

# HMS RELENTLESS

*By Sam185*

## 1950's COMMISSIONS

*Last updated 3<sup>rd</sup> April 2013*



**HMS RELENTLESS – As converted, 1952**

## 1950's TYPE 15 FIRST COMMISSION

1<sup>st</sup> JANUARY 1951 to 31<sup>st</sup> DECEMBER 1956

In 1949, RELENTLESS was selected to be a prototype for conversion to fast Anti-submarine Frigate and was towed from Harwich to HM Dockyard Portsmouth for conversion to a Type 15 Frigate.

The ship was stripped down to deck level and beyond, all superstructure, weaponry, masts and equipment was removed, the machinery overhauled and fuel capacity increased to improve range.

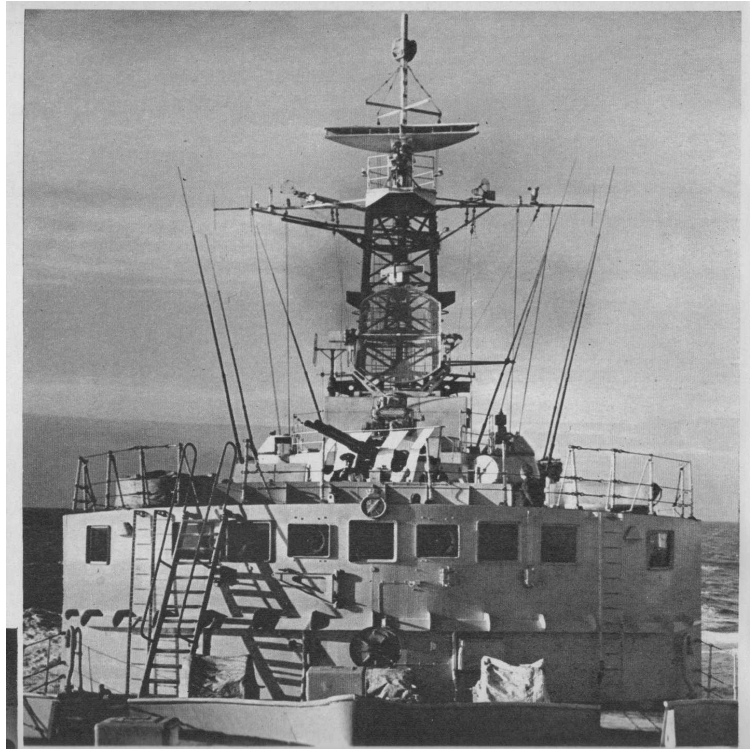
The foc'sl was extended backwards to leave only a small quarterdeck, providing much improved accommodation. The hull was increased in height to form a new single-level superstructure and incorporated a fully enclosed bridge. A sonar room and an operations room were added spanning the full width of the hull in front of the funnel.



**HMS RELENTLESS – Periscope mounting in Operations Room**

The new superstructure layout allowed the crew to fight the ship without having to expose themselves to the elements. As a fast anti-submarine frigate, a completely new suite of

armaments and electronics was added and new lattice masts were provided to carry the updated range of radars and communications equipment.



**HMS RELENTLESS – view from foc'sl looking aft**

For ship defence, a twin 4" gun on a Mk XIX mounting was carried midships (as shown BELOW) and controlled by an MRS1 Close Range Blind-Fire director (CRBF). Fitted above and behind the bridge was a twin 40mm Bofors on a Mk V mounting (as shown ABOVE).



**HMS RELENTLESS – 4" gun drill**

The armament was centred around a pair of three-barreled Mk 10 LIMBO A/S mortars which were mounted on the quarterdeck. They had their own dedicated Type 170 attack sonar, had a 360° field of fire and were automatic.

As late as May 1951, RELENTLESS was still 'work in progress' in Portsmouth Dockyard but by the end of July she was commissioned as the first Type 15 frigate conversion to be accepted into service. In those early days of the 'new' Type 15s they were unofficially referred to as 'Relentless Class Frigates'. However, whilst RELENTLESS was the first ship to be completed, she was generally referred to as the 'prototype' and it was ROCKET that was actually referred to as the 'first of class'

Following recommissioning there followed a lengthy series of testing machinery and trials and calibration of radar, navigation and radio equipment. Moving down the Portland, the ship endured extensive trials on the new LIMBO anti-submarine mortar and other weapons both from a technical and a tactical viewpoint.

