

Mr. Clagg
You might find these hand-outs useful

He Swarbrick

13.11.44 - No. 34

THE ADMIRAL VON TIRPITZ

The German battleship Admiral Von Tirpitz, which was completed in 1941, has an official standard displacement of 35,000 tons, but it is probable that the actual figure is nearer 45,000 tons. She has a complement of about 1,600 men, with a main armament of eight 15" guns and a secondary armament of twelve 5.9" guns. Her designed speed is 30 knots.

The TIRPITZ is believed to have left the Baltic between December 1941 and 23rd January, 1942, when she was seen at Trondheim.

The first attack on the enemy battleship was made in March 1942 by twelve Albacores operating from the aircraft carrier H.M.S. VICTORIOUS, but no damage was sustained by the enemy.

On 8th July, 1942 a Soviet communique stated that a Russian submarine had attacked the TIRPITZ in the Barents Sea. The submarine claimed to have obtained two torpedo hits and caused serious damage to the battleship.

In July, 1942, the TIRPITZ was at sea in the vicinity of a Russian convoy, but on learning of the presence of a strong force of naval escorts the TIRPITZ returned to Narvik. From Narvik she returned to Trondheim where she was believed to be undergoing repairs in October and November. She later went up to Alten Fjord where she was located by aircraft reconnaissance in June 1943.

On September 9th, 1943, the TIRPITZ made her only operational sortie, when in company with the SCHARNHORST and screened by destroyers, she raided Spitzbergen.

/She then

She then returned to her hideout in Alten Fjord, Northern Norway, where on 22nd September 1943, she was attacked by H.M. midget submarines and sustained such severe underwater damage that she was immobilised for many months.

On the 3rd April 1944, naval aircraft operating from H.M. aircraft carriers scored a number of hits with heavy and medium sized bombs on the TIRPITZ at Alten Fjord. The battleship sustained damage near the bridge, amidships, in the vicinity of the after-turret and on the forecastel. Large explosions were observed by the mainmast and on the forecassel, and the TIRPITZ was left on fire amidships.

Early in September 1944 naval aircraft again attacked the TIRPITZ in Alten Fjord, but smokescreens obscured the battleship and no results on the attack were observed.

On 15th September, 1944 Bomber Command Lancasters, operating from Russian bases, carried out an attack with 12,000 lb. bombs, but again a smokescreen obscured the target and made it difficult to assess the results of the bombing. Aerial reconnaissance however revealed significant indications of damage, and a later report claimed one direct hit with a 12,000 lb. bomb.

Following this attack, and the entry into Northern Norway by the Red Army, the TIRPITZ moved south from Alten Fjord to Tromso.

On 29th October, Lancasters of Bomber Command again attacked the TIRPITZ in her new hideout, and again claimed one direct hit with a 12,000 lb. bomb on the enemy battleship.

On the 12th November, 1944 Lancasters delivered the final attack against the TIRPITZ.

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THE TIRPITZ SUNK

The Tirpitz has been sunk by Lancasters of R.A.F. Bomber Command. After capsizing she has settled on the bottom of Tromsø Fjord. Only her keel and some parts of the bottom of the ship can be seen above water. This result was the achievement of two squadrons of R.A.F. Bomber Command.

The Prime Minister has sent this message to Air Chief Marshal Sir Arthur Harris, Air Officer Commanding-in-Chief, R.A.F. Bomber Command:-- "Heartiest congratulations to all."

Sir Arthur Harris has also received this message from the Admiralty:-- "Request you will convey our warmest congratulations and thanks to those concerned in this very successful attack. It was a good job well done."

Shortly before 10.30 a.m. yesterday a force of 32 Lancasters arrived over Tromsø Fjord, where the Tirpitz was lying. The Lancasters were led by W/Cdr. J.B. Tait, D.S.O., D.F.C., of Abercynon, Glamorgan, and S/Ldr, A.G. Williams, of Cirencester.

At 10.30 the Tirpitz was hit. At 10.45 she was seen to be on fire. As the last aircraft turned for home she was seen to be heeling over in the shallow water of the fjord.

Reconnaissance after the attack showed that the battleship had by then completely capsized, with about 700 feet of her keel sticking out of the water. All around the wreck was a great pool of oil, through which could still be seen the booms protecting the battleship from attack by torpedoes.

