

BATTLE HONOURS FOR HMS SUPERB



PASSERO 11 August, 1718

Conflict - War for Sicily (War of the Quadruple Alliance); 1718-20

The battle took place off Cape Passero on the southern tip of Italy.

Following the Spanish invasion of Sicily in 1718 and subsequent formation of the Quadruple Alliance. A British fleet under Admiral Sir George Byng, was sent to the Mediterranean.

Contact was made with a Spanish squadron comprising 12 ships-of-the-line plus smaller vessels on 10-Aug. Due to the lack of wind, the Spanish ships were towed by accompanying galleys during the night. However the British caught up with the Spanish the next day.

As a result the small Spanish vessels were sent inshore, but eight British frigates followed and chase them out. By the evening of the 11th the Spanish were in full flight and had suffered badly during the day.

Spanish losses are uncertain but could have been 7 ships-of-the-line plus 9 frigates, plus many smaller vessels captured or burned.

Admiral Byng was awarded the title 'Viscount Torrington'.

LOUISBURG April 16 to June 23.

Conflict - War of Austrian Succession

The War of Austrian Succession had begun in 1740 and eventually drew France and England, once again, into conflict.

By the spring of 1745 the New England colonies were busy preparing to launch an expedition against the French fortress of the Atlantic, Louisburg on Cape Breton Island. Louisburg was the capital of the colony of Ile Royale and Ile St Jean.

The British had established forts at Annapolis Royal and Canso in Nova Scotia and were somewhat vulnerable to the French in Louisburg. The Micmac Indians were also encouraged to cause trouble for the British. The French struck at Canso, which was sixty miles from Louisbourg, 350 soldiers under Captain Francois Du Pont Duverer. The British with only 87 soldiers quickly faltered and surrendered who were interned at Louisburg.

Although the number of casualties was relatively minor from combat, for the colonists, the number that died over the next year from garrison duty was almost 600. This made the news that the peace treaty, the Treaty of Aix-la-Chapelle, to end the war had given Louisburg back to the French in exchange for Madras in India. The British did take action to counter the presence of Louisburg after this war by building the great naval base of Halifax, a short distance along the Nova Scotia coast. The war had not solved the tense situation but had only put it off until the next war which was to come soon.

SADRAS 17 February, 1782

Conflict - American War of Independence; 1775-83

The battle was the first of a series of four actions awarded a battle honour in the East Indies between the British Vice-Admiral Sir Edward Hughes and the French Admiral Pierre Suffren, to establish naval supremacy in the Indian Ocean.

The battle took place off Madras about 9 miles SE of Sadras. The French squadron of 11 ships-of-the-line plus a small convoy of transports were sighted and the British squadron of 9 ships-of-the-line set off in pursuit.

The French had the wind advantage and concentrated on the rear five British ships. Then the wind shifted and the British van was able to engage. The battle ended when the French withdrew having failed to turn their initial advantage into victory.

PROVIDIEN 12 April, 1782

Conflict - American War of Independence; 1775-83

The battle was the second of a series of four actions awarded a battle honour in the East Indies between the British Vice-Admiral Sir Edward Hughes and the French Admiral Pierre Suffren, to establish naval supremacy in the Indian Ocean.

Hughes with 11 ships-of-the-line was reinforcing Trincomalee in Ceylon (Sri Lanka) which had been captured earlier in the year. Suffren with 12 ships-of-the-line encountered the British, while they were on a lee shore, 12 miles NE by E of Providien rock of the east coast of the island.

During the battle the British *HMS Monmouth* was carronaded almost to a wreck, but refused to strike her colours. Each side suffered about 500 casualties and the fighting continued until both were exhausted. They then anchored for the night, and next morning neither side wanted to continue the action.

They lay in sight of each other for a week, when the French sailed north and the British sailed south for Trincomalee.

NEGAPATAM 6 July, 1782

Conflict - American War of Independence; 1775-83

The battle was the third of a series of four actions awarded a battle honour in the East Indies between the British Vice-Admiral Sir Edward Hughes and the French Admiral Pierre Suffren, to establish naval supremacy in the Indian Ocean.

The French intended to capture the British base at Negapatam and Hughes sailed from Trincomalee on Ceylon's (Sri Lanka) north-east coast to intercept. The two squadrons each comprised 11 ships-of-the-line.

The battle was fierce and casualties heavy but no ships were taken or sunk. However, while the captain of the French ship *Severe* (64) struck his colours to *HMS Sultan*, his crew refused to surrender, fought off the British and rejoined their squadron.

In the evening both squadrons anchored inshore to lick their wounds. The French were later able to retire to the north but their attempt to take the British base was abandoned.

