

## THE BRITISH PACIFIC FLEET AND THE 27<sup>TH</sup> DESTROYER FLOTILLA

From 17 Jan 45, Rear-Admiral (Destroyers) was Rear-Admiral John Edelsten CB CBE. The 27<sup>th</sup> Destroyer Flotilla (27DF) was part of the British Pacific Fleet (BPF) in the final year of the Second World War, 1944-45. Captain 'D' of the 27<sup>th</sup> Destroyer Flotilla - D27 - was in HMS *Kempenfelt* and the ships in the Flotilla were, in order of seniority:

**HMS *Kempenfelt*** (Captain Eric G MacGregor DSO RN from 10 Feb 45)<sup>1</sup>

**HMS *Whelp*** (Commander George A F Norfolk RN from 28 Feb 44)

**HMS *Whirlwind*** (Commander William A F Hawkins OBE DSO DSC RN from 14 Jun 44)

**HMS *Wager*** (Lieutenant-Commander Roland C Watkin RN from 28 Feb 44)

**HMS *Wessex*** (Lieutenant-Commander Richard Horncastle RN from 27 Mar 44)<sup>2</sup>

**HMS *Wizard*** (Lieutenant-Commander R H Hodgkinson DSC RN from 27 Dec 44)<sup>3</sup>

**HMS *Wrangler*** (Lieutenant-Commander Derek W Austin RN from 10 Apr 44)<sup>4</sup>

**HMS *Wakeful*** (Lieutenant-Commander George D Pound DSC RN from 17 Jan 44)<sup>5</sup>

### Date each ship of the 27<sup>th</sup> Destroyer Flotilla (27DF) arrived in the Pacific

(All bar HMS *Wessex* and HMS *Wizard* were based at Trincomalee until 16 Jan 45; HMS *Wessex* departed Trincomalee slightly later. HMS *Wizard* was in refit in UK until April 1945)

**HMS *Kempenfelt*** - sailed 14 Oct 44 from Gibraltar with HM Destroyers *Wakeful*, *Whirlwind* and *Wrangler* in company for passage to Ceylon. Arrived Trincomalee and transferred to the British Pacific Fleet with 27DF on formation 23 Nov 44.

**HMS *Wager*** - sailed Aden 31 Aug 44, arriving Addu Atoll on 7 Sep, before reaching Colombo 9 Sep and Trincomalee on 12 Sep 44.

**HMS *Wakeful*** - sailed Aden 31 Aug 44 in company with HMS *Wager*.

**HMS *Wessex*** - left Aden and arrived at Kilindini 4 Sep 44 for Flotilla duties before reaching Trincomalee by 14 Oct 44.

**HMS *Whelp*** - passage with 27DF Sep 44; arrived Trincomalee by 14 Oct 44.

**HMS *Whirlwind*** - in company with HMS *Kempenfelt*.

**HMS *Wizard*** - sailed UK in May/ Jun 45 post-refit; arrived Sydney Aug 45.

**HMS *Wrangler*** - in company with HMS *Kempenfelt*; joined BPF in Ceylon 13 Dec 44.

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<sup>1</sup> HMS *Kempenfelt* was first commanded by Lieutenant-Commander J B Marjoribanks RN from 31 Aug 43 to 24 April 44. He was succeeded by Captain Manley L Power CBE RN (Captain D26?), who left on 9 Jul 44 and the ship began refit and transferred to D27 the next month. Confirmation is needed that she was commanded between July 1944 and 10 Feb 45 by Temporary Acting Lieutenant-Commander J F Dibben RNVR.

<sup>2</sup> The First Lieutenant of HMS *Wessex* was an Australian, Lieutenant (John) Michael (Avison) Parker RN. He later became Private Secretary to HRH The Duke of Edinburgh. He died in 2001 (see obituary at [http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi\\_qn4158/is\\_20020104/ai\\_n9670306/pg\\_1?tag=artBody;col1](http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_qn4158/is_20020104/ai_n9670306/pg_1?tag=artBody;col1) and [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John\\_Michael\\_Avison\\_Parker\\_\(Royal\\_Household\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John_Michael_Avison_Parker_(Royal_Household)))

<sup>3</sup> Lieutenant-Commander D T McBarnet DSC RN was the first Commanding Officer, joining at Vickers-Armstrong, Barrow on 21 Feb 44. He is likely to have left the ship when she paid off for repairs in Middlesbrough in June/July 1944. Lt Cdr R H Hodgkinson DSC\* RN retired as a Lt Cdr and died on 22 Jan 96.

<sup>4</sup> Lieutenant-Commander Edgar G Warren RN relieved Lt Cdr Austin (srty 27 Mar 42, retired as Lt Cdr and in The Navy List of Retired Officers 1996) in command on 26 Mar 45

<sup>5</sup> Lieutenant-Commander George Dudley Pound RN joined as a Lieutenant on 17 Jan 44 and was promoted to Lt Cdr on 1 Feb 44. He is clearly related to Admiral of the Fleet Sir Dudley Pound, who was First Sea Lord for the first years of the war; he resigned owing to ill health on 5 Oct 43 and died 21 Oct 43.

## Destroyer Depot Ship - HMS Tyne<sup>6</sup>

Before and during the Second World War, naval ratings were port based - they were Chatham ratings, Portsmouth ratings or Devonport ratings (the C, P or D before their official number, as in P/JX 152459). Sailors often referred to their home base port as 'the Depot'.

Depot ships, in addition to the repair facilities for vessels that could not carry out other than simple self-maintenance, catered for flotilla vessels providing base and personnel services which smaller ships lacked.

With the Royal Navy's two major bases in the Pacific in the hands of the enemy, other bases had to be established to address the needs of a significant fleet the size of the British Pacific Fleet. The vastness of the Pacific Ocean, and the relative isolation of some of the areas of operation, also presented problems for administration of smaller ships.

The larger warships in task groups would have offered limited support to smaller ships. The Fleet Train set up to operate with the BPF would have offered support for smaller ships' immediate needs - fuel, water, victualling and naval stores - but they were not their depots, not their accounting bases.

The Depot Ship HMS *Tyne* was the accounting base for the 27<sup>th</sup> Destroyer Flotilla for most of the Pacific war. HMS *Tyne* was built in 1940 as a Destroyer Depot Ship (10,850 tons, 8 x 4.5-inch guns and AA guns, with a complement of 818 officers and men). From March 1941 she was the flagship of Rear-Admiral (Destroyers) Home Fleet at Scapa Flow and served with the Home Fleet until 18 Aug 44 when she left for a refit on the Clyde to prepare her for service in the Pacific. She sailed in mid-November 1944 and arrived in Trincomalee on 11 Dec 44, joining the Fleet Train as the flagship of Rear-Admiral (Destroyers), British Pacific Fleet. She was the Depot Ship (and accounting base) for the 27<sup>th</sup> Destroyer Flotilla until 21 Jul 44 and again from 1 Jan 45 to 30 Nov 45. (From 22 Jul 44 until the end of the year, the Flotilla's depot and accounting base was ashore in HMS *Highflyer*, the naval base at Trincomalee, Ceylon).

### Accounting bases from 1 Dec 45 onwards

From 1 Dec 45, the Flotilla's accounting base was HMS *Victory III*, by this time in Commercial Chambers, Portsmouth and then, for those serving with the Reserve Fleet on 1 Jun 46, accounts transferred to the Fleet Repair Ship HMS *Resource* (1928), headquarters ship for the Reserve Fleet in Portsmouth. This is shown on a rating's Service Certificates, for example, as:

Tyne (Wager)

16 June 44 - 21 July 44

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<sup>6</sup> See photograph at <http://www.britains-smallwars.com/suez/Communications-Overview.html>

Highflyer (Wager)	22 July 44 - 31 Dec 44
Tyne (Wager)	1 Jan 45 - 30 Nov 45
Victory III (Wager)	1 Dec 45 - 30 April 46
Victory III (Whelp) (Wager)	1 May 46 - 31 May 46
Resource (Whelp) (Wager)	1 June 46 - 20 May 47

Note - (Whelp) (Wager), above, would indicate that the two ships had both de-stored after paying off and reduced to Reserve Fleet status, with one skeleton ship's company working on board the two ships; they may have been moored alongside one another in the north of Portsmouth Harbour, requiring those on board to 'commute' daily to the dockyard by PAS boat.