This was the third attack to be made on the Tirpitz with 12,000-lb. bombs, but it was the first time that the attackers were able to see the ship properly. In the first attack, when the Tirpitz was in Kaa Fjord, the Germans put up a smoke-screen so rapidly that only one or two of the first air crews to arrive could see the ship. One 12,000-pounder hit and seriously damaged her then. The hit was unfortunately too far forward to be lethal, but she would have been useless as a fighting unit for at least six months, during which time she would have had to undergo dockyard repairs.

/The second....

The second attack, when the ship had moved westwards to Tromsøe Fjord - on her way for repair in a German dockyard and because of the threat of the Russian advance into Norway - was made through cloud and crews could only obtain an oblique view of the target from some distance.

But yesterday the weather was clear and there was no smokescreen. One 12,000-pounder apparently hit the Tirpitz amidships, another in the bows and a third hit towards the stern. There were also apparently two very near misses which must themselves have done serious underwater damage, so violent is the explosive effect of these bombs when they burst in the water. The ship heeled over rapidly. The last air crew to leave the scene said they saw that something was going to happen and they turned hastily so that they might be over the ship to watch. By the time the turn was completed the Tirpitz had capsized.

The rear gunner of this Lancaster - an aircraft from a R.A.A.F. squadron despatched to make a film of the attack, stated that he saw the ship heel over when the aircraft was flying at a height of only 5,000 feet.

"We were just returning to make our run", he said, "when I saw yet another explosion - it may have been another direct hit, or something may have exploded inside the Tirpitz. It was impossible to tell. She seemed to be going over, and we turned again. By the time we had got round, she was already on her side."

F/Lt. B.A. Buckham, D.F.C. of Sydney, N.S.W., the pilot of this aircraft, said that the weather was ideal.

"Now at last", he said, "we knew that we had our chance. The first bombs fell just beyond the ship. Agonizing moments! Then came three direct hits in quick succession, the first amidships, the next in the bows, and the third towards the stern. Her guns had been firing like blazes when we first arrived, but after the first bomb had hit her the guns stopped firing. Not a shot came up after that. Smoke began to pour up. It spiralled at first in a column. Then it spread out over the doomed ship in the shape of a mushroom.

"Afterwards there were several explosions. One of them was very big and one of my crew shouted out over the inter-comm 'she's on fire, skipper, she's on fire'. The fire did not seem to last very long - not more than two or three minutes, I should say. It was difficult to see exactly what was happening at this stage. Smoke was pouring from the vessel and we could not see the Tirpitz clearly. Finally, she capsized."

The designer of the 12,000-lb. bomb is Mr. B.N. Wallis, of Vickers Armstrong, the scientist who also designed the special mines which breached the Mohne and Eder dams. Direct hits and near misses with these bombs have sunk the sister ship of the Bismarck. The Germans originally believed that these two battleships were unsinkable, and the amount of punishment which the Bismarck took before she was sunk in 1941, at least explains the origin of this belief.

The new "earthquake" bomb, however, is a weapon which could hardly have been imagined at the time when the battleships were built: it is a bomb which can penetrate many feet of concrete, as it did in the attack on the E-boat pens at IJmuiden, without losing its explosive force. Those who have studied the effects of this bomb have always believed that it could sink any capital ship.

The Tirpitz was as well protected against attack by air as any capital ship could be. Her decks had the thickest possible armour and she had 16 4.1 inch anti-aircraft guns and sixteen others of smaller calibre. Her main armament was very formidable - eight 15 inch guns and 12 5.9 inch guns. She also had torpedo tubes, which the Bismarck had not, and there were two catapults for aircraft. She was a vessel of 45,000 tons, 792 feet long, and with a speed of 30 knots.

Since the Tirpitz was completed in 1941 - she was laid down in 1936 - her importance as a threat has been out of all proportion to her actual achievement, but as a threat, her strategic value was that of a fleet in being and capital ships had always to be kept ready to fight her if she should make any sortie. It was evidently the intention of the enemy to use this and the other capital ships of the German navy as commerce raiders and the achievement of the Scharnhorst and Gneisenau, which once sank about 20 merchant ships during their one brief expedition into the Atlantic, shows how much damage this far more powerful warship could have done.