TRINCOMALEE 3 September, 1782

Conflict - American War of Independence; 1775-83

This was the fourth of a series of four actions awarded a battle honour in the East Indies between Vice-Admiral Sir Edward Hughes and the French Admiral Pierre Suffren. It took place off Sri Lanka's (Ceylon) North East anchorage of Trincomalee. One of the world's largest natural harbours.

When Hughes arrived off Trincomalee with 12 ships-of-the-line and six frigates, the French weighed anchor with 14 ships-of-the-line and action took place 25 miles south east of Trincomalee.

During the 3 hour battle not all French ships engaged and the Flagship *Heros* (74) lost her mainmast; *Illustre* (74) and *Ajax* (74) were badly damaged. Later *L'orient* (74) hit a reef and was wrecked. Despite this the French managed to return to Trincomalee and the British retired north to Madras.

GUT OF GIBRALTAR 6 & 12/13 July, 1801
Conflict - French Revolutionary War 1793-1802

The honour was awarded for two separate actions fought within a week off Gibraltar, between a British squadron of six ships-of-the-line plus two smaller ships, and a squadron of French and Spanish ships-of-the-line.

On 6 July Rear Admiral Sir James Saumarez engaged a smaller Spanish squadron of 3 ships-of-the-line plus a frigate, under Rear Admiral Durand-Linois, lying at anchor in Algeciras Bay. The Spanish were forced to run their ships aground to avoid destruction and gain the protection of shore batteries. HMS Hannibal also ran aground and was forced to surrender by the shore batteries. The remaining British ships retired to Gibraltar to repair their damage.

Six days later the British ships sailed and engaged a joint Franco-Spanish fleet comprising 8 ships-of-the-line and 3 frigates at dusk on 12 July. About midnight two Spanish first rates, each of 112 guns, collided and caught fire. Later they both foundered with heavy loss of life. After this the French St. Antoine (74) was captured.

Although several British ships were damaged, (HMS Venerable badly damaged), all reached Gibraltar safely.

BLOCKADE OF TOULON 1803 - 1805
Conflict - The Napoleonic War

From the outset, Nelson's time as Commander-in-Chief was beset with problems, but he dealt with them all remarkably. One that he complained about often in his letters to the Admiralty was the condition of his ships. Victory had just had a refit in England before he took her to the Mediterranean, and he was happy with her, Canopus, Donegal, and Belleisle. But on the 24th of August, he wrote to Henry Addington about the poor condition of the Triumph, Superb, Monmouth, Agincourt, Kent, Gibraltar and Renown, and that he wished them back in England for a complete refit. They needed constant maintenance, which was difficult so far from England and with very few suitable ports available to Nelson. The Admiralty expected him to use Malta, but he was disdainful of it, as it was too far away. So he kept his battleships together, and only sent his frigates to look into Toulon almost daily.

Nelson's fleet was the same size as the French one in Toulon, so he couldn't afford to send any of his ships-of-the-line to any port for supplies. So he arranged for store ships to travel between the ports and his fleet. This might seem an obvious solution, but it wasn't common practice at the time. He set up reliable supply networks at various ports around the

Mediterranean, one important one being at Roses in Spain. His contact there, Mr Gayner, was a British wine merchant, and also provided Nelson with onions and beef. He also established good intelligence networks in Spain, and elsewhere, and so didn't need to waste ships by having them watch the ports there. He also got lucky in managing to capture a French ship which had documents, charts and signal codes.

For the next two years, Nelson achieved an impressive yet underestimated feat. He kept a fleet of damaged ships together, well-supplied, and as well-maintained as they could be. His aim was always to keep his ships with five weeks' worth of supplies, so they were ready to leap into a long chase of the French at a moment's notice.

He of course also had to keep the men who manned his ships in working order. When he first boarded the Victory, he complained about the inexperience of most of the crew. But during the time of the blockade, the crews of all his ships were drilled every day. They were also, considering the length of time they went without setting a foot on shore, remarkably healthy, at times with not a single man ill. This meant that they were ready for all eventualities - to chase, to fight, or to continue at sea.

SAN DOMINGO 6 February, 1806
Conflict - Napoleonic War; 1803-15

The action took place at Occa Bay at the eastern end of San Domingo in the West Indies.

A French squadron of 5 ships-of-the-line plus 2 frigates and smaller vessels had evaded the blockade at Brest and headed for the West Indies. They were followed by a British squadron of 6 ships-of-the-line plus 2 frigates.

The two squadrons met at San Domingo while the French ships were re-provisioning. During the action which followed 2 French ships-of-the-line were driven ashore and burned to avoid capture, the other 3 were captured and the 2 frigates escaped.

BOMBARDMENT OF ALGIERS 27 August, 1816
Conflict - 19th Century Anti-Slavery Operations

Description The part of the North Africa coast from the Strait of Gibraltar to Cape Bon was known as the Barbary Coast, and was a centre for piracy.