**The Commanders in the Pacific** - *flags of admirals were flown at sea unless indicated*

**British Pacific Fleet** (all appointments from 22 Nov 44 and extant VJ Day, 15 Aug 45)

**Admiral Sir Bruce Fraser** GCB KBE - Commander-in-Chief British Pacific Fleet (flagship - briefly HMS *Howe* at Trincomalee and then HMS *Duke of York* in Sydney, although his HQ was ashore, from November 1944; he was Commander-in-Chief East Indies Fleet from August to November 1944)

**Vice-Admiral Sir Bernard Rawlings** KCB KBE- Second-in-Command British Pacific Fleet (flagship - HMS *King George V*)

**Acting Vice-Admiral C S Daniel** CBE DSO - Vice-Admiral (Administration) - known as VA (Q) and based in Melbourne from the spring of 1944; after the surrender, transferred his flag to HMS *Anson*

**Rear-Admiral Sir Philip Vian** KCB KBE DSO - Flag Officer Commanding First Aircraft Carrier Squadron, from 23 Feb 45 (flagship - HMS *Indomitable* and, from July 1945, HMS *Formidable*)

**Rear-Admiral D B Fisher** CB CBE - Rear-Admiral Fleet Train (RAFT), in Sydney, from October 1944 and based in his flagship HMS *Lothian* in Manus from 2 Mar 45 and, from 29 May 45, the flagship was HMS *Montclare* which sailed from Manus on 31 May 45 for Brisbane and back to Manus arriving 30 Jun 45

**Rear-Admiral Cecil H J Harcourt** CB - Flag Officer Commanding Eleventh Aircraft Carrier Squadron, from 1 Mar 45 (flagship - HMS *Indomitable*)

**Rear-Admiral E J P Brind** CB CBE - commanding Fourth Cruiser Squadron (flagship - HMS *Swiftsure*)

**Rear-Admiral John H Edelsten** CB CBE - Rear-Admiral (Destroyers), from 17 Jan 45 (flagship was the Depot Ship HMS *Tyne* but his flag would shift to a cruiser when at sea and was flown in HMS *Euryalus* while part of TF57)

**Rear-Admiral R M Servaes** CBE - Flag Officer Commanding Third Cruiser Squadron (flagship - HMS *Belfast*)

**Rear-Admiral Reginald H Portal** - Flag Officer Naval Air Pacific (FONAP), based at Sydney, from 1944

**Rear-Admiral James W Rivett-Carnac** - Rear-Admiral (Q), based at Melbourne, from 1 Apr 45 (perhaps succeeded **Rear-Admiral D B Fisher**, above?)

**Commodore Edmund M Evans-Lombe** RN - Chief of Staff to Commander-in-Chief British Pacific Fleet, based ashore in Sydney

**Commodore R P Carne** RN - Commander 30<sup>th</sup> Aircraft Carrier Squadron and Commodore Fleet Train (COFT) - broad pennant variously in HMS *Striker* and in HMS *Ruler* (see

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/ww2peopleswar/stories/09/a8109209.shtml>)

**Commodore H S Murray-Smith** RN - Commodore Air Train (COMAT) - broad pennant in HMS *Pioneer*

**Commodore [A N Other]** - Commodore Royal Naval Barracks, HMS *Golden Hind*, Sydney

### East Indies Fleet (appointments extant VJ Day, 15 Aug 45)

**Acting Admiral Sir Arthur Power** KCB CVO - Commander-in-Chief East Indies Fleet (from November 1944, ashore in Colombo)

**Admiral Sir James Somerville** KCB KBE DSO - Commander-in-Chief East Indies Fleet (to August 1944 when relieved by Admiral **Fraser** - see above)

**Vice-Admiral Harold T C Walker** CB - Flag Officer Commanding Third Battle Squadron (from 4 Dec 44, flagship - HMS *Queen Elizabeth?*)

**Vice-Admiral Clement Moody** CB - Flag Officer (Air) East Indies Station, commanding Aircraft Carriers and naval air stations (appointed when Rear-Admiral, 1 Dec 43)

**Rear-Admiral Randolph S G Nicholson** - Second-in-Command East Indies Fleet and Flag Officer Ceylon - from 6 Apr 44, ashore in Colombo

**Rear-Admiral Wilfred R Patterson** CB CVO - commanding Fifth Cruiser Squadron, from Mar 45 (succeeded **Rear-Admiral A D Read**)

**Commodore A L Poland** CB CBE DSO RN - Commodore (Destroyers) East Indies, from 4 Jun 44 - known as Commodore (D) - broad pennant for first month in HMAS *Napier* and later in HMS *Roebuck* when with Force 62 in April 1945

**Commodore [A N Other]** - Commodore Superintendent Ceylon

**Commodore [A N Other]** - Commodore-in-Command, HMS *Highflyer*, Trincomalee Ceylon

**Commodore E A Aylmer** DSC RN - HMS *Sheba*, Aden

**Rear-Admiral Richard Shelley** - Flag Officer East Africa and Admiral Superintendent, Kilindini, Kenya, from 1 Feb 44

### United States

**Fleet Admiral Ernest J King** - Commander-in-Chief US Fleet and Chief of Naval Operations (HQ in Washington DC); he was promoted Fleet Admiral on 17 Dec 44. (He famously said that civilians should be told nothing until the war was over, and then only who had won!).

**General Douglas MacArthur** - Supreme Commander of Allied Forces South-West Pacific (SWPA - from March 1942; HQ in Brisbane from April 1942 to October 1944 and thence in Manila); Commander US Army Pacific from April 1945 and Supreme Commander Allied Powers (SCAP) after the surrender of Japan; he was promoted to General of the Army on 18 Dec 44. (After his retreat from the

Philippines, he famously said “I will return” - and he did, at Leyte, in October 1944).

**Fleet Admiral Chester W Nimitz** - Commander-in-Chief Pacific Naval Forces (C-in-C Pac) and Commander-in-Chief Pacific Ocean Areas (CINCPAC) from 7 Oct 43 (HQ in Pearl Harbor and, from January 1945, in Guam); he was promoted Fleet Admiral on 19 Dec 44

**Admiral William ‘Bull’ Halsey** - Commander, US Third Fleet from September 1944 to January 1945 and again from May 1945 to the end of the war (flagship - USS *Missouri*). He had been previously Commander of Carriers, US Pacific Fleet

**Vice-Admiral Raymond A Spruance** - Commander, US Fifth Fleet from April 1944 which, in January 1945 absorbed Halsey’s Third Fleet (flagship - USS *Indianapolis*)

**Admiral R K Turner (?)** - Commander of the Joint Expeditionary Force of 182,000 troops in over 1,400 ships and craft that made the assault on Okinawa.

**Vice-Admiral Marc A Mitscher** - Commander, Task Force 58 from 21 March 1944 (flagship - USS *Lexington*)

### Supreme Allied Commander South-East Asia (SEAC)

**Admiral Lord Louis Mountbatten** GCVO CB DSO - Supreme Allied Commander SEAC (from October 1943; HQ in Kandy, Ceylon from June 1944)

**Lieutenant-General Sir William Slim** KCB CBE DSO MC - Commander, Fourteenth Army (from May 1945)

**Vice-Admiral Geoffrey J A Miles** - Deputy Naval Commander, South-East Asia

### Ceylon

**Admiral Sir Geoffrey Layton** KCB KBE KCMG DSO - Commander-in-Chief Ceylon (until 8 Jan 45)

**General Sir Edward Wetherall** KCB - Commander-in-Chief Ceylon (from 8 Jan 45)

**Air Vice-Marshal John D’Albaic** RAF - Air Officer Commanding No.222 Group, Ceylon (AOC Ceylon)

### British Pacific Fleet - principal units

**Task Force 57 (TF57)** - the British Pacific Fleet (Task Force 112) and its Fleet Train (Task Force 113) while part of the US Fifth Fleet from March to August 1945; it was the largest and most powerful British fleet of the Second World War.

**Force 63** - virtually the whole of the British Pacific Fleet, minus HMS *Howe* and, initially, HMS *Ceylon* and HMS *Wessex*. Force 63 undertook air strikes on the oil refineries at Palembang, in Sumatra, in January 1945.

