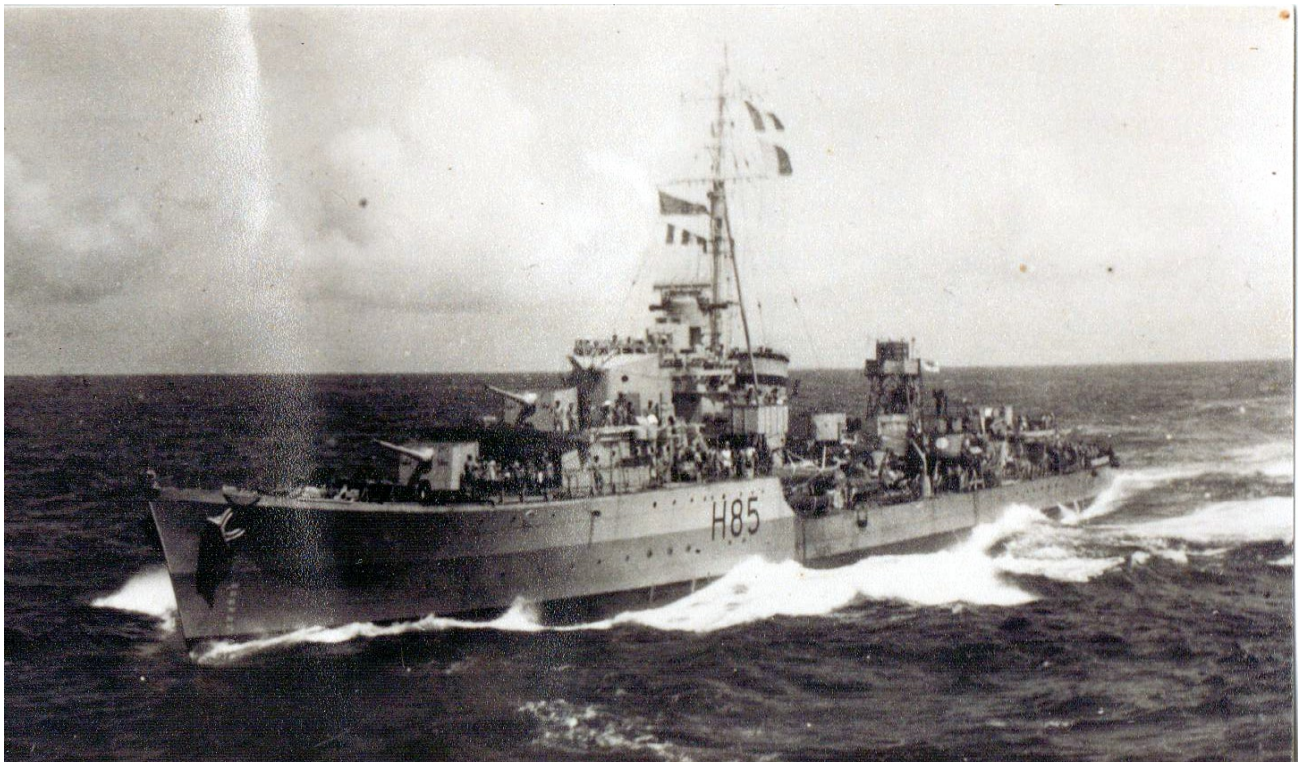


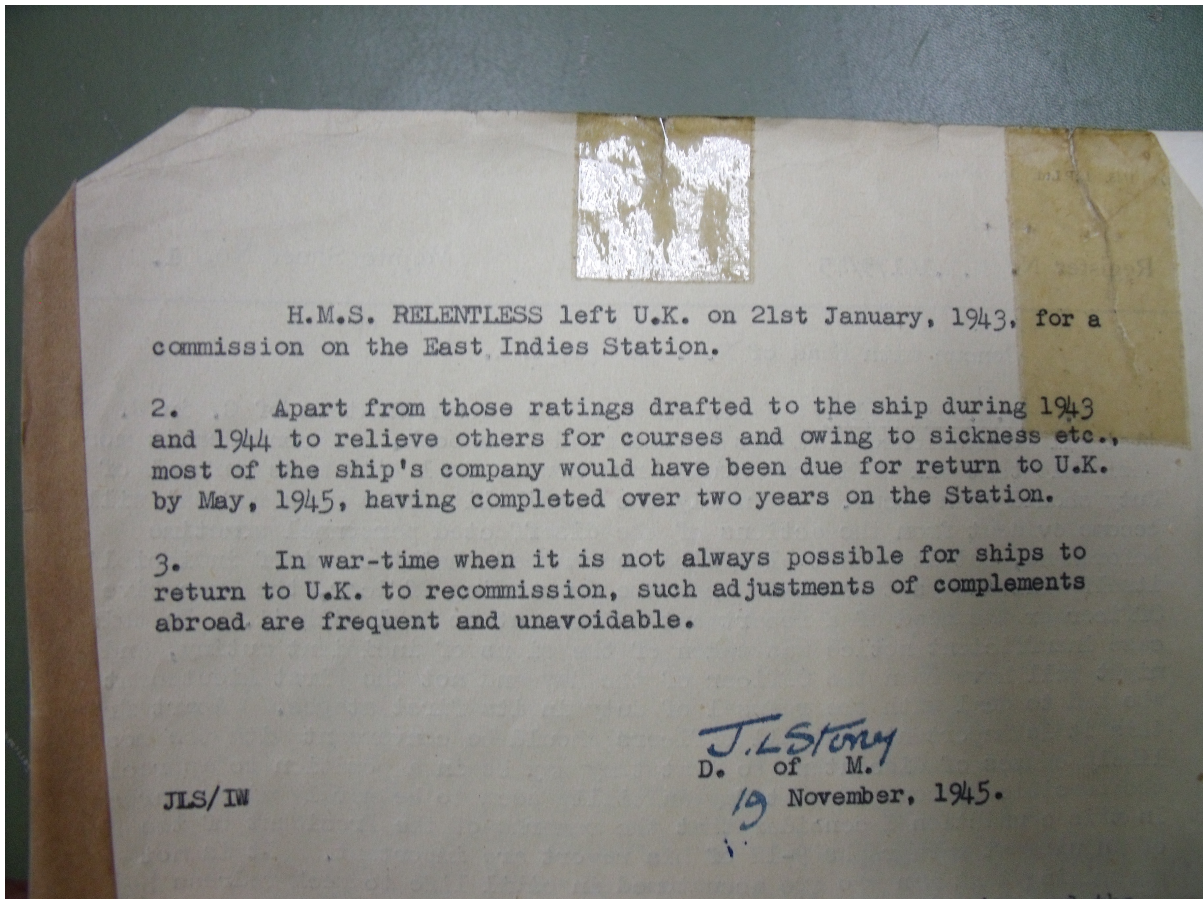
MUTINY ON THE RELENTLESS



By Sam185

MUTINY ON THE "RELENTLESS"

"Report by Commander In Chief East Indies (Vice-Admiral Sir Arthur J. Power) regarding the Mutiny onboard HMS RELENTLESS on 13th June 1945 and Minutes of the Board of Inquiry held at Naval Headquarters Trincomalee, Ceylon."



The comments above were part of a memo attached to the Minutes of the Board of Enquiry relating to the Mutiny on HMS Relentless.

After reading the Minutes, most of the Witness statements and the conclusions of the Board of Enquiry, here is the story of the Mutiny on the Relentless.

Most of it is true, some of it is necessarily speculation because as you may imagine, nothing was as it seemed and maybe that is why the files were classified TOP SECRET and originally closed until 2046.

* * * *

BACKGROUND

HMS RELENTLESS, an 'R' class destroyer built on the Clyde in 1942 and with a crew of 176, sailed from the UK in January 1943 as ocean escort for the 29-ship convoy WS26, from the Clyde down to Durban in South Africa. Subsequently, she spent the whole of the Second World War on the West Africa/South Africa and East Indies stations before returning to the UK in November 1945.