Subsequently, RELENTLESS was deployed to Londonderry as leader of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Training Squadron. Although each ship of the squadron had its own Commanding Officer, Captain "D" 'floated' between the different ships of the Squadron. The squadron ships were oft times rotated but in the main were RELENTLESS, ROCKET, CREOLE, CRISPIN, LOCH VEYATIE, LOCH RUTHVEN and TENACIOUS and at any one time, there were between four and six submarines assigned to the Squadron.

Captain "D"'s staff comprised the man himself, Captain Michael Le Fanu (later Admiral of the Fleet and First Sea Lord, Sir Michael Le Fanu), his personal staff of Petty Officer Writer, Chef and Steward, and a Yeoman of Signals and PO Tel. The senior 'Squadron' officers comprised Lt Cdr specialists for Navigation, TAS and Communications.

The role of the Squadron was to provide specialist training in Anti-Submarine operations both for specialist officers and for individual ships. It was not uncommon for ships from visiting foreign navies, particularly US and Dutch ships, to be seen operating and being put through their paces by the 3<sup>rd</sup> Training Squadron.

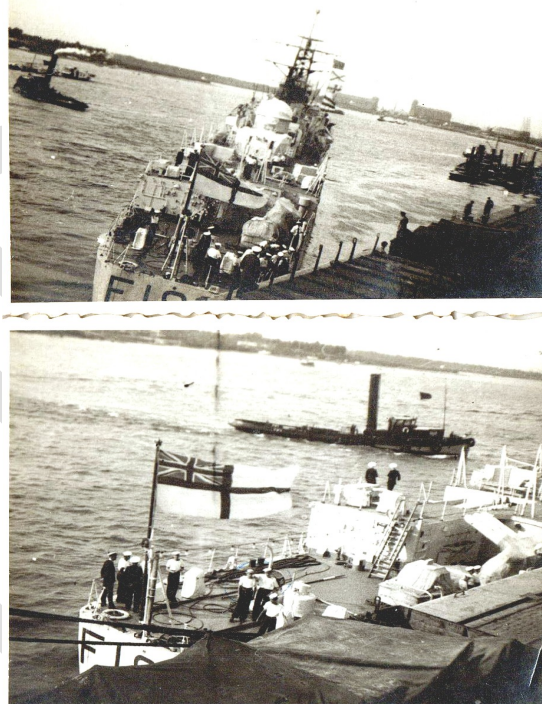
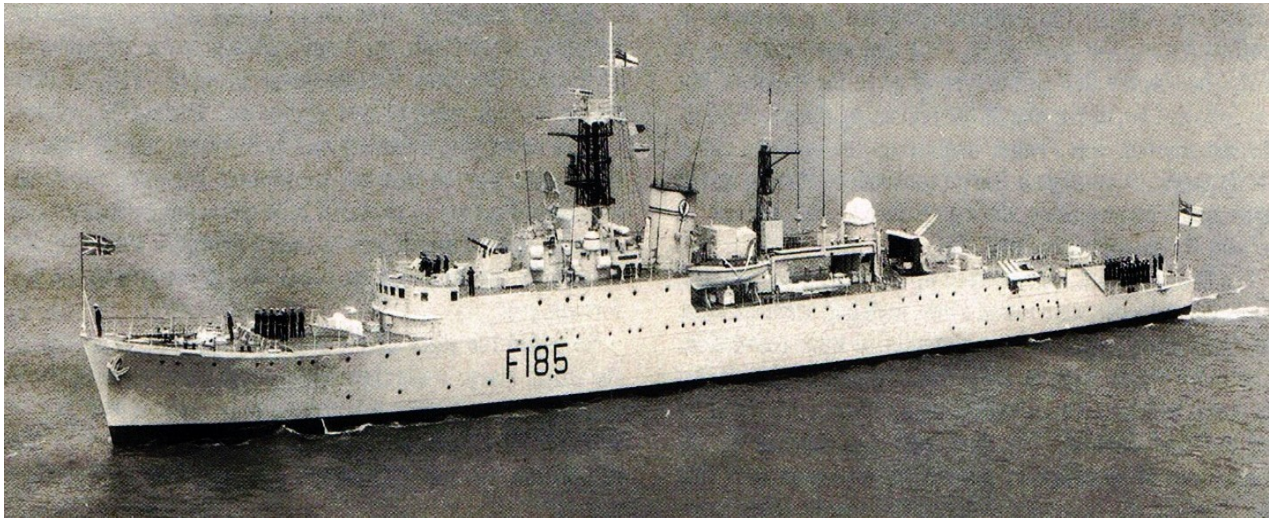
In addition to sub searching aircraft such as the Shackleton, more use was also starting to be made of helicopter-borne sonar dunking equipment so the Royal Navy and in particular the Squadron was at the leading edge Anti-Submarine operations.