/The Tirpitz

The Tirpitz was not ready for action until just after the Bismarck was sunk, so that the Germans just missed the chance of being able to use two battleships together.

On 1st June, 1941, four days after the sinking of the Bismarck, a reconnaissance photograph showed that the Tirpitz had left Kiel: she had been brought there from Wilhelmshaven, the naval base in which she was built.

After trials in the Baltic, and after spending some time in Trondheim Fjord, where she was twice attacked by Halifaxes of R.A.F. Bomber Command, the Tirpitz proceeded to Alten Fjord - Kaa Fjord, is a branch of it - and there she stayed, apart from brief sorties, until she was moved a few weeks ago to her last station near Tromsøe.

In Alten Fjord she was a constant and formidable menace to our convoys bringing war material to Russia. There were long periods, however, during which she was too badly damaged to fight after attacks by the Fleet Air Arm and midget submarines of the Royal Navy.

The first attack by Lancasters with the 12,000 pounder was made on 15 September, 1944. Then came the move to Tromsøe - a move which took the battleship from her prepared defences in Kaa Fjord, and within easier range of the R.A.F. but very little nearer to the permanent naval base in which the damage done by the first 12,000-pounders could alone be repaired.

Air Chief Marshal Sir Arthur Harris seized the first opportunity, at a time when the weather has been constantly difficult, to make two more attacks on the Tirpitz while she was in this exposed condition.

The first attack on 29 September when a sudden cloud hid the battleship and in the second and conclusive attack yesterday.

As soon as the result was known, he sent the following message to Air Vice-Marshal R.H. Cochrane, C.B., C.B.E., A.F.C., the Air Officer Commanding the group to which the Lancasters belong.- "Congratulations to you and all the ranks of the squadrons concerned in the destruction of the Tirpitz. The skilful planning and courageous and determined execution of these operations put precisely that end to this ship which was inevitable as soon as the squadrons got a clear bead on her."

NOTE: Photographs of W/Odr. Tait with B.I.P.P.A.

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AIR MINISTRY NEWS SERVICE.

A.M.B.NO. 16351.

THE TIRPITZ. INTERPRETATION OF AIR PHOTOGRAPHS.

An interpretation of photographs taken two and a half hours after the attack on the Tirpitz on November 12th has now been made.

Only a part of the bottom and starboard side of the ship can be seen.

The control tower and other upper works appear to be embedded in the sea bed in this comparatively shallow anchorage, which would explain why the ship did not completely turn turtle.

The total length above water is approximately 720 feet.

The centre and starboard propeller shafts can be seen, but the port shaft is under water.

When examined through the stereoscope, the photographs reveal that there are two considerable breaks in the otherwise even surface of the ship's bottom, and this may indicate damage to that part of the ship which would normally be under water.

Oil covers a large area of the sea round the Tirpitz.

Only a few small vessels can be seen near her.

Her position is the same as that which she occupied last month, south of Haakoy Island, and four miles west of Tromso.

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EARLIER ATTACK ON TIRPITZHALIFAXES ROLLED MINES DOWN CLIFF

Two and a half years before Bomber Command sank the Tirpitz, Halifaxes and Lancasters, using highly original tactics, made a determined attack on the ship although no mention was made of this at the time.

The Tirpitz was then moored under a towering precipice in Foetten Fjord, an inlet of Trondheim Fjord, and the bombers attacked her, not only with armour piercing bombs, but also with mines and depth charges, which they dropped on the cliff so that they would roll down between the shore and the ship and damage her below the waterline.

Wing Commander (now Air Vice Marshal) D.F.C., D.C.T. Bennett, led the Halifaxes and his aircraft was missing after the operation. He baled out over Norway, escaped, and returned to this country to become Air Officer Commanding Bomber Command Pathfinder Force.

Foetten Fjord was a natural fortress. There were powerful batteries on the cliffs above the ship as well as on the other side of the fjord and on a small island at its entrance. Near at hand was a fighter airfield. All around the Tirpitz there was material to make a dense smokescreen at a moment's notice which would fill the whole gulf between the cliffs on both sides of the fjord. There were also, of course, the ack-ack guns of the Tirpitz and of the Prinz Eugen and the Von Scheer, then lying in Lo Fjord, some two miles north of the Tirpitz.