**Force 65** - commanded by Rear-Admiral Sir Philip Vian, with his flag in the aircraft carrier HMS *Indomitable*, the carriers HMS *Indefatigable* and HMS *Victorious*, escorted by four cruisers, HM Ships *Argonaut*, *Black Prince*, *Ceylon*,

and *Suffolk* and eight destroyers of the 26<sup>th</sup> and 27<sup>th</sup> Destroyer Flotillas, led by HMS *Grenville* and HMS *Kempenfelt*, undertook strikes on Sumatran oil fields in Operational Lentil, the second part of Operation *Outflank* in January 1945.

**Force 67** - commanded by Rear-Admiral Sir Philip Vian, with his flag in the aircraft carrier HMS *Indomitable*, and the carrier HMS *Illustrious*, escorted by three cruisers and five destroyers of the 27<sup>th</sup> Destroyer Flotilla, led by HMS *Kempenfelt*, undertook strikes on Sumatran oil fields as part of Operation *Outflank* and Operation *Robson* in December 1944. See Force 69.

**Force 69** - the oiler group that supported Force 67, with the tanker RFA *Wave King*, escorted by the other two destroyers of the 27<sup>th</sup> Destroyer Flotilla, HMS *Whelp* and HMS *Wager*. See Force 67. (Another Force 69 replenishment group was constituted in January 1945 for the attacks on Palembang, but no destroyers of the 27<sup>th</sup> Destroyer Flotilla were part of Force 69).

**Task Force 112 (TF112)** - the Fleet Train and escorting force.

**Task Force 113 (TF113)** - the Fleet Train.

**4<sup>th</sup> Cruiser Squadron** - HM Ships *Argonaut*, *Black Prince*, *Ceylon* and *Euryalus*

**25<sup>th</sup> Destroyer Flotilla** - HMS *Grenville* and the U class

**27<sup>th</sup> Destroyer Flotilla** - HMS *Kempenfelt* and the W class (including HMS *Wager*)

Battleships - 4 (HM Ships *Duke of York*, *King George V*, *Anson*, *Howe*)

Fleet Aircraft Carriers - 5 (HM Ships *Victorious*, *Formidable*, *Indefatigable*, *Indomitable*, *Implacable*)

Light Fleet Aircraft Carriers - 4 (HM Ships *Colossus*, *Glory*, *Venerable*, *Vengeance*)

Escort Aircraft Carriers - 8 (Attacker + Ruler classes + HMS *Vindex*)

Cruisers - 10 (incl 1 RCN and 2 RNZN-manned; *Leander*, *Southampton*, *Dido*, *Fiji* + *Minotaur* classes)

Fast Minelayers - 3 (HM Ships *Apollo*, *Ariadne*, *Manxman*)

Destroyer Depot Ships - 2 (HMS *Tyne* and HMS *Montclare*)

Destroyers - 40 (N (all RAN-manned), Q (2 RAN), T, U, W and *Battle* classes + 1 RCN V class)

Submarines

Minor war vessels

Fleet Train

### United States Pacific Fleet - principal units

**Task Force 58** - Fast Carrier Force of the US Fifth Fleet

### East Indies Fleet - principal units

Battleships - 2 (HMS *Nelson* + FS *Richelieu*)

Escort Aircraft Carriers - 16 (Attacker + Ruler classes)

Cruisers - 12 (incl 2 Dutch; *Kent*, *London*, *Norfolk*, *Leander*, *Dido* + *Fiji* classes)

Destroyer Depot Ships - 1 (HMS *Woolwich* + destroyer HMS *Scout* as her tender)  
Destroyers - 34 (P, R, V, Z, Ca and Tribal classes + 2 Dutch, 1 French, 1 Italian)  
Escort Destroyers - 9 (Hunt class)  
Submarines  
Frigates  
Minor war vessels  
Landing ships

### **British naval aircraft in Naval Air Squadrons of the Fleet Air Arm**

Fighters and fighter-bombers: Hellcat, Corsair, Seafire, Firefly  
Bomber: Avenger  
Reconnaissance and air-sea rescue: Walrus

### **Selected bases, depot ships, shore establishments and RN Air Stations**

HMS *Bambara* - RNAS Trincomalee, Ceylon  
HMS *Bherunda* - RNAS Colombo, Ceylon  
HMS *Braganza* - shore base in Bombay  
HMS *Golden Hind* - Royal Naval Barracks, Sydney, New South Wales  
HMS *Highflyer* - shore base in Trincomalee, Ceylon  
HMS *Lanka* - shore base in Colombo, Ceylon  
HMS *Maraga* - shore base in Addu Atoll  
HMS *Pangkor* - shore base in Bombay  
HMS *Sambur* - shore base in Plaisance, Mauritius  
HMS *Sheba* - shore base in Aden  
HMS *Tamar* - shore base in Hong Kong (lost to Japan 25 Dec 41)  
HMS *Tana* - shore base in Kilindini, Kenya  
HMS *Terror* - shore base and dockyard in Singapore (lost to Japan 15 Mar 42)

### **Battle Honours**

Battle honours were awarded for the following actions and campaigns in which ships and naval air squadrons of the British Pacific Fleet took part:

**EAST INDIES 1944** - for actions in the Indian Ocean, including the Red Sea, Bay of Bengal and the Arabian Sea

**EAST INDIES 1945** - for actions in the Indian Ocean, including the Red Sea, Bay of Bengal and the Arabian Sea (mostly ships of the East Indies Fleet, not those of the British Pacific Fleet)

**PALEMBANG 1945** - for the air strikes on 24 Jan 45 and 29 Jan 45

**OKINAWA 1945** - during the period 26 Mar 45 to 25 May 45

**JAPAN 1945** - for ships and aircraft involved in the final attacks and bombardments of Japanese mainland and ships 16 Jul 45 to 11 Aug 45

**Gazetteer** (names as used in 1944-45) add note about key battles and complete notes about the dates of occupation and liberation

**Addu Atoll** - in the Maldives, it became a base for the British Eastern Fleet (later East Indies Fleet), away from less well defended Ceylon.

**Aden** - a port and British naval base on the south-western coast of the Arabian Peninsula, it is now part of the Yemen.

**Admiralty Islands** - a group of islands in the Pacific Ocean, in the north of the Bismarck Sea, some 200 miles north-east of what was then the Australian mandate of New Guinea, of which they formed a part; see Manus below. Occupied by the Japanese in April 1942, an American force, supported by Australians, landed on Los Negros Island on 29 Feb 44, securing the group by 18 May 44. From that time US Navy Seabees (CBs - Construction Battalions) transformed Manus and Los Negros into the largest US naval and air base in the south-west Pacific. The Admiralty Islands are now part of Papua New Guinea.

**Akyab** - a key port on the Arakan coast, the west coast, of Burma, about 100 miles south of the border with India (now Bangladesh); now known as Sittwe.

**Alexandria** - major port and British naval base on Egypt's Mediterranean coast.

**Algiers** - port and capital of Algeria, then a French colony, important in both the Desert War and in the battle for supremacy in the Mediterranean Sea.

**Auckland** - port and principal naval base of New Zealand, on North Island.

**Barisan range** - mountain range along the south-west coast of the island of Sumatra.

**Bay of Bengal** - between the east coast of India and the west coast of Burma.

**Belawan Deli** - the port of the city of Medan, on the north-west coast of the island of Sumatra, near the north end of the Strait of Malacca.

**Bonin Islands** - known as Ogasawara-shoto, a group of islands in the Pacific Ocean belonging to Japan, some 750 miles south of Honshu, the main island of Japan, midway between Tokyo and the Mariana Islands (see Iwo Jima).

**Borneo** - a large island at the southern end of the South China Sea, between the Philippines and Sumatra, the main part is Indonesia, and the northern third part of Malaya (now Sarawak, Sabah and Brunei).

**Brisbane** - port and capital of Queensland, north eastern Australia.

**Burma** - then a British colony and occupied by the Japanese in 1942, it was the scene of jungle warfare from 1941 until 1945. Independent since 1948, it is now known as the Republic of Myanmar.

**Canton** - a port in southern China, north-east of Hong Kong (now called Guangzhou).

**Caroline Islands** - 'the Carolines' are a group of islands in the Pacific Ocean some 850 miles north of New Guinea (they now part of Micronesia); see Palau Islands and Truk.