The Londonderry Exercise Areas stretched up the west coast of Scotland - the Clyde, Rothesay, Greenock, Mull of Kintyre, Isles of Arran and Skye, and out into the Atlantic. A browse through RELENTLESS' ship's logs shows that the ship was in almost continuous operation out of Londonderry in these areas and in this type of role from July 1951 to early 1955.

There were brief spells away for refits in Devonport (1952), Rosyth (53) or Chatham (55); dry docking in Liverpool (53), Rosyth (54) and Greenock (54), and visits to the delights of Antwerp (53), Belfast (54), Sunderland (54), Aberystwyth (54), Swansea (54), Brest (54), Liverpool (55) and Cardiff (55).



The photo below was probably taken in 1952 as it bears the Londonderry Squadron's "Red Hand of Ulster" emblem and has a pre-60's radio aerial fit.



**HMS RELENTLESS – Londonderry 1953**

## Collision

Through the evening and night of 26th / 27th October 1954, RELENTLESS and VIGILANT, also a Type 15 frigate, were conducting anti-submarine exercises as they transited south through the Minch Channel.

The channel is between 20 and 45 miles wide, some 70 miles long and separates the Hebrides from the Scottish mainland. Today, the channel is a busy shipping lane carrying some 2.5 million tonnes of shipping each year. There is no reason to believe the channel was any less busy in 1954 in terms of the number of ships however, the gross tonnage would have been considerably less.

At approximately 0415 on the 27th, in response to a signal from RELENTLESS, the VIGILANT was manoeuvring to be astern of RELENTLESS when the ships collided. RELENTLESS rammed VIGILANT on her port side taking out the Wardroom Pantry and a not inconsiderable amount of Wardroom and upper deck fittings. Fortunately, there were no injuries, other than to the pride of a number of people.

It is unclear from the newspaper reports which follow how the collision actually happened but the fact that neither ship had navigation lights switched on may well have been a factor.

### ***NEWSPAPER REPORT***

The Glasgow Herald, Saturday December 4th 1954.  
FRIGATE'S COMMANDER REPRIMANDED  
Ships' Collision in Minch

Commander Michael Elijah Impey, commanding officer of the anti-submarine frigate Vigilant, appeared before a court-martial at Devonport Naval Barracks yesterday as a result of the collision between his ship and Relentless, another anti-submarine frigate, in the Little Minch channel off the West of Scotland early on October 27. Both ships were taking part in a N.A.T.O. anti-submarine exercise.

The court-martial was the second of four arising from the collision.

He was found not guilty of the second and third charges against him but guilty of the first charge "in that after 4.21 a.m. he failed to manoeuvre the ship with more caution by not switching on navigation lights and not decreasing speed in the existing visibility and in view of the sea 'clutter' on the bridge radar set" he was adjudged to be reprimanded.

The second charge was that he negligently performed the duty imposed on him as commanding officer, in that he failed to warn the look-outs to be on the alert when taking up station astern of H.M.S. Relentless. The third was of negligent performance of his duty, in that he failed to make full use of radar in the operations room when taking up station astern of H.M.S Relentless.

#### SWUNG TO STARBOARD

Commissioned Gunner Morris Jackson Cook, officer of the watch aboard H.M.S.Vigilant at the time, who on Thursday was acquitted of charges against him arising out of the collision, gave details of the courses steered and of the distance between the Relentless and the Vigilant. The ship was swinging to port, and an order was then received from the Relentless that the Vigilant should act independently, keeping a mile astern, he said.

Asked what action was taken when this signal was received, he said Commander Impey gave the order "hard a-starboard" at 4.21 a.m. It steadied the ship, which then started to swing to starboard.

The Vigilant was in collision with the Relentless shortly after 4.22 a.m.

Both ships were darkened and showing no navigation lights. After the collision both switched on their navigation lights.