Barbary pirates had operated to a greater or lesser extent for hundreds of years and reached far outside the Mediterranean. Including England and Ireland where they even landed to

capture slaves from south coast villages. Ships crews were also taken as far as the Grand Banks off Newfoundland.

After the Napoleonic war, the British decided to deal with the problem of the Barbary pirates.

A joint Anglo-Dutch operation patrolled the coast and included land forces comprising troop, sappers and miners. A treaty was offered to the Beys of Tunis, Tripoli and Algiers if they would prohibit the taking of Christians for slaves. This was rejected by the Bey of Algiers who thought his defences too powerful to be taken.

The well defended town and harbour was bombarded to near ruins, 1,200 slaves released and the Bey surrendered his jewel-studded scimitar as a symbol of his complete surrender.

BOMBARDMENT OF ALEXANDRIA 11 July, 1882

Conflict - 19th Century Colonial Wars

The action took place at Alexandria, and was intended to quell anti-Foreign riots which were taking place.

The port and installations were bombarded by the British Mediterranean Fleet, comprising eight armoured ships plus other smaller vessels.

A VC was earned by a gunner on board the flagship *Alexandra*, when he picked up a live shell and put it into a bucket of water to render it harmless.

JUTLAND 31-May, 1916

Conflict - World War 1; 1914-18

The action took place in the North Sea off Jutland, Denmark between the main Battle Fleets of the British and German Navies. The first sight enemy in sight position made by HMS *Galatea* at 1410 hrs was at 56° 48N 5° 51E.

The German plan was to draw the British Battle Cruiser Fleet based at Rosyth onto the superior numbers of the Main German Fleet. But the previous afternoon the German signal to prepare to leave port had been intercepted and decoded. At 1728hrs the Admiralty signalled for the Grand Fleet raise steam.

So the Battle Cruiser Fleet at Rosyth began to leave port shortly after 2200hrs on the 30th. With the main Battleship Squadrons leaving from Scapa Flow and Invergordon.

The British Battle cruisers engaged the German Scout Group about 1600hrs with all ships moving in a south-east direction and soon 2 British battle cruisers had been sunk. The rest continued to the south-east and by 1700hrs the main German battle fleet was in sight ahead of them. The British then turned to the north and headed towards the main British battle Fleet chased by the German ships.

At 1800 hrs the main British Battle Fleet sighted their battlecruisers and were advised the main German Fleet was close behind. So the Battle Fleet began manoeuvring from the cruising formation of six columns in line abreast each with four ships; to a single column in line ahead with 24 ships following one another, six miles in length.

The British battleships opened fire as the German ships became visible, and by 1830 hours all were engaged. At 1835 hrs the German Fleet was ordered to turn away having scored no hits on the main British Battle Fleet. In the poor visibility caused by mist, funnel-smoke, fires and cordite it was not readily clear where the Germans had gone and by 1845 hrs the British battleships having no clear targets had ceased fire. A confusing action continued as destroyers fired torpedoes causing ships to make evasive maneuvers and soon after night fell. However the action between mainly destroyers and cruisers continued into the night.

The British tried to position themselves between the German ships and their home port at Wilhelmshaven, but there were two possible routes through the minefields.

So the Germans made port claiming victory as they had sunk more British ships than they had lost. But many German ships had been damaged.

The British Fleets returned to port during Friday 02-June, the morning for ships at Rosyth and the middle part of the day at Scapa Flow. By evening the British had 24 battleships ready for sea, the Germans could only muster 10.

(The German High Seas fleet only set out beyond the minefields off the German coast on three more occasions, twice in 1916 and once in 1918. On the 18/19-August-1916 they intended to bombard Sunderland and draw the British Battlecruiser Fleet onto the main High Seas Fleet. Again Room 40's intelligence reported this and the Grand Fleet sailed in response. But about dawn HMS Nottingham was torpedoed by U-52 and the Grand Fleet thinking she had hit a mine, reversed course for two hours until the situation clarified. By 1400Hrs the British Battle Fleet with 29 battleships was at action stations and steaming south. However at 1435 hours the German Fleet with half that number turned for home as U-53 reported the Grand Fleet 65 miles to their north.

So another decisive battle never took place. But the *German Fleet* knew the *British Grand Fleet* was unbeatable.)

So Jutland was, and will forever remain, the only battle ever to take place between opposing battleship fleets.

Information gathered from the following sites

Britain's Navy UK Ships

<http://www.britainsnavy.co.uk/Ships/HMS%20Superb/HMS%20Superb%20Battlehonours.htm>

Admiral Nelson

<http://www.admiralnelson.info/Trafalgar.htm>