RELENTLESS' prime roles were as a convoy escort or as part of an anti-submarine screen escort for battleships and aircraft carriers and to this end, she had 4 single-mount 4.7" guns, 4 quad-mount Bofors 'pom poms', 6 single-mount Oerlikons and could carry 70 depth-charges.

She was one of the six 'R' class destroyers comprising the 11th Destroyer Flotilla commanded by Captain H Briggs in HMS ROTHERHAM, and from October 1944, RELENTLESS' commanding officer was Lt Cdr George Baillie Barstow.

* * * *

May 8th 1945 was celebrated throughout the world as the end of the Second World War. Unfortunately for some, it was only VE DAY, Victory in Europe Day. In the Far East the war still raged on albeit rapidly drawing to its conclusion. Consequently, VJ DAY, Victory over Japan didn't happen until 14th August 1945 (VJ Day was later changed to VP DAY, Victory in the Pacific).

For most of March and all of April 1945, RELENTLESS underwent a refit and assisted maintenance period in Simonstown, South Africa. After refit and into early-June, there was an 'adjustment' to the ship's company. More than half the crew were drafted off after having served for more than two-years, many of them since the ship first commissioned in November 1942. In fact during the May-June period there were 104 replacements, amongst them were 2 Officers, the CPO Coxswain, 4 seaman Petty Officers, 6 Leading Seamen and over 60 Able or Ordinary seamen, most of the latter being relatively young, inexperienced men.

Following the refit and a few days in Durban, RELENTLESS sailed from Durban on May 15th as convoy escort for Convoy OW5/2, escorting the troopship USS GENERAL CREELY to Calcutta where they arrived on the 20th. Subsequently, RELENTLESS 'Worked Up' at Trincomalee Naval Base in Ceylon, either at sea exercising or alongside training.

The ship was alongside at D8 berth in the Naval Base from 8th June until the planned sailing date of 14th June for Operation BALSAM. During this period, some essential Engine Room maintenance was undertaken and the First Lt also took this opportunity to have the ship painted.

* * * *

Lt Cdr Barstow RN. had been in command of the ship since October 1944 and the First Lieutenant, Lt Griffiths, South African Naval Forces (Volunteer) (SANF(V)) although only appointed as such on 1st May 1945, had actually been onboard as a Sub-Lieutenant and Lieutenant since January 1943.

Barstow had asked Captain 'D' (Captain H Briggs) to provide him with more experienced officers and men than those he actually had. In response, RELENTLESS' senior Lieutenant was appointed into the First Lt role in early May and he in turn was replaced by another (SANF) Lieutenant from REDOUBT. At the same time, an unpopular S/Lt was also replaced. The Deck Officer complement therefore comprised the Captain (Lt Cdr), 1st Lt (Lt), one Lt and 5 S/Lt.

The Captain was of the belief that there was too much familiarity between the officers and lower deck. He had addressed his Officers on the subject and quoted, for instance, officers on the bridge calling the Chief Bosun's Mate, "Bos'n"; the Yeoman of Signals, "Yeo"; and the Petty Officer Telegraphist, "Pots".

Separately, when he had addressed the ship's company and commented on the need for saluting, he used an analogy which was misconstrued.

Lieutenant Lockhead, the officer I have got has unfortunately, M.L's, except for, I think, two months in the "REDOUBT" before he came to me, therefore I do not consider he knew a great deal about destroyers.

There is one other point which may or may not have some significance, and that is that when I first joined the ship I addressed the ship's company and remarked about saluting. I think Captain Jones was present when Admiral Burrough gave a lecture to all officers in Gib on saluting, and I quoted Admiral Burrough in the story of barons, freemen and serfs. I said, "In the old days of barons, freemen and serfs, when the barons rode along the highway the serfs cowered into the ditch, and hid their faces, but the freemen stood up and greeted the baron by a form of salute," and I then said that the salute we give is a survival of those days and is therefore a greeting between equals and not a position of junior rating. Anyway, it appealed to me as being an extremely good illustration why a freeman should salute. Unfortunately, somebody in the ship appears to have got my story wrongly, and recently over the last two or three months in the censoring, the officers told me that they have found in letters reference to 'serfs.' The last occasion was on the night of Wednesday, the 13th, when the Doctor found this remark in a letter. I think he told me the remark read roughly, "The Officers appear to think we are serfs." I may say the rating in question joined at Colombo approximately the 13th May.

