naval architect Capt. Edward L. Cochrane, USN, was responsible for the DE program. On a visit to England in 1940-1941, he had been impressed by the *Hunt*-class 900-ton destroyer. As well as being nimble and fast (27.5 knots), the ship was also seaworthy, and possessed excellent anti-submarine and anti-aircraft armament. Cochrane worked up a design for a 1,085-ton destroyer escort, which could be built for a little over half the cost of the existing 341-foot *Benson*-class destroyer.⁴⁵

In June 1941, the British Admiralty presented an urgent request for the construction of one hundred 1,500-ton escort vessels to counter the wider range of German submarine operations. (Following the fall of France, the German Navy had gained the use of bases much closer to the Atlantic and Mediterranean shipping routes, allowing its submarines to operate much farther from their homeland, as necessary fuel, provisions, and munitions could then be obtained, and maintenance provided in French ports.) Rear Adm. James W. S. Dorling, RN, the Admiralty representative in Washington D.C., found Cochrane's design acceptable, and Adm. Harold R. Stark, chief of Naval Operations, approved building twenty of these escort vessels for Britain on 29 July 1941. Within a month, President Roosevelt increased this number to fifty ships.⁴⁶

As a result of successive building programs, the U.S. Navy acquired 374 DEs during the war, of which 8 were later transferred in 1944-45 to Brazil. Another 91 USN DEs were converted to high-speed transports (APDs), either after commissioning or being laid down as destroyer escorts. Six ship classes comprised the U.S. Navy destroyer escorts—*Evarts*, *Buckley*, *Cannon*, *Edsall*, *Rudderow*, and *John C. Butler*. The Royal Navy acquired DEs of both the *Evarts*- and *Buckley*-class, while the Free French and Brazilian navies boasted only *Cannon*-class destroyer escorts.

Destroyer Escorts Commissioned Prior to 2 September 1945

DE/High-Speed Transport Classes	U.S. Navy	Royal Navy	Free French Navy	Brazilian Navy
<i>Evarts</i> DE	65	32		
<i>Buckley</i> DE	65	46		
DE-APD	37			
APD	6			
<i>Cannon</i> DE	58		6	8
<i>Edsall</i> DE	85			
<i>Rudderow</i> DE	21			
DE-APD	1			
APD	47			
<i>John C. Butler</i> DE	80			
Total DEs	374	78	6	8

Total DE-APDs	38			
Total APDs	53			
Total DEs/DE-APDs/APDs	465	78	6	8

US DE	DEs that served only as DEs in the US Navy in World War II
UK DE	DEs commissioned in the Royal Navy in World War II
FR DE	DEs commissioned in the Free French Navy in World War II
BR DE	DEs commissioned in the US Navy then Brazil in World War II
DE-APD	Ships commissioned as DEs but later converted to APDs
APD	Ships launched as DEs but commissioned as APDs ⁴⁷

U.S. NAVY CONVOY ESCORT TO, AND IN, THE MED

Immediately following Allied occupation of the Moroccan and Algerian ports in November 1942, troop tanker and general supply convoys were organized to take advantage of the opening of the Mediterranean. The delivery by ship convoys of war materiel necessary to support Allied armies embroiled in combat ashore, led successively to the defeat of the Axis in Libya and Tunisia, the invasion of Sicily and Italy, the surrender of the Italian Navy, and finally the occupation of Southern France.⁴⁸

After the landings, a revised routing plan for US sourced convoys was established. It was to move Mediterranean and North African area bound supplies directly from the U.S. to the Mediterranean, instead of shipping them to the UK via HX/SC (fast and slow North Atlantic) convoys and then transshipping via KMS (UK to Mediterranean) convoys. Then, “UG” (United States to Gibraltar) convoys would sail at regular intervals, with fast troop convoys and slower freight convoys given the suffix “F” and “S” respectively.⁴⁹