On the night of April 27th, 1942, the Lancasters attacked this improvised but well defended naval base. The plan was for a high flying force to go in first to distract and so far as possible to silence the ack-ack batteries by bombing them as well as the Tirpitz itself. Immediately afterwards, and, if possible, so quickly that the smokescreen would not yet have hidden the battleship, a force of Halifaxes was to follow, going in between and below the cliffs. The weather had to be exactly right for the operation and a Norwegian meteorologist, an expert in the weather of his own country, was at the H.Q. where the operation was planned. It was not until he gave the word that the bombers were despatched. His predictions were exactly right, and the weather was ideal for the operation with a clear sky over the target, though there had been clouds over the north sea, and a bright moon.

/A high flying...

The high flying bombers achieved complete surprise. The guns fired wildly at first. The smokescreen had not begun, and the flash of bursting bombs lit up the ship.

Then came the low flying Halifaxes which dived to within 500, and some even to within 200 feet of the sea. There was violent cross fire from both sides of the fjord, and guns fired from above as well as from below. The smokescreen filled the gulf between the cliffs so quickly that the later Halifax crews could not see the ship, but ^{as} they looked back they saw black smoke rising up through the white smoke of the screen.

The operation was very carefully planned and daringly executed, but the 12,000 lb. bomb had not then been designed, and as with so many attacks on warships in the earlier days of the war it proved very difficult to assess the results of the operation.

A/V/M Bennett's Halifax was hit several times by flak. An engine caught fire and the aircraft quickly lost height so he gave the order to bale out. When last he saw the aircraft it was going southwest, well alight and losing height. He landed among sparse trees and gave a shout in the hope that some of his crew would hear. The wireless operator answered at once, but just as A/V/M/ Bennett met him a German soldier appeared on skis.

He was armed with a rifle and made signs to the two men to go with him. At that moment they heard calls from others and the German dashed off to round them up. When he had gone 200 yards A/V/M Bennett and his wireless operator made off. They ran for five hours through deep snow going on through desolate country, until night fell. They could not rest because of the water in their boots and so went on walking across bad country in soft snow. Sustaining themselves on malted milk tablets and water from their water-bottles they eventually escaped into Sweden.

SIR ARCHIBALD SINCLAIR SPEAKS TO THE MEN WHO SANK THE TIRPITZ

"You have kicked away the strongest single prop of the German military position in Norway and Northern Europe". In these words, Sir Archibald Sinclair, Secretary Of State For Air, to-day summarised the effect of the sinking of the Tirpitz in an address to air and ground crews of the Lancasters which made the attack.

Sir Archibald flew to the bomber station this morning and was met by Air Vice Marshal The Honourable R.H.Cochrane, C.B., C.B.E., A.F.C., the A.O.C. of the Group to which the Lancasters belong. The Secretary of State was introduced to the Station Commander, Group Captain M.G.Philpott and the two Squadron Commanders, as well as the Captains of other aircraft taking part.

"You have sunk one of the toughest ships in the world," said Sir Archibald Sinclair. "People of this country will take pride in the fact that the Tirpitz was sunk by British aircraft, flown by British crews, using a British bomb sight, and with British bombs that no other air force in the world have so far carried except the R.A.F. I know that I speak the feelings of all your fellow countrymen when I thank you and say what a grand exploit it is that you have carried out. It is too early precisely to assess the effect of what you have done, but it would be difficult to exaggerate the far-reaching effects of this powerful blow which the two squadrons have struck. So long as that ship was there in those Northern waters she was a permanent and formidable threat to our sea communications with Russia and to those convoys which for the past two years and more have carried invaluable supplies which the gallant Red Army has put to such good use on the Eastern Front. The results of your work will be felt in all our operations against the Germans on the Norwegian coast and on the Russian Front, which is now approaching the frontier of Norway.

"The power of the Tirpitz, which remained strong so long as she was in being against Allied naval forces, is now finished, and a larger measure of freedom can be exercised by our Navy. The effect of the disappearance of their most powerful warship on the morale of the German people will be very great, and so will be the effect in the council of the German Supreme Command. Already the German people have much to fill them with gloom and depression, and very little to sustain them. They have many causes of anxiety, among which I gather from the newspapers is anxiety about the Fuehrer's health, and you have added, by the destruction of the warship of which they were so proud, another cause for deep depression.