**Ceylon** - an island nation off the southern coast of India, it became independent from the UK in 1948 and was renamed Sri Lanka in 1972.

**Cochin** - the port city of Kerala on the Malabar Coast of south-west India, some 160 miles from Cape Comorin, the southern tip of India (now called Kochi).

**Darwin** - port and capital of the Northern Territory, Australia.



**Enggano Island** - in the Indian Ocean, off the south-west coast of Sumatra.

**Dutch East Indies** - see Netherlands East Indies.

**Formosa** - a large island 120km off the coast of mainland China, ceded to Japan in 1895 and part of the Japanese Empire in the Second World War; it is the former name of Taiwan (capital Taipei). *Ilha Formosa* is Portuguese for *beautiful island*.

**Fremantle** - the port of Perth, in Western Australia.

**Garden Island** - Royal Australian Navy dockyard north of Woolloomooloo in Sydney, New South Wales.

**Gibraltar** - British colony, port and naval base at the southern tip of Spain, often known as 'the Rock of Gibraltar' or 'The Rock'. Spain was neutral in the Second World War, although General Franco, *el caudillo*, was sympathetic to Germany.

**Gilbert Islands** - a group of islands in the Pacific Ocean, north of the Ellice Islands (now called Tuvalu) and some 1,000 miles north-east of the Solomon Islands; it is now called Kiribati.

**Glasgow** - Scotland's second city on the River Clyde and then the world's most important shipbuilding centre.

**Greenock** - a south bank port near the mouth of the River Clyde, west of Glasgow.

**Guadalcanal** - one of the Solomon Islands (qv), where the first real test of land strength between Japan and the USA in the Pacific war took place. The bloody and protracted battle for this steamy, malaria-ridden, rain-sodden island began on 7 Aug 42 and lasted to January 1943 with a number of different naval battles: the Battles of Savo Island, of Cape Esperance, (First and Second) of Guadalcanal and of Tassafaronga in 1942. There were high numbers of American casualties, some 6,111 US army and marine casualties, including 1,752 dead, and substantial naval losses. However, Guadalcanal is now seen as a major turning-point in the Pacific war from which Japan never recovered.

**Guam** - a US unincorporated territory, an island at the southern end of the North Mariana Islands, some 1,400 miles east of the Philippines. It was occupied by the Japanese at the start of the Pacific war and recaptured by the Americans in July 1944; it now has a large US military base.

**Haiphong** - a port on the east coast of Vietnam, in the Gulf of Tongking, it is sometimes known as Hai Phong.

**Hong Kong** - British colony and naval base on the southern coast of Canton province, China (returned to China on 30 Jun 97).

**India** - the 'jewel in the crown' of the British Empire, India was then all of what is today India, Pakistan and Bangladesh. Independence came in 1947.

**Indonesia** - an important part of the Netherlands East Indies until 1949.

**Irrawaddy** - the great river of Burma, the Mouths of the Irrawaddy are at the very south of the country (and what is now called Myanmar).

**Iwo Jima** - one of the Bonin Islands, and part of the of the Japanese Empire, this small island now known as Iwo Jima is to the south-west of the volcanic island of Kazan-retto, just north of the Tropic of Cancer, and some 1,300 miles due east of Formosa.

**Jervis Bay** - a port south of Sydney and strictly in New South Wales, Australia, it is properly called Jervis Bay Territory and is considered as part of the Australian Capital Territory (as, indeed, the port of Canberra).

**Kerama Retto** - a group of mostly uninhabited islands in the same group as Okinawa, the landing beaches were used as a staging post in late March 1945 by the Americans for the advance on Okinawa.

**Kilindini** - a natural harbour and port, serving as the port of Mombasa in Kenya on the east coast of Africa.

**Kure** - port city and Japanese naval base south-east of the city of Hiroshima, on the main island of Honshu, Japan.

**Leyte Gulf** - between the islands of Samar and Leyte in the Philippines.

**Luzon** - an island in the north of the Philippines on which is situated the capital, Manila.

**Malacca Straits** (*aka* Strait of Malacca) - the stretch of sea between the Malay Peninsula and Sumatra.

**Malaya** - a British colony occupying the Malay Peninsula and northern Borneo, and now called Malaysia (and Singapore, now independent), it was invaded by the Japanese in December 1941 and occupied in early 1942.

**Maldives** - an archipelago off the south-western tip of India.

**Malta GC** - a British colony and important strategic island in the centre of the Mediterranean Sea, midway on the sea route from Gibraltar (990 miles) to Alexandria (820 miles); the island was awarded the George Cross in 1942 by King George VI and was granted independence in 1964.

**Manila** - capital of the Philippines, on the island of Luzon.

**Manus** - an island, the westernmost of the Admiralty Islands in the Pacific Ocean, some 200 miles north-east of what was then the Australian mandate of New Guinea, of which they formed a part. Occupied by the Japanese in April 1942, an American force, supported by Australians, landed at Los Negros Island (off the eastern coast of Manus) on 29 Feb 44, securing Manus and the group by 18 May 44. From that time US Navy Seabees (CBs - Construction Battalions) transformed Manus and Los Negros into the largest US naval and air base in the south-west Pacific. The base on Manus Island was at Seeadler Harbour, where up to 600 ships were sometimes at anchor.

**Mariana Islands** - belonging to the USA, 'the Marianas' is a group of islands in the North Pacific Ocean to the north-west of Guam; one of the islands is Saipan.

**Medan** - a city in the north-west of the island of Sumatra, close to northern end of the Strait of Malacca. The important oil refineries at Pangkalan Brandan were nearby.

**Melbourne** - port and capital of Victoria, second city of Australia.

**Naha** - the capital of the Japanese island of Okinawa (qv).

**Netherlands East Indies (NEI)** - a Dutch colony including the islands of Java, Sumatra, Dutch Borneo (all now Indonesia), Dutch New Guinea, Celebes, western Timor and Moluccas. Vital to the economy of the Netherlands, a seventh of its income came from the NEI. Oil was the most important product, mostly from Sumatra. The Japanese began their invasion in late December

1941 and by March 1942 most of Sumatra and Java were occupied, although resistance continued in Dutch Borneo until October 1942. The Dutch flag continued, however, to fly over the capital of Dutch New Guinea throughout the war. The occupied islands of the NEI were liberated during the course of mid-1945.

**New Hebrides** - the former colonial name for the group of islands in the Pacific now known as Vanuatu and New Caledonia off the north-west coast of Queensland, Australia.

**Nicobar Islands** - belonging to India, a group of islands in the Andaman Sea, at the south of the Bay of Bengal, due south of Burma.

**Okinawa** - the key island in the Ryukyu Islands, in the middle of the Nansei Shoto islands, part of the Japanese Empire since 1879, midway between Formosa and Japan. It is mountainous, 61 miles long and from three to eighteen miles wide. It has a good harbour in its capital, Naha.

**Ogasawara-shoto** - see Bonin Islands.

**Palang**. Thought to be another oil refinery in northern Sumatra, near Pangkalan Brandan.

**Palau Islands** - a group of islands in the Pacific Ocean, the most westerly of the Caroline Islands, some 600 miles due west of Davao city in the south of the Philippines.

**Palembang** - a city on the River Musi in the south-east of the island of Sumatra, part of the Indonesian archipelago in the NEI (qv), it was strategically important because of the Royal Dutch Shell oil refineries at Sangaigerong in the southern suburbs and at Plajoe (sometimes Plaju, Pladju or Pladjoe), just a few miles to the east, and adjacent airfields. It was taken by the Japanese in a battle in mid-February 1942.

**Pangkalan Brandan** - a village in north-west Sumatra, with important oil refineries, fifty miles north-west of the city of Medan (qv).

**Pangkalan Soe Soe** - also known as Pangkalansusu, a port town in north-west Sumatra, eight miles from the important oil refineries at Pangkalan Brandan (qv).

**Pearl Harbour** (Pearl Harbor) - a US naval base in the island of Oahu, in the Hawaiian Islands, a little west of Honolulu, the capital. It was attacked by naval aircraft on 7 Dec 41 and brought the United States into the Second World War.