As intimated in the extract above, one of the roles of each officer on board was to censor the outgoing mail of his Division, often assisted by the Medical Officer. This task was supposed to be undertaken in the officer's cabin but in practice, it was often done in the Wardroom. Whilst there is no evidence that this task was not done diligently, the fact was that any comments could be overheard by the Officer's Stewards (referred to on the ship's books incidentally, as 'Officer's Servants') or anyone passing the Wardroom serving hatch.

Thus it became known that the officers did not appear to hold the crew in high regard.

The reference to 'serfs' (above) was by no means an isolated incident, in his own testimony, the Surgeon Lt said one rating had used the word quite frequently in at least three letters.

* * * *

DRAFT 2

MUTINY

As previously mentioned, the decision had been taken to paint the ship prior to sailing on Operation 'BALSAM' on the 14th June.

Most ships in harbour on the East Indies station worked a form of 'tropical routine', where the day's work started early but finished at lunchtime. RELENTLESS however, was not particularly working that routine; having just received a large 'adjustment' of crew the ship was still in a work-up and training phase, essential maintenance was being undertaken prior to going on an Operation and of course, the Paint Ship programme was underway.

The painting schedule called for virtually the whole ship's company to 'turn to' to complete the task, including Stokers, Signalmen and Telegraphists painting their own 'parts of ship'.

Both watches of seamen had been turned to, scrubbing and washing down the ship's side and superstructure on Sunday 10th and into Monday 11th prior to repainting. However, as some of the tasks were falling behind schedule, work had to carry on in the afternoon of Tuesday and Wednesday in order to complete the task in time for sailing on the 14th.

You may well imagine the grumbling that went on during Tuesday's dinner break, and especially into the afternoon when they noticed that other ship's in harbour were working Tropical Routine.

During the 1200-1330 dinner break on Wednesday, the muttering and grumbling took on a new purpose, no doubt fanned by tot time and inflamed by one or two 'lower deck lawyers'. The bottom line was that both the forward and after seaman's messes decided that they would not turn to that afternoon.

The Leading Hands of the two Forward and two Aft seaman's messes were sufficiently concerned that they went to report the grumbling to the First Lt but on the way met up with the Cox'n who went with them to see the First Lt. After the First Lt had explained the reasons for working in the afternoon he went to report the issue to the Captain whose response was to basically 'sort it'

Crime and...

When 1325 came around and the Bosun's Mates piped 'Turn To' in the messdecks, no one moved. Up on deck, the First Lt, Chief Bos'n's Mate, Parts of Ship POs and Leading Seamen watched 1330 come and go, then the Cox'n went down to the For'd messdeck and a PO down to the after messdeck to give them a direct order to Turn To but again, no one moved. After piping 'Turn To' for a second time with the same negative response the First Lt reported to the Captain.

Subsequently, when the Captain had the lower deck cleared, everyone complied. He warned them all about their conduct and actions, the repercussions and told them that Turn To would be piped again and he expected everyone to obey the pipe. On being dismissed, the pipe was made and everyone eventually turned to as ordered.

...Punishment

After reporting the incident to Captain 'D', RELENTLESS was moved to the oiling jetty in the late afternoon where the ship's company were addressed by Captain 'D'. The address was short and sharp; he told them in no uncertain terms of the disgrace they had brought upon the ship.

During the afternoon and late into the evening, the Captain interviewed every seaman on the ship to get to the bottom of the issue before making his report. However, everyone 'put the shutters up' and he was unable to identify all the ringleaders. The following day, RELENTLESS sailed on Operation BALSAM.

It wasn't until the 25th June, 12 days after the incident, that the Courts Martial and Board of Enquiry were separately convened. Why it was that steps were taken to the level of Courts Martial remains unclear, but it was decided to go down that route with two identified ringleaders over what was clearly seen as a mutinous gathering. The mutineers were separately held to account for mutinous assembly and punished accordingly.