If there is one quality which has distinguished the operation of the squadrons of this group over the past year or 18 months I would say it is versatility. You have bombed targets in France, Germany, Norway, Italy, and in the Low Countries. You have bombed targets of every sort and kind. There was your magnificent bombing of the Dortmund-Ems Canal in Germany, the destruction with your 12,000 lb. block busters of a factory at Limoges, and, of course, the destruction of the Dams in the Ruhr with another weird weapon of yours. You have bombed from great heights, and sometimes, as with the Ruhr Dams, from 60 or 70 feet. The other day - that was a grand show - you destroyed the Kembs Dam on the Upper Rhine when flying at 600 or 700 feet.

/These are

These are some of the great strategic problems which you have tackled with different weapons and by different methods.

"Then you have taken a great task in the land battle. Squadrons of this group played a great part in the direct support which was given to the Army at vital stages of the Normandy battle. And in addition you played a great part in the railway interdiction plan. That plan inflicted great suffering on the French civilian people, and I know how you feel about that. You have shown what you felt in the splendid way you contributed to the French fund. And the French have understood and have shown that they did by the reception which they have given to our troops in France. No one has had a better reception from the French than the R.A.F. and above all they have shown it in the risks they have run to protect crews who came down in France and helped them to avoid capture.

"That railway interdiction plan played a tremendous part in the battle of Normandy. When storms broke and it was difficult to get any reinforcements and supplies in, it was indeed fortunate for us that you had smashed the great railway centres in France, so that the Germans had even greater difficulties in reinforcing and supplying their own armies. Prominent, of course, among these brilliant achievements was the smashing of the Saumur Tunnel by these squadrons.

"Just as you have co-operated with the Army, so, too, you have a fine record of co-operating with the Royal Navy. There was the great damage which you inflicted on the submarine pens at Brest. There was the extermination of the German midget fleet in Le Havre. And now there's the destruction of the Tirpitz. Even the destruction of the Tirpitz is an example of this co-operation with the Royal Navy. In your hour of triumph I am sure you will remember the men who went out in the midget submarines and inflicted such deep and severe wounds: I am sure you will also remember your gallant comrades of the Fleet Air Arm who hit the Tirpitz very hard blows. The work which the Royal Navy and the Royal Air Force have done in destroying the Tirpitz will strengthen the bonds of comradeship between the two services.

"It is an astonishing development that has taken place in these last five years of war in air power. You will remember the days when the Wellington could perhaps carry 4,000 lbs. to Cologne, 250 miles away. You can now carry 12,000 lbs. a distance of 1,200 miles to Tromsø Fjord, and drop a bomb with deadly accuracy from a height of 16,000 or 17,000 feet - which would have been undreamt of five years ago, even from a low height.

"I am sure you would all like me to say how much we owe for this achievement to the ground staff. The air crews and ground staffs working together is one of the most impressive things of this exploit of yours. The servicing, too, of the equipment, and the extreme efficiency in which all your equipment has worked, is another example of the immense debt that we owe to the splendid spirit, faith and duty, and the grand efficiency of the ground staff.

"You have sunk one of the toughest ships in the world, you have struck a blow at German power which was already beginning to crumble. You have shortened the war."

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A.M.B. NO. 16347.

THE KING'S MESSAGE TO R.A.F. BOMBER COMMAND.

The King has sent the following message to the Commander in Chief, R.A.F. Bomber Command:-

"Please convey my hearty congratulations to all those who took part in the daring and successful attack on the Tirpitz".

Air Chief Marshal Sir Arthur Harris has replied:-

"The Commander in Chief, Bomber Command presents his humble duty and begs to thank His Majesty for his most gracious message, which is a source of pride to those who took part in the destruction of the Tirpitz and to all in Bomber Command".

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13.11.44. No.33.

Air Ministry No.16338.

AIR MINISTRY COMMUNIQUE

The Tirpitz has been sunk.

Yesterday morning 29 Lancasters of R.A.F. Bomber Command, led by Wing Commander B. Tait, D.S.O., D.F.C. and Squadron Leader A.C. Williams, attacked the German battleship Tirpitz with 12,000-lb. bombs.

There were several direct hits and within a few minutes the ship capsized and sank.

One of our aircraft is missing.