Answering Captain H C B Coleridge (defending), he said that at the time it was blowing Force five to Force six from the south-south-west. Visibility was poor and it was rough.

He had hoped to sight the other ship at half a mile, but did not sight her before the collision. Conditions for sighting from the enclosed bridge of his ship were poor. Look-outs had been posted and were carrying out their duties on the bridge.

Two other witnesses, the port and starboard look-outs of H.M.S. Vigilant, said they had been given no 'special' orders, nor had they received any information about the proximity of any other ship.

Lieutenant Nigel James Mills, officer of the watch on board the Relentless, said the enclosed bridge in ships such as his own and the Vigilant was not an easy place from which to maintain a look-out. The Vigilant was not sighted before the collision.

Lieutenant-Commander A. F. Milne, navigation expert, produced drawings of the tracks of the two ships, based on the data available, and said he was unable to make turning circles to fit to make the two ships collide. It seemed the data could not all be reconciled.

Commander Impey, in evidence, said he had been asleep just before being called to the bridge about 4.15 a.m. The night was dark and overcast, the sea rough, and a south-south-westerly wind was blowing at Force five.

He had no reason to doubt the look-outs were alert, and was convinced that no one on the bridge could have been unaware of what was happening.

He could not explain how a collision could occur after the manoeuvres which had been made.

Asked why he not used the information available from the radar set un the operations room, he said that when he left the radar set on the bridge the ship was being manoeuvred into a position where there was no possible risk of collision.

After the court-martial had given their decision Captain Coleridge said that Commander Impey was one of the few officers who could claim the certain destruction of seven U-boats and the infliction of severe damage on many more. He had been appointed to command the ship on October 5, and the day of the collision was his third day at sea.

The Glasgow Herald, Thursday December 9th 1954.

REPRIMAND FOR R.N. OFFICER

Ships in Collision

Commander George Osborn Symonds, D.S.C., described in Service certificates read to the Court, as “a brilliant and able officer”, was sentenced to be reprimanded by a Devonport court-martial yesterday after being found guilty on three charges arising out of the collision between his ship, the frigate Relentless, and another frigate, the Vigilant.

It was the fourth court-martial after the collision in the Minches off the west coast of Scotland, during a N.A.T.O. exercise.

Commander Symonds had pled not guilty to failing to take adequate precautions or the safe conduct of the ships by not ensuring that the Vigilant was reported by radar at more frequent intervals when she was carrying out his order to take station astern, failing to ensure that a sufficient visual look-out was maintained, and failing to ensure that a continuous watch was kept on radar.



Unfortunately, I can find no other information on the incident other than that reported above and the following brief comments from the Register of Courts Martial. It would appear that full details of the incident, including both Ships' Logs, are still under lock and key.

#### **Extract from Register of Courts Martial**

1. 7153. 2nd December 1954. Commissioned Gunner (TAS) Morris Jackson COOK, OOW, HMS Vigilant.

First charge: Negligently or by default hazard HMS Vigilant.

Second, Third, Fourth: Negligent performance of duty.

Accused found not guilty on all charges and acquitted accordingly.

2. 7155. 3rd December 1954. Commander Michael Elijah IMPEY, CO, HMS Vigilant

First charge: Negligently or by default hazard HMS Vigilant.

Second and Third: Negligent performance of duty.

Accused found not guilty on second and third charges, but found guilty on first charge.

Adjudged to be reprimanded.

3. 7156. 7th December 1954. Lieutenant Nigel James MILLS, OOW, HMS Relentless

First and Second: Negligent performance of duty

Accused was found not guilty on all charges and acquitted accordingly.

4. 7157. 8th December 1954. Commander George Osborne SYMONDS, CO, HMS Relentless

First, Second and Third: Negligent performance of duty.

Accused was found guilty on all charges.

Adjudged to be reprimanded.

#### **Paid Off into Reserve 1955**

Following the collision, the damage to the RELENTLESS' bow section was substantial although both ships managed to make Greenock unaided. Both were dry docked and VIGILANT, once repaired was soon back at sea. RELENTLESS however, was made seaworthy and sailed for Chatham for further repairs and maintenance. On completion, she sailed back north to Gareloch and on 20<sup>th</sup> May 1955 was paid off into Category One Reserve in Faslane.