**Penang** - an island off the east coast of Malaya, in the Straits of Malacca; it is now known as Pinang.

**(The) Philippines**. An archipelago of some 7,000 islands and islets, scattered between Formosa and Borneo in the Pacific Ocean. The Japanese began their invasion in December 1941 and from mid-1942 the country was occupied by the Japanese until March 1945, American forces beginning their invasion in September 1944.

**Plajoe (Pladju or Plaju)** - see Palembang.

**Port Said** - a port in Egypt at the northern end of the Suez Canal on the Mediterranean coast.

**Portsmouth** - a port city with a large harbour, the Royal Navy's premier naval base in Hampshire, on the south coast of England.

**Rabaul** - a town on the coast of East New Britain province, Papua New Guinea.

**Rangoon** - capital of Burma.

**Ryukyu archipelago** - midway between Formosa and Japan. See Okinawa.

**Sagami-wan** - Sagami Bay, the outer bay of Tokyo Bay, Japan.

**Sakishima Gunto** - a group of small islands, in the larger Nansei Shoto group of islands, about 200 miles north-west of Taipei in northern Formosa, and midway between Formosa and Okinawa.

**Sangaigerong** - see Palembang.

**Scapa Flow** - a large, natural, enclosed anchorage in the Orkney Islands, north of Scotland and the base of the Grand Fleet or Home Fleet in both world wars. (Scapa is pronounced as 'scapper'; the rhyming slang 'scarper' is, therefore, based on a false premise!).

**Siam** - the former name of the Kingdom of Thailand. Thailand was invaded by Japan in December 1941 and, in 1942, the Siamese prime minister declared war on the UK and USA, but not on China, with whom Japan was also at war.

However, though the UK treated Siam as an enemy, the US treated her as an enemy-occupied country. The Siamese government fell in July 1944 and the Allies regained control in the months leading to Japan's surrender in 1945.

**Simalur Island** - also known as Simeuluë Island, is some thirty miles north-east of Sumatra, in the Indian Ocean.

**Singapore** - major port, naval base and entrepôt in southern Malaya (now independent from Malaysia). The Japanese invaded Malaya, to the north, and Singapore surrendered on 15 Mar 42, and over 60,000 British and Empire troops were taken prisoner.

**Sliema Creek** - a harbour on the northern side of the peninsula of Valletta, Malta, where Royal Navy destroyers typically moored; Grand Harbour is to the south of Valletta.

**Soengo Garong** - see Sangaigerong.

**Solomon Islands** - a double-chained archipelago in the Pacific Ocean, some 600 miles long, due east of New Guinea and 1,000 miles off the north-east coast of Queensland, Australia. The islands were the scene of some of the severest fighting in the Pacific war. The Japanese occupied the islands from around May 1942 and Allied landings took place, to regain them, from February 1943 to March 1944. See Guadalcanal.

**Suez** - a port in Egypt at the southern end of the Suez Canal and at the north of the Gulf of Suez.

**Suez Canal** - an international artificial waterway in Egypt, opened in 1869, connecting the Mediterranean Sea with the Red Sea and, hence, the Indian Ocean and Far East; the main sea route from the UK to the India; it is 101 miles long and in seven parts.

**Sumatra** - an important island of the Netherlands East Indies, oil its main product; it is now in Indonesia.

**Sydney** - Australia's largest city, port and naval base, in New South Wales.

**Tokyo Bay** - the bay of the port of Tokyo, the capital of Japan.

**Trincomalee** - a port and British naval base on the east coast of Ceylon, due north-east of Colombo.

**Truk** - a small group of islands in the centre of the Caroline Islands, it was an important Japanese base; now known as Chuuk.

**Ulithi Atoll** - a small island 100 miles north-west of Yap Island in the Caroline Islands, some 850 miles north of New Guinea (now part of Micronesia).

**Valletta** - the capital of the island of Malta, on a peninsula overlooking the magnificent Grand Harbour to its south; Sliema Creek is to the north.

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## THE BRITISH PACIFIC FLEET

### *A brief overview*

#### **Historical background**

##### **The Second World War - a brief overview**

The Second World War began on 3 Sep 39 with the UK and her colonial allies, and France, declaring war on Germany. Once Italy joined the Axis, the Royal Navy's main theatres of operations were, of course, the waters around the United Kingdom and around her allies in Europe, and in the Atlantic Ocean and Mediterranean Sea, with the aim of protecting trade routes and British interests and possessions.

After the Japanese attack on the US Navy base at Pearl Harbour, on the island of O'ahu, Hawaii, on 7 Dec 41, the United States formally entered the war. What had been a war centred on Europe became truly global, with Germany declaring war on the United States and the UK and her Allies declaring war on Japan. The United States agreed in principle that the defeat of Germany should be the main priority of the Allies while it was mainly the forces of the United States which prosecuted the war against Japan in the Pacific from 1942 to 1944.

After the success of the D-Day landings in Normandy, France, on 6 June 1944 and the weeks that followed, the Allies rather expected that the war in Europe against Germany would be won before the end of 1944. In that event, the intention was that the British and Allied forces would be sent to the Pacific to support the Americans in the fight against Japan. However, Germany's repulse of Allied armies in northern Europe in late 1944 delayed the Allies and caused the war in Europe to extend into 1945. Germany surrendered on 8 May 45.

The War at Sea against Germany, however, in Home Waters, the Atlantic and in the Mediterranean and Arctic, was largely won by mid-1944. Thus the British

and her Allies were able to release warships from that time for the Pacific theatre, whereas much of their amphibious, land and air forces were required to continue the war in Europe to defeat Germany.

### The Pacific theatre

The policy of the United States, as they built up their forces in the Pacific through 1942, was to regain territory by 'island hopping', defeating Japanese land forces island by island, thus inexorably getting closer to the Japanese mainland. Admiral King summed up the policy as "Hold Hawaii; support Australasia; drive north-westwards from the New Hebrides." As this succeeded, it was hoped that a blockade of Japan, cutting her off from her overseas territories, would destroy her economy and bring her industries to a stop; failing that, an invasion of Japan herself would follow, in which case the loss of the life was expected to be huge. After the fall of Hong Kong on 25 Dec 41 and Malaya by 31 Jan 42, with the surrender of Singapore on 15 Feb 42, came the defeat of the Americans in the Philippines by 6 May 42. Japan had also taken most other strategically-important islands in the Pacific. Then came key American victories: the sea Battle of Midway (4-7 Jun 42), the landings in the Solomon Islands in August 1942, the taking of Guadalcanal in January 1943, and the assault on the Gilbert Islands in November 1943.

By early 1944 the Americans had torn a great gap in the very centre of the Japanese defensive perimeter in the Pacific. Maritime control throughout the Pacific and South-East Asia was slipping rapidly from the grasp of the Japanese, and it was clear that the tide of war had changed.

By early June 1944, Admiral Nimitz's Central Pacific forces were ready for the next stage, seizing the key islands of the Marianas, the last major obstacle from the sea road leading to the Philippines. Though the Battle of the Philippine Sea was not a decisive victory, it did stop the Japanese from interfering with the invasion of the Marianas. In July and August 1944, Saipan, Guam and Tinian were secured by the Americans.

In mid-September 1944 the Americans easily took Morotai and Ulithi, though Pelelieu - the key island in the Palau group - was a longer, harder fight, the Japanese failed to prevent General MacArthur's and Admiral Nimitz's forces joining hands in the Philippine Sea.

Maritime power had been skilfully and successfully employed by the Americans in the Pacific, in successive island leaps across thousands of miles of ocean such that, by June to September 1944 the fruition of the strategic plan was realised. Naval air power and the aircraft carrier had established command of the sea and the highly trained amphibious forces exploited this taking island after island. Underlying this was the success of the Americans' attention to logistics which enabled such prolonged operations of their naval forces.

At the same time, the British Eastern Fleet, under Admiral Somerville, was gradually being reinforced from the Mediterranean and Home theatres and he was beginning to assume the offensive in the Indian Ocean. However, the amphibious forces that the Supreme Commander in SE Asia, Admiral Mountbatten, required to mount a combined operation across the Bay of Bengal were still being held back by the war in Europe. Admiral Somerville was relieved by Admiral Fraser on 23 Aug 44.