Without going through all the Witness Statements, it transpired that Leading Seaman Mansell was the main instigator and he had been abetted by Able Seaman Payne. Both of them were from one of the Forward messes.

L/S Mansell was charged on two counts;

- 1. Not using the utmost endeavour to suppress mutiny not accompanied by violence*
- 2. Endeavouring to incite ratings on the forward messdeck to commit an act of mutiny*

At his Court Martial, Mansell was found guilty on both charges and sentenced to 3-years penal servitude and dismissed in disgrace.

AB Payne was also charged on two counts:

1. *Joining in a mutiny not accompanied by violence*

2. *Endeavouring to incite ratings on the forward messdeck to join in a mutinous assembly*

At his Court Martial, Payne was found guilty on both charges and sentenced to 9-months detention.

The disparity between sentences, according to the notes, was due to a lack of evidence although it had been thought that there was a *prima facie* case against Payne.

* * * *

So, what happened to the mutineers, those found guilty of “mutinous assembly”?

Well, in the vernacular, they were trooped big time...

7 ABs were each sentenced to 90 days imprisonment and 1 AB to 60 days imprisonment

18 ABs were each sentenced to 90 days detention suspended after 35 days

4 ABs were each sentenced to 60 days detention suspended after 28 days

8 ABs and 1 OS were each sentenced to 90 days detention and 13 other OS sentenced to 60 days detention. All these were suspended before committal and all of them drafted off the ship and spread around the Eastern Fleet, not one of them to the same ship.

Collateral punishment resulted in one Leading Seaman being disgraced to Able Seaman and 1 AB and 2 Ordinary Seamen charged with being “Absent from Place of Duty”.

The officer who had been Officer Of The Day was dismissed the ship, and one Petty Officer and 3 Leading Seamen were removed from the ship.

And so, this sorry chapter in RELENTLESS' history resulted in 59 people being removed from the ship - one-third of the ship's company.

* * * *

AFTERMATH

A Confidential Book (CB) was available to the Commanding Officers of capital ships which seemingly dealt with such subjects as “How to spot, and put down a mutiny before it happens”. In the aftermath of the Relentless incident, the Admiralty downgraded CB003027 from Top Secret to Secret and it was distributed to all ships with a recommendation that ALL commissioned officers are made aware of its contents.

However, to quote another passage from the recommendations of the Board of Enquiry: “The remarks of VA 3 BS (Vice Admiral, 3rd Battle Squadron) in... of his submission are concurred so far as they relate to the recommendation in... of the Board’s report. It would not it is thought be appropriate to include instruction on how to deal with a mutiny in the disciplinary training of all officers.....”

I was further recommended that The Articles of War were prominently displayed on a lockable notice board. (You may have noticed that in our day, such notice boards were generally placed near the NAAFI Canteen queue).

Interestingly, there is a note in the Conclusions that state

“It is probably the first case of mutiny in which no blame had been attached to the Commanding Officer or Executive Officer”

The extent of the mutiny itself was pretty much hushed up although a notice was distributed within the East Indies Fleet referring only to the two main protagonists. Of the men drafted off RELENTLESS to other ships, a covering letter was sent with their documents explaining the reason for their dismissal.

The files containing the minutes of the Courts Martial and The Board of Inquiry were variously classified TOP SECRET and SECRET with a “Keep Closed” notice stamped on the front with a release date of 2046.....

* * * *

Author's Note

Whilst I don't condone the mutiny I have tried to imagine what my own feelings would have been if I had just joined the ship in the Far East in May 1945 as many actually had - a week or so after VE Day...

It seems inconceivable in this day and age that the situation ended up with so many people being so harshly punished for what seems to have been just 'a bit of a moan'.

However, this was the Armed Forces in wartime and justice needs to be seen to be done. Of course, this was never about justice. Just as in our day, it was all about discipline.

Actions taken that day affected the lives of many people to a greater or lesser degree and I have no doubt that the consequential decisions and recommendations helped 'our navy' along the road to being a better place to be.

Ironically, the operation that HMS RELENTLESS was going on, which had warranted the 'paint ship' decision was cancelled. That's life in a blue suit.

DRAFT 2

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.