## Recommissioned 1956

We last saw RELENTLESS on May 20<sup>th</sup> 1955 alongside the Support Ship BUCHAN NESS (see photo below) in Faslane



At some stage between 20<sup>th</sup> May 1955 and 1<sup>st</sup> September 1956, RELENTLESS moved, or was moved, up the Clyde to Queens Dock, in Glasgow.

Between the 1<sup>st</sup> & 24<sup>th</sup> September, RELENTLESS was 'commissioned' and was stored and ammunitioned. She undertook Machinery Trials, Full Speed and Measured Mile trials, LIMBO mortar firing trials, Radar Acceptance Trials and Radar calibration. All this took place in the Clyde Exercise Areas.

Subsequently, RELENTLESS went down to Devonport to go through degaussing on the DG Range at Cawsand Bay and calibrated the MF and HF Direction Finding equipment. For some inexplicable reason she then spent two days anchored at Portland before returning to the Clyde.

On arrival back at Queens Dock in Glasgow, the ship was de-stored, the crew were drafted off and the ship 'de-commissioned'.

I assume that these trials were a part of the ship being in 'Category One Reserve' but there are no other Ship's Logs available of a similar nature.

If there is anyone around who served on this brief 'commission' or served on other ships which underwent such exercises, it would be nice to know the background.

Although the last two paragraphs are redundant in light of information I have since received, I have left them in to show how fickle this History gathering can be. This section on the 1950s Commission had lain untouched since September 2012 until I added the "Recommissioned 1956" item in March of 2013. Within two weeks of the updates, I received information from someone who was on board during that period.

Here's the information in the words of Jim Ashby (Jack Dusty)

*I remember:*

### ***HMS Relentless***

*(27 August – 2 October 1956)*

*In August 1956 I was detailed off to standby 'lent draft' to HMS Relentless (a Type 15 Anti-submarine Frigate) coming to the end of a long refit and repairs following a collision (27 October 1954) with HMS Vigilant off the coast of Scotland.*

*On 27<sup>th</sup> August 1956 I joined HMS Relentless at Alexander Stephen's Yard, Queens Dock, Govan, for 'sea trials' scheduled to last two weeks. First, however, I had three days to store ship before we commissioned on Friday 31<sup>st</sup> August.*

*We commissioned with a reduced trials crew, supplemented by a contingent of fifteen RNVR reservists, and around fifty shipyard workers (who were to live and eat on board).*

*We sailed on Monday 3 September for Tail of Bank, Greenock where we underwent compass trials, fuelled ship and completed capstan and anchor trials. Then, over a period of eleven days, we ran a series of trials in the Firth of Clyde – sailing early each morning and returning every evening – sometimes anchoring at Tail of Bank, sometimes going alongside in Greenock itself.*

*Then on 14<sup>th</sup> September we were told that the trials had been extended, and that we would be sailing for Weymouth for Limbo (anti-submarine mortars) ranging and calibration. In consequence we landed both RNVR reservists and shipyard workers and sailed almost immediately for Plymouth. There we underwent de-gaussing trials in St Bride's Bay before proceeding to Weymouth where we secured between buoys in Weymouth Bay and fired our Limbos over the calibration range.*

*On completion we returned to Queens Dock, Govan, and paid off on the 24<sup>th</sup> September. I then had two days in which to de-store ship and return everything to Kirkliston. Then after a long weekend at home, I returned to HMS Woolwich on 2<sup>nd</sup> October*

*Jim Ashby*

RELENTLESS was probably towed from Faslane for refit in the Alexander Stephens' Yard in Govan. The repairs undertaken in November 1954 by Scotts of Greenock were enough to keep 'Rusty' going until May 1955 and whilst the refit may have been brought forward, I suspect it was already in plan.

Who knows what might have happened to RELENTLESS between 1954 and 1964 had she not been in the collision with VIGILANT. As it was, by October 1956, RELENTLESS was placed in Category One Reserve.

Until we pick up the history from ANOTHER Jack Dusty (Dave Wright) relating the time of RELENTLESS in Reserve in Chatham in 1959 and being towed up to Rosyth when Chatham Dockyard closed in 1960 there is no more information.

Unless.....



This document was created with Win2PDF available at <http://www.win2pdf.com>.  
The unregistered version of Win2PDF is for evaluation or non-commercial use only.  
This page will not be added after purchasing Win2PDF.