There were disagreements about strategy between the UK and America. Whereas the British wanted the Royal Navy to play a greater part in the Pacific theatre, the Americans expressed a desire for the British to focus on keeping open the supply route to India. There was a feeling that, in truth, the Americans were not enthusiastic about the return of the White Ensign to the main Pacific theatre. Issues were not resolved until the second Quebec conference in September 1944 when President Roosevelt replied to Prime Minister Winston Churchill's offer of a British fleet for the Pacific theatre that "it was no sooner offered than accepted." Even at that very conference, it was clear that the US Chief of Naval Operations, Admiral King, who was no Anglophile, was not keen.

By this time Japanese maritime power was too far gone in defeat for it to be able move its land forces around - Japan no longer had command of the seas. By the autumn of 1944, it was General MacArthur who was insisting that the proper strategy was to continue the advance by sea, island by island, towards the Japanese mainland, while the US Navy appeared to prefer a strike from the Philippines across to the coast of China. General MacArthur prevailed.

In mid-October the Eastern Fleet sailed to strike at Nicobar Islands once more. This operation was planned to divert Japanese attention from the Philippines, where the Americans landed on 20 Oct 44, at Leyte Gulf.

### The British Pacific Fleet (BPF)

On 22 Nov 44 Admiral Fraser assumed the title of Commander-in-Chief British Pacific Fleet and his former command, the Eastern Fleet, now renamed the East Indies Fleet, was taken over by Vice-Admiral Power.

By the end of 1944 the sweeps and air attacks by the East Indies Fleet, the patrols in offshore waters by British submarines (the 8<sup>th</sup> Submarine Flotilla had moved from Ceylon to Western Australia in September 1944), and the minelaying by Allied aircraft had so far deprived the Japanese of the control of the Bay of Bengal; thus few supplies could get through to the enemy armies in Burma and Siam. The Fourteenth Army in Burma had taken the offensive and, on 2 Jan 45, the key port of Akyab, in the Arakan, was taken by a Royal Marines Commando brigade, preparations being made to take the whole of the coast.

At the same time, the British Pacific Fleet was beginning to form in Ceylon, at the British naval base of Trincomalee. On 4 Dec 44, Admiral Fraser flew to Australia where its main base was to be established at Sydney. He then flew on to Pearl Harbour for discussions with Admiral Nimitz to decide the deployment of his Fleet<sup>7</sup>.

The Japanese first employed suicide tactics by sending Kamikaze<sup>8</sup> pilots in bomb-laden planes to immolate themselves on the decks of Allied warships; the first such attack was in October 1944 on the cruiser HMAS *Australia*. In the succeeding weeks such attacks were almost daily but few ships were lost this way, though many suffered damage.

A Japanese Navy sortie on 22 Oct 44 did imperil the success of the landings in the Philippines when it attempted to lure Admiral Halsey's powerful fleet away from its role of covering the landings. However, the Japanese missed the opportunity of succeeding in the following days and, all told, they lost four carriers in what became known as the Battle of Leyte Gulf. After these heavy losses, the Japanese Navy was never again able to assemble a balanced fleet.

After Leyte Gulf, Allied operations in the Philippines prospered. General MacArthur was a skilful user of maritime assets and by early 1945 he was ready to advance on Luzon where lay the capital city of Manila - the focus of his intent, since his expulsion in defeat in 1942.

At the beginning of 1945 the British Pacific Fleet was still in the Indian Ocean, where the carriers were re-equipping and training their aircrews.

On 4 Jan 45 Admiral Vian attacked the oil refineries at Belawan Deli, in Sumatra, with aircraft from three carriers. But this operation was really only a preliminary to the heavier blow which the British intended to strike while on passage to Australia. On 16 Jan 45 Admiral Vian left Ceylon with four carriers, one battleship, three cruisers and ten destroyers to attack the two big refineries at Palembang, in eastern Sumatra, from where Japan was supplied with most of its aviation fuel. On 24 and 29 Jan 45, with a refuelling period in between, about 50 Avengers from the four carriers, escorted by some 80 fighters, devastated the refineries and inflicted heavy losses on the Japanese aircraft caught on the nearby airfields. The Battle Honour PALEMBANG 1945 was awarded to the four aircraft carriers and to each of the Fleet Air Arm squadrons involved. These were by far the most successful attacks made so far

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<sup>7</sup> In the long flight by an aircraft of NATS - the US Naval Air Transportation Service - Admiral Fraser talked with the aircrew, remarking later of the American Master Sergeant, "He earns more than I do!". From Fraser of North Cape by Richard Humble (Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1983).

<sup>8</sup> Kamikaze means Divine Wind. The name was given to the Japanese "Special Naval Attack Force" and derives from the salvation of their country in 1281, when a timely typhoon destroyed a Mongol invasion fleet.



in the Indian Ocean and, on 4 Feb 45, the fleet arrived at Fremantle, in Western Australia, full of confidence.

At Fremantle, Vice-Admiral Rawlings hoisted his flag in the battleship HMS *King George V* as second-in-command British Pacific Fleet, while Admiral Vian continued in command of the First Aircraft Carrier Squadron. Then the whole fleet pushed on to Sydney, where it arrived on 11 and 12 Feb 45, to be met by Admiral Fraser, the Commander-in-Chief, who had now established his headquarters ashore.

Long before the fighting fleet moved into the Pacific, the Admiralty had begun to prepare the floating supply organisation it would need - a "Fleet Train" on the American model. Without this, the British Pacific Fleet would not be able to operate independently at all. In the event, it was difficult to acquire the right ships, since many merchant ships were still required to bring imports into the UK and to supply our overseas armies. Some 60 ships were assembled, some commissioned under the White Ensign, tankers transferred to the RFA, some flew the Red Ensign and some came from allied merchant navies working under British colours. Their crews were as mixed in origins. This rag tag assembly, commanded by a flag officer, assembled some 12,000 miles from home, did some sterling work but we were never able to provide enough fast tankers and the lack of them was to prove a serious handicap to the British Pacific Fleet. From December 1944, the Americans agreed to the British using Manus as an intermediate base, its being supplied from Australia.

By the end of February 1945, most of the ships had arrived on their new station, and the new logistics arrangements were well advanced, the actual employment of the British fleet had not been established. MacArthur and Nimitz disagreed on its deployment and pressure was needed from London. By 15 March 1945, Admiral Rawlings was able to signal from his flagship that the fleet was ready, to which Admiral Nimitz replied that the British fleet "will add greatly to our power to strike the enemy".

The Fourteenth Army was making good progress down the Irrawaddy and the capture of Rangoon seemed certain; it was re-taken by early May. The East Indies Fleet had some much wanted success when, on 16 Feb 45, the Japanese heavy cruiser IJS *Haguro* was sunk off Penang by five destroyers of the 26<sup>th</sup> Destroyer Flotilla (Captain M L Power RN). This action in the Malacca Straits left the Allies in virtually undisputed control of the whole Indian Ocean, enabling the plan for large-scale landings on the east coast of Malaya to proceed.

Meanwhile, back in the Pacific, on 19 Feb 45, a week after Admiral Rawlings reached Sydney, the US Marines assaulted the tiny island of Iwo Jima in the Bonin Islands, their importance being that they were just 650 miles from Tokyo, with their airfields allowing allied fighter escorts for American heavy

bombers right through to the targets. The Japanese defended Iwo Jima stubbornly, and it was 16 Mar 45 before it was secured.

The next stage was a concurrent, bigger, seaborne assault on Okinawa, the key island in the Nansei Shoto, and here the BPF had a part to play. Okinawa was one of the biggest expeditions of the Pacific war, and Admiral Spruance's Fifth Fleet, of which the British contingent formed a part, totalled over 1,200 ships. American carrier crews struck airfields and naval bases on the Japanese mainland. On 23 Mar 45 attacks switched to the defences of Okinawa and, three days later, the first landings took place at Kerama Retto, where the Americans intended to set up a repair base.

The same day, 26 Mar 45, Admiral Rawlings, with HMS *King George V*, four carriers, five cruisers and eleven destroyers, took up his station off the Sakishima Gunto, with the objective of preventing the Japanese using the six airfields of the group as staging points for reinforcements flying from Formosa to Okinawa. The 218 bombers and fighters in the carriers made their first strikes on targets on 26 and 27 Mar 45. The Americans began their assault landings on 1 Apr 45.