These convoys from Hampton Roads, Virginia, were organised, sailed and escorted by the U.S. Navy based ships across the Atlantic to 24° west longitude under their control, after which escort and control was passed to the Royal Navy. Convoys were routed to Casablanca, with British local escorts receiving the incoming shipping, providing escort into and out of the Mediterranean ports and returning them again to the U.S. Navy for return to Hampton Roads, at a rendezvous at sea.⁵⁰

When air attacks on Mediterranean convoys increased along the Algerian coast, and adequate British escorts became unavailable, Admiral King reversed an expressed policy of leaving full responsibility for escorting inside the Mediterranean to the British. Commencing with UGS 36 passing Gibraltar on 30 March 1944, United States to Gibraltar convoys were escorted by the U.S. ocean escorts as far as Bizerte, Tunisia, before being relieved by the British. This practice continued until 23 October 1944 when independent sailings under full U.S. escort of GUS/UGS shipping in the Mediterranean was agreed upon.⁵¹

U.S. NAVY DD / DE LOSSES TO ENEMY IN THE MED

Six U.S. Navy destroyers (DD) and two destroyer escorts (DE) were sunk, or damaged beyond repair, in the Mediterranean. Destroyer escorts operating in the Med were employed almost exclusively for convoy escort duties and anti-submarine warfare. During this tasking, *Fechteler* (DE-157) and *Holder* (DE-401) fell victim to a German U-boat and aircraft, respectively. Destroyers also carried out convoy and anti-submarine work (ASW), but being more heavily armed than DEs, were assigned shore bombardment duties as well. This put them in proximity of German motor torpedo boats operating closer to land, to which the destroyer *Rowan* (DD-405) fell victim.

<u>U-boat</u>	<u>Enemy Aircraft</u>	<u>German E-boat</u>
USS <i>Bristol</i> (DD-453)	USS <i>Beatty</i> (DD-640)	USS <i>Rowan</i> (DD-405)
USS <i>Buck</i> (DD-420)	USS <i>Holder</i> (DE-401)	
USS <i>Fechteler</i> (DE-157)	USS <i>Lansdale</i> (DD-426)	
	USS <i>Maddox</i> (DD-622) ⁵²	

Ship losses of the South African Naval Force, and those of the U.S. Navy in the Mediterranean, have been addressed in this preface. Those of the Royal Australian Navy and Royal Canadian Navy are taken up in the text. Britain, whose RN performed the bulk of naval warfare in the Mediterranean against Axis forces, suffered the loss of many ships and sailors. Space constraints in this book do not allow adequate tribute to these sacrifices.

Having progressed through this overview, intended to provide background before readers progress into the heart of the book, fierce combat in Mussolini's Mare Nostrum, it's appropriate to touch on some lighter matters.

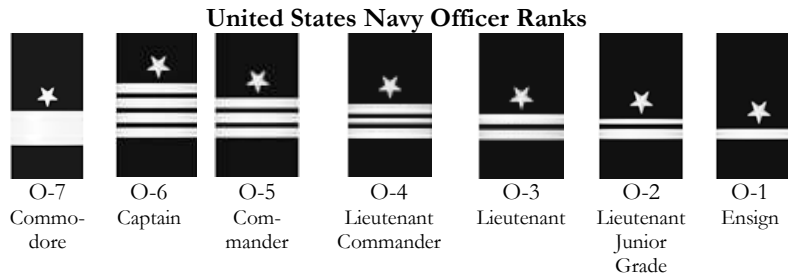
DIFFERENCES IN OFFICERS AND TERMINOLOGY

The RNV/R (classic, wartime reservists known as 'Saturday night sailors') were gentlemen trying to be sailors.

The RNR (professional seamen and part-time Navy officers) were sailors trying to be gentlemen.

and The RN (regular Navy officers) were neither trying to be both.