The most dangerous Japanese reaction to the assault on Okinawa was the massed Kamikaze suicide attacks against warships offshore; HMS *Indefatigable* was hit on 6 Apr 45 but saved by her armoured flight deck. The next day, Admiral Mitscher's carrier aircrews sank the Japanese battleship IJS *Yamato*, and much of her accompanying task group, in the Battle of the East China Sea. This would be the last Japanese attempt to challenge Allied control of the sea approaches to Japan.

On 9 Apr 45 Admiral Spruance switched the British carriers to attack the airfields in northern Formosa, from which enemy bombers had been setting out to attack the invasion shipping off Okinawa; they struck at new targets on 12 and 13 Apr 45. Before returning to Leyte, at the suggestion of Admiral Rawlings, his force returned to the Sakishima group in order to neutralise airfields where there had been a revival of enemy activity.

The BPF had been working continuously for a month off the enemy's coasts when, on 20 Apr 45, Admiral Rawlings took his ships back to Leyte to replenish.

The assault forces on Okinawa had been encountering very stubborn resistance, but never enough to force the fleet to withdraw. On 1 May 45 the BPF was ready to re-enter the fray and sailed north from Leyte in much the same strength as before. Admiral Rawlings reopened his attack on the Sakishima Gunto with a battleship and cruiser bombardment of the airfields on 4 May 45. It was now that the BPF came in for their full share of kamikaze attacks. On 4 May 45 both HMS *Formidable* and HMS *Indomitable* were hit; five days later, HMS *Formidable* was hit again and another hit HMS *Victorious*. Though many

aircraft on the carriers' flight decks were destroyed, the strikes at enemy airfields continued until 25 May 45, when the fleet sailed for Manus. The Battle Honour OKINAWA 1945 was awarded to five ships of the 27<sup>th</sup> Destroyer Flotilla and to all the other British ships and naval air squadrons involved between 26 Mar 45 and 25 May 45.

From 26 Mar to 25 May 45, the first two months of the BPF's active service in the US Fifth Fleet, British carrier aircrews flew 5,335 sorties and dropped nearly 1,000 tons of bombs on enemy airfields and port installations. Aircraft losses totalled 160 but about one-third of them arose from deck landing accidents, to which the Seafire fighters (converted RAF Spitfires) were especially prone.

The campaign to take Okinawa ended on 21 Jun 45, and proved to be one of the costliest of the Pacific war, but it gained for the Allies excellent airfields within easy reach of the Japanese mainland.

General MacArthur's forces, meanwhile, had regained all of the Philippine islands and were conducting combined operations in Borneo, in order to recover oilfields in the island.

The newly arrived aircraft carrier HMS *Implacable* left Manus on 10 Jun 45 to attack the Japanese base at Truk in the Carolines, by-passed by the Americans in their great drive westwards across the central Pacific. On 28 Jun 45 the main body of the BPF sailed from Sydney to resume duty with the Third Fleet (the title of the Fifth Fleet changed when Admiral Halsey relieved Admiral Spruance in command of the American sea-going force on 28 May 45).

Admiral Rawlings and Admiral Halsey met off Japan in mid-July and discussed how the BPF should fit into his new command. They decided that the BPF should carry out carrier air attacks and heavy gun bombardment of the Japanese mainland, preparatory to final invasion which the Allies planned to launch in November 1945. The BPF thus served as an additional group of the American Fast Carrier Attack Force.

On 17 Jul 45 the BPF was in action against targets on the Japanese mainland, setting the pattern for the succeeding weeks. The BPF took no part in the final destruction of the Japanese fleet at Kure; Admiral Halsey wanted that to be solely an American affair, thus avenging Pearl Harbour.

While the onslaught on Japan's towns, dockyards, airfields and industries continued, far to the south the Royal Navy's latest midget submarines penetrated enemy waters. On 30 Jul 45, XE1 and XE3 planted their charges

under the heavy cruiser IJS *Takao*, lying off Singapore naval base, and she sank to the seabed<sup>9</sup>.

The US Third Fleet, with the BPF integrated, was prosecuting its offensive against targets on mainland Japan. The blockade of Japan was being tightened and the final stage was sealing off the Japanese islands from mainland Asia. The US Army Air Force (USAAF) carried out an intensive minelaying campaign from March to July 1945, laying over 12,000 mines in ports and channels around the Japanese coast. By the end of July 1945, Japanese shipping movements were almost at a standstill, her industries in chaos, her economy breaking down and her people starving. The blockade was far more successful than had been realised at the time.

The weather had changed dramatically and there were now frequent storms, for the typhoon season was at its height. After destroying the remnants of the Japanese fleet at Kure, the US Third Fleet, including the BPF, moved north-east up the Japanese coast and continued air attacks and bombardments of shore targets. Following a series of strikes the fighting ships withdrew to refuel.

News of the first atomic bomb over Hiroshima came on 6 Aug 45 while Admiral Rawlings' ships were striking at airfields in Honshu. Naval operations, however, continued until 11 Aug 45 when Japan accepted the terms of the Potsdam Declaration.

In the final days, hundreds of aircraft were destroyed on the Japanese mainland, dockyards and coastal factories were pulverised by bombardments and enemy shipping swept away. It is now plain that the enemy could not have waged war much longer but it was not so clear at the time.

Although many would have preferred otherwise, plans had already been made for the BPF to return to Sydney, so no fresh tankers were available. Thus on 12 Aug 45 the greater part of the BPF set course south, leaving only his flagship, HMS *King George V*, the carrier HMS *Indefatigable* and other smaller units, including a few from Australia and New Zealand, to represent the British Empire at the surrender ceremonies; these took place on board Admiral Halsey's flagship, USS *Missouri*, on 2 Sep 45 and, from the upper decks of the BPF, British sailors watched the sun set over Tokyo Bay.

In the Indian Ocean, the East Indies Fleet reached Penang on 28 Aug 45 and forces were landed at Sabang, in Sumatra, on 2 Sep 45. C-in-C East Indies Fleet arrived in Singapore the next day, to be followed by his fleet and troop

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<sup>9</sup> Lieutenant Ian Fraser was awarded the VC for this action. See [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ian\\_Edward\\_Fraser](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ian_Edward_Fraser) and <http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/comment/obituaries/article4662850.ece>

transports. On 12 Sep 45, Admiral Mountbatten accepted the surrender of all Japanese forces in his theatre at a ceremony in the Singapore Municipal Buildings.

On 30 Aug 45 Rear-Admiral Harcourt arrived in Hong Kong with a strong naval force and the surrender ceremony there took place on 16 Sep 45.

Lastly, Admiral Fraser sent a squadron to Rabaul, to receive the surrender of the 140,000 Japanese troops who had been cut off in New Britain, and the adjacent islands, for over a year. Other British warships and troop transports arrived in the Netherlands East Indies to re-establish order and start the flow of relief supplied for the civil population.

In the final phase of the war, after the surrender of Japan, the ships of the British Pacific Fleet and East Indies Fleet, and the Fleet Train, were all employed on urgent humanitarian and anti-piracy tasks. Prisoners of war, who had languished in appalling conditions for as much as three years, had to be rescued and succoured. Food and medical supplies had to be carried to the starving people of south-east Asia - and, over a vast area, order had to be re-established and maintained.

Many months elapsed before ships wearing the White Ensign had completed these duties when, to paraphrase the words of the Naval Prayer, the ship's companies could return home to "enjoy the blessings of the land and the fruits of their labours."

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- **Burma Victory - The Forgotten War** (DDHE DD21471, 2005 - running time 2 hrs 44 mins. RRP £19.99. Also available as part of an excellent box set, **The Victory Films - 6 DVDs**. RRP £49.99). Includes *Burma Victory* (1945) and *Stilwell Road* (1945), *Our Enemy Japan* (1945), *Report from Burma* (1945). Good overview of the land war in Burma.