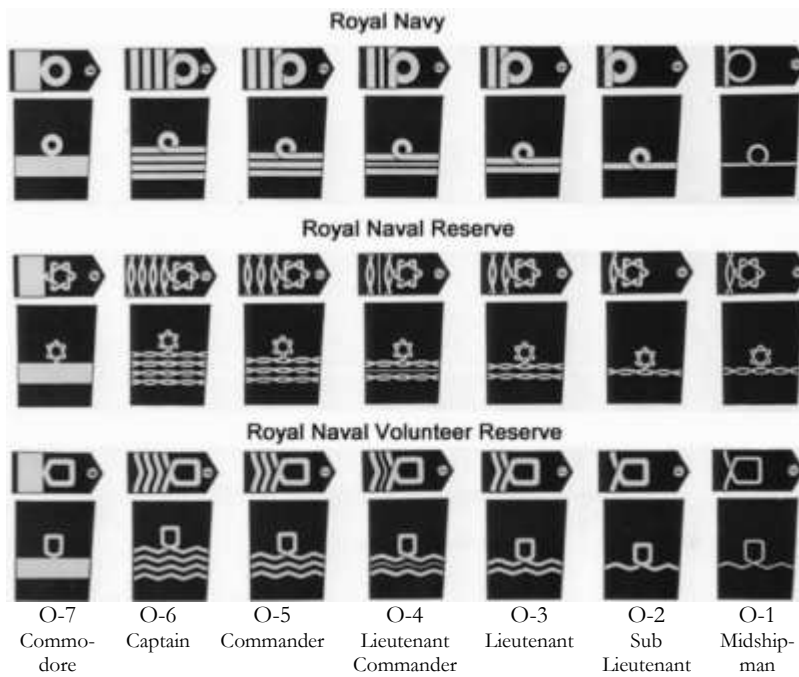
—Old saying in the Royal Navy, courtesy of Rob Hoole



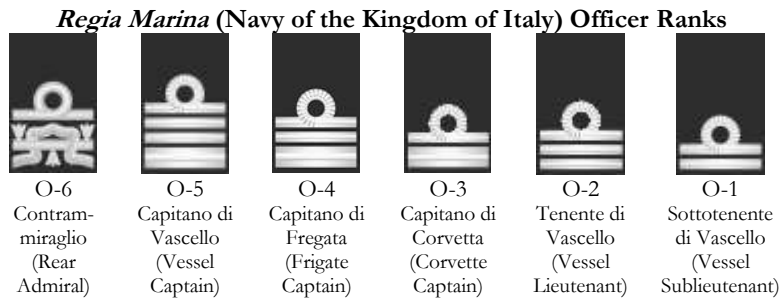
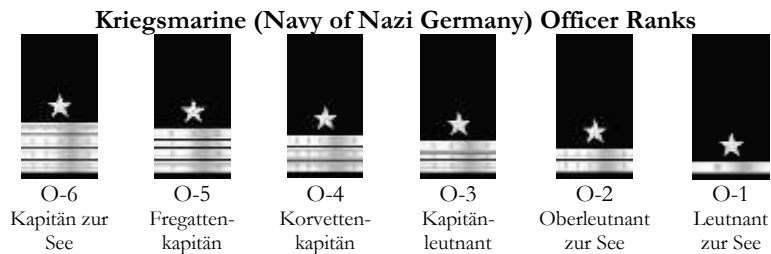
Gold stripes on the shoulder boards and sleeves of U.S. naval officers are the same for regular and reserve officers. A star denotes unrestricted line officer, eligible for command. In lieu of a star, Staff Corps officers (supply corps, medical corps, nurse corps, judge advocate general, etc.) sport an emblem associated with their respective communities. Since the device for Supply Corps officers resembles a porkchop, line officers often refer to the former officers as “pork chops” or, for a single individual, as “chop.” In consideration of relative standing, within the Supply Department on a destroyer, the department head is identified as “pork chop,” and the more junior disbursing officer, as “lamb chop.”