- **Crusade in the Pacific** (Delta Music 86180, 2006 - 3 discs, running time 10 hrs 24 mins. RRP £12.99). Box set containing the 24 episodes of an American TV series of 1951 about the war in the Pacific, narrated in a style more akin to propaganda and driven by the available footage rather than history.
- **The Day of the Kamikaze** (Channel Four TV, 2008 - no information regarding DVD) - a 90-minute documentary first transmitted on 18 Feb 08.
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- **Know Your Enemy: Japan (1945)** (Elstree Hill 761999, 2004 - running time 67 mins. RRP £4.99). From director Frank Capra, similar in style to his excellent *Why We Fight* series.
- **Royal Navy at War: British Pacific & East Indies Fleets - a sailor's view** (DDHE D23774, 2006 - running time 3 hrs approx). Film from diverse sources drawn together by the late Roland R Smith and the best footage of the British Pacific Fleet hitherto found; it includes footage of HMS *Wager* coming alongside a capital ship. More detail will be added in due course.
- **Victory at Sea** (Oracle PRA-800, 2001 - 6 discs, running time 11 hrs 24 mins. RRP £39.99. Each disc is available separately for less than £4 - see [www.find-dvd.co.uk](http://www.find-dvd.co.uk). Beware the box set with the same title released by Elstree Hill in 2006 which has poor reviews). Box set with all 26 half-hour episodes of the NBC/USN series made in 1952. The whole series is clearly made for an American audience and sometimes seems more like propaganda, but there is excellent footage and it certainly helps to set the scene for the Pacific War. The last three episodes (all on disc 6) are most relevant to the story of the British Pacific Fleet but there is not much footage of the Royal Navy: Episode 24 - *The Road to Mandalay* covers China, Burma, India and the Indian Ocean; Episode 25 - *Suicide for Glory* covers Okinawa; Episode 26 - *Design for Peace* covers the Surrender of Japan and the Aftermath of War.
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- **World War 2: The Complete History** (Green Umbrella GRDSL1123 - 8 discs, running time 11 hrs approx). British Movietone News footage with modest coverage of the Pacific War.
- **WWII - War in the Pacific** (Topics, 2007 - 6 discs, running time 6 hrs 49 mins. Region 1 only). Box set of films from the US National Archives.
- **The World War II Archives: Attack on Pearl Harbour** [sic - should be Pearl Harbor, of course] - **December 7<sup>th</sup> 1941, a date which will live in infamy** (Delta 96010, 2008 - running time 58 mins).
- **The World War II Archives: The Japanese at War 1939-1945 - fighting to the death** (Delta 96011, 2008 - running time 58 mins).
- **The World War II Archives: Victory in the Pacific 1945 - the Japanese surrender and world peace beckons** (Delta 96012, 2008 - running time 58 mins).

**Filmography - drama** (for best online prices, generally significantly less than RRP - see [www.find-dvd.co.uk](http://www.find-dvd.co.uk))

- **Air Force** (1943) (released only on Region 1 DVD) - propaganda drama about a Flying Fortress on missions in the Pacific theatre, starring John Garfield and directed by Howard Hawks.
- **Away All Boats** (1956) (released only on Region 1 DVD) - the story of a US warship in the Pacific 1943-45, starring Jeff Chandler and a young Clint Eastwood.
- **The Bridge on the River Kwai** (1957) (Sony Pictures, 2005 - RRP £12.99) - a movie classic about British PoWs in Burma forced to work for their Japanese captors, starring Alec Guinness, William Holden and Jack Hawkins.
- **The Fighting Seabees** (1944) (Universal, 2006 - RRP £9.99) - a routine film about the CBs (US Navy Construction Battalions) in the Pacific war, with too much love interest, starring John Wayne.
- **The Fighting Sullivans** (1944) (Eureka 40010, 2002 - RRP £5.99 but no longer available) - the true story of five brothers, serving together in the cruiser USS *Juneau*, who all lost their lives when the ship was torpedoed off the Solomon Islands in November 1942, starring Anne Baxter and Thomas Mitchell.
- **Flags of Our Fathers** (2006) (Warner Bros, 2007 - RRP £40.99\* for both Clint Eastwood films, with supporting documentaries) - the life stories of six men who raised the flag at Iwo Jima, directed by Clint Eastwood. See also **Letters from Iwo Jima**, below.
- **Guadalcanal Diary** (1943) (20<sup>th</sup> Century Fox, 2004 - RRP £12.99) - a platoon of US Marines in the Solomon Islands in the south Pacific, starring William

Bendix and Anthony Quinn - an early piece of propaganda but very well done and comparatively authentic.

- **Hellcats of the Navy** (1957) (UCA, 2005 - RRP £5.99) - a US submarine hunts Japanese merchant shipping in the Sea of Japan, starring Ronald Reagan and his future wife, Nancy Davis.
- **In Harm's Way** (1965) (Paramount, 2005 - RRP £12.99) - a long, sprawling story of the US Navy's Pacific war, starring John Wayne.
- **Letters from Iwo Jima\*** (2006) (see **Flags of Our Fathers** above) - the story of Iwo Jima told from the Japanese perspective, directed by Clint Eastwood.
- **MacArthur** (1977) (Universal, 2003 - RRP £9.99) - biopic about General MacArthur in the Pacific, starring Gregory Peck.
- **Midway** (*aka* The Battle of Midway) (1976) (Universal, 2003 - RRP £5.99) - a story about the Battle of Midway, in June 1942, with some original war footage, starring Charlton Heston and Henry Fonda.
- **The Pacific** (2009) - watch out for the release of this ten-part mini-series currently in production; it is about US Marines in the Pacific theatre and is being made by the same team behind the outstanding mini-series **Band of Brothers** (2000), about Easy Company of the US 101<sup>st</sup> Airborne in the European theatre.
- **Pearl Harbor** (2001) (Walt Disney Studios, 2007 - RRP £19.99) - Long, glossy, blockbuster with a soap opera at its centre and the war action more like a video game.
- **Run Silent, Run Deep** (1958) (MGM, 2000 - RRP £12.99) - A US submarine in the Pacific, starring Clark Gable and Burt Lancaster. Based on the wartime experiences of Edward L Beach in his book of the same name.
- **Sands of Iwo Jima** (1949) (Universal, 2006 - RRP £9.99) - John Wayne in a flagwaver, a celebrated star war comic.
- **They Were Expendable** (1945) (Warner Bros, 2006 - RRP £13.99) - a story of American PT boats in the Pacific, including PT41's taking General MacArthur's from the Philippines in March 1942, starring John Wayne and directed by John Ford who served in the US Navy in the Second World War.
- **The Thin Red Line** (1998) (20<sup>th</sup> Century Fox, 2000 - RRP £19.99) - a platoon of soldiers fight the Japanese at Guadalcanal in 1943; highly rated by reviewers.
- **Tora! Tora! Tora!** (1970) (20<sup>th</sup> Century Fox, 2006 - RRP £17.99) - the events leading up to Pearl Harbour, faithfully told from both sides.

### Abbreviations

(A) - Air Branch (Fleet Air Arm)  
AA - anti-aircraft  
*aka* - also known as  
AOC - Air Officer Commanding  
BPF - British Pacific Fleet  
C-in-C - Commander-in-Chief



CB, CVO - companion of orders of chivalry in the United Kingdom  
CBE, OBE - Commander or Officer of the Order of the British Empire  
CBs - Construction Battalions  
D - Destroyer (or Devonport, depending on context)  
DSC - Distinguished Service Cross  
DSC\* - Distinguished Service Cross and Bar (= awarded twice)  
DSO - Distinguished Service Order  
FS - French Ship  
GCVO - knight grand commander in the United Kingdom  
HMAS - His Majesty's Australian Ship  
HMS - His Majesty's Ship  
HRH - His Royal Highness  
IJS - Imperial Japanese Ship  
KCB, KCMG, KBE - orders of knighthood in the United Kingdom  
Lt Cdr - Lieutenant-Commander  
NEI - Netherlands East Indies  
OBE - Officer of the Order of the British Empire  
PAS - Port Auxiliary Service  
PoWs - prisoners of war  
PT - patrol boat  
RAF - Royal Air Force  
RAN - Royal Australian Navy  
RCN - Royal Canadian Navy  
RFA - Royal Fleet Auxiliary  
RNAS - Royal Naval Air Station  
RNVR - Royal Naval Volunteer Reserve  
RNZN - Royal New Zealand Navy  
RRP - recommended retail price  
srty - seniority  
tbc - to be confirmed  
TF - Task Force  
USAAF - US Army Air Force (there was no separate US Air Force in WW2)  
USS - United States Ship  
VC - the highest award for gallantry in the face of the enemy in the British and some Commonwealth armed forces; ten recipients are alive today, five of which were awarded in the Second World War  
VJ - Victory in Japan (VJ Day - 15 Aug 45)

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