In World War II, the U.S. Navy used the rank of commodore to denote a one-star admiral, which today is rear admiral (lower half).

Commonwealth navies, as alluded to in the quoted material, use different type stripes to identify regular, reserve, and volunteer officers, but there is uniformity regarding rank. A captain is a captain, lieutenant a lieutenant, midshipman a midshipman, and so on whether Royal Navy, Royal Canadian Navy, Royal Australian Navy, or South African Navy.



Since references to German and Italian naval officers may be found in this book, descriptions of their ranks (from O-1 through O-6) follow:









COMMONWEALTH NAVIES-RELATED MATTERS

In general, regular RN officers were granted permanent commissions by the Crown. These lasted for the duration of their lives unless forfeited (e.g., owing to some serious misdemeanour) or resigned (e.g. to serve in another nation's forces).

A significant difference exists between references to officers in the Royal Navy and its Dominions, and those of the United States Navy. Those of the former include "Sir," if knighted (Royal Navy), following an individual's military rank, and reference to military awards earned after surname.

Over the course of their careers, officers advance in rank and may receive additional awards. Since it is difficult to associate the latter with the former at any given point in time, the convention is to denote the final rank of an officer, and all awards they received in the first reference to that officer. So, the first reference to fictional Lt. John Smith, RN, would include in parenthesis after his surname (later Vice Adm. Sir John Smith, VC, DSO, DSC, CGM RN). In order to make the text easier to follow, particularly for those without naval backgrounds, this information is provided after the individuals' names in the index.

A Few British Military Awards

	Victoria Cross (VC): Highest award of the British honours system; for gallantry "in the presence of the enemy"		Distinguished Service Cross (DSC): For an act or acts of exemplary gallantry during active operations against the enemy at sea
	George Cross (GC): For acts of the greatest heroism or for most conspicuous courage in circumstance of extreme danger, not in the presence of the enemy		Conspicuous Gallantry Medal (CGM): Award for enlisted members for conspicuous gallantry in action against the enemy at sea or in the air
	Distinguished Service Order (DSO): for meritorious or distinguished service by officers during wartime, typically in actual combat		George Medal (GM): For gallantry "not in the face of the enemy" where the services were not so outstanding as to merit the George Cross

Of course, other awards existed; some with humorous acronyms describing how “other ranks” viewed those received by their seniors:

- MBE (Member) – My Bloody Efforts
- OBE (Officer) – Other Buggers’ Efforts
- CBE (Commander) – Covers Bloody Everything
- Order of St Michael & St George which has three classes:
 - CMG (Companion) – Call Me God
 - KCMG (Knight Commander) or DCMG (Dame Commander) – Kindly Call Me God
 - GCMG (Knight Grand Cross or Dame Grand Cross) – God Calls Me God

LANGUAGE DIFFERENCES

Before readers vicariously stand out into the Med aboard a destroyer type ship, some explanation of language is in order; particularly to those not part of the Commonwealth.

The British spelling of particular words are used throughout as a nod to the Royal Navy. They also apply to the Dominions generally. The primary differences are the addition of the letter “u” in some words, and the use of “s” instead of “z” in others. Some words uniquely American, such as Harbor in Pearl Harbor, or American spellings of words in quoted material have been left alone.

British	American	British	American
armour	armor	manoeuvre	maneuver
authorise	authorize	metre	meter
calibre	caliber	minimise	minimize
centre	center	offence	offense
colour	color	organisation	organization
defence	defense	programme	program
despatch	dispatch	recognise	recognize
draught	draft	theatre	theater
endeavour	endeavor	utilise	utilize
harbour	harbor	valour	valor
honour	honor	vigourous	vigorous
labour	labor		

Photo Preface-18



Adm. Sir John D. H. Cunningham, RN (at left), and Adm. Henry K. Hewitt, USN.
Naval History and Heritage Command photograph #NH 49177