

WATER LINE SERIES

In November 1921 the then five great Naval powers held a conference in Washington to discuss the reduction of their fleets then in existence to an agreed tonnage. Further to set limitations on the number, size and armament of new ships, either building or projected. These discussions resulted in the signing of a Treaty as the Washington Agreement.

At this period in time the Royal Navy was the largest and most powerful fleet in the world. As signatories of the Treaty the British Government agreed to scrap some 657 ships of a total displacement of 1,500,000 tons. Among these were some 22 battleships and the four new 16-inch battle-cruisers on which work had commenced just prior to the invitation to attend the Washington Conference being received.

The Japanese 16-inch gunned battleships Nagato and Mutsu had just been completed, as had the similarly armed American battleship Maryland. After much manoeuvring it was agreed that in order to maintain a balance of power in the Pacific area where the major ambitions and interests of these two great powers were centered, the Americans could complete two further ships of the Maryland class, the Colorado and West Virginia. The fourth ship the Washington, although 75% complete to be scrapped.

The British delegation led by its Chief Negotiator, Rear Admiral Chatfield, no doubt with an eye to its own interests in the Far East, held out for permission to build two new ships carrying the 16-inch gun, and finally after much debate Britains' demands were agreed to.

The Treaty had allowed for a maximum displacement for Capital ships, namely 35,000 tons - this displacement not to include the weight of fuel oil or water - and showed an increase on that originally proposed during the Conference by the U.S.A. of 32,500 tons.

Although the British could now have their new ships the problems facing the Admiralty and the Director of Naval Construction were much more complex than those of the other countries involved in the Treaty. The ships of the Royal Navy were built to cover greater distances and to stay at sea longer than those of the other nations, yet must of necessity, carry their equivalent both in armour and firepower to be effective, also a great deal of the time and money had been spent in the development of the four cancelled 16-inch battle-cruisers. The Navy's answer to these and other problems was to revert to the plans for the cancelled ships in a highly modified form, tons which meant a reduction of some 13,000 tons from the original design. Thus evolved the first two warships to be built which met the terms of the Washington Agreement. These were to become famous as H.M.S. Nelson and her sister ship

H.M.S. Rodney.

Nelson was laid down in December 1922 at the Newcastle yard of Vickers-Armstrong. She was launched on September 3rd 1925 and completed in June 1927. Her cost including fitting out reaching a final figure of £7,504,055.

Her armament consisted of nine 16-inch guns in triple turrets all sited forward of her bridge, twelve 6-inch guns in twin turrets, six 4.7-inch A.A. guns and eight 2 pounder pom-poms. Also two submerged torpedo tubes housed one on each beam forward below the lower deck line. It is interesting to note these torpedos were of the 24.5-inch type common in the Japanese Navy, but unique to Nelson and Rodney within the Royal Navy as were their 16-inch guns. In order to save weight such as light weight steel, aluminium, fir for her deck in place of the traditional teak, and plywood for many internal non structural bulkheads and fittings, all of which was fireproofed. Her completed displacement was 33,950 tons over a thousand tons under the limit imposed.

Nelson and Rodney were the first British warships to have a tower bridge and mast, also the first to have flush decks since the "Lord Nelsons" of 1908 and have their engine rooms forward of the boilers.

As protection she carried a 14-inch armour belt along her beam which ran from slightly ahead of her fore turret aft to her steering compartment. Her main turrets carried armour 16-inches thick except for their backs which were 9-inch plate, the barbettes were of 15-inch plate and her middle deck A.P. was 6 1/2 inches thick over her magazines, varying to 3-inches over her machinery spaces.

She was powered by Brown-Curtis geared turbines driving two shafts and her machinery was supplied by the Wallsend Shipway and Engineering Company. These gave her a speed of 23.5 knots for 46,000 H.P. at her standard displacement on trials, though this speed was seldom attained in service. She carried a complement in peacetime of 1,300 Officers and men, this being increased in wartime to 1,700.

Because of her design, a compromise at best, she handled very badly under most conditions, and especially in cross winds or in shallow water. In a following sea or going astern she steered poorly, and was slow to answer the helm under all conditions. In regard to accommodation for Officers and men she was a great improvement on her predecessors having reading and recreation rooms, dressing rooms, wash rooms, drying rooms, stowage spaces, etc. in abundance. Her galleys were ultra modern by the standards of the day including electric bakery ovens in their equipment. The one bad point of her design in this area was not apparent until wartime, when it was found that with the ship darkened and/or closed up for action, the galleys which became barely habitable under such conditions.

Nelson commissioned on the 15th of August 1927 as flagship of the Atlantic Fleet. For the next 14 years she wore the flag of either the C-in-C of the Atlantic Fleet or the Home Fleet. The

outbreak of W.W.II found her on guard duties operating out of Scapa Flow. Later in September she was part of a covering force engaged in the salvage of H.M. Submarine Spearfish, which had been heavily damaged in the North Sea while operating off Norway. In October 1939 she took part in abortive operations against German surface ships in the North Sea. On October 30th 1939 with Winston Churchill on board she was operating west of the Orkneys when attacked unsuccessfully, owing to torpedo failure, by Lt. Cdr. Zahn in U-56. On December 4th 1939 she was badly damaged by a magnetic mine laid by U-31 (Lt. Cdr. Haberoest) near Loch Ewe and was under repair until August 1940, certain minor alterations being made during the same period. In September 1940 she took part in operations off the Norwegian coast until being ordered south to the base at Rosyth in preparation for the expected German invasion of Britain, when she would have operated in the English Channel. She served with the Home Fleet until August 1942, during this period she took part in the search for the Scharnhorst and Gneisenau, acting as escort to both Atlantic and Malta convoys. During one of the latter, code named "Halberd" she was struck by a torpedo dropped by an Italian aircraft on September 27th 1941 and was under repair in Britain until April 1942. In August of that year she transferred to the Mediterranean Fleet as Flagship of Admiral Syfret forming part of "Force H", taking part in further Malta convoys, covering the Allied landings in North Africa and later those in Sicily and on the Italian mainland. The armistice between the Allies and Italy was signed by General Eisenhower and Marshal Badoglio on the 29th September 1943 on board Nelson in Malta harbour. She returned to Britain for a much needed refit in November 1943.

June 1944 saw her in the English Channel as part of the bombardment force covering the D-Day landings in France. Once again she was mined and spent the next six months at Philadelphia Navy Yard in America undergoing repairs and refitting, on completion of which she returned to Britain in January 1945. She was ordered to join the East Indies Fleet as second Flagship and arrived at Colombo in August of 1946. She was sold being broken up for scrap by Thomas Ward & Co. at Inverkeithing in March 1949.

It is interesting to note that at this, the final stage in her operational wartime career, she now carried an additional A.A. armament of sixteen 40 mm guns, forty eight 2 pdr. pom-poms and sixty one 20 mm oerlikons, bringing her total of A.A. weapons up to 139 guns. A far cry from the original A.A. armament of 14 guns.

She sailed for Britain on the 13th November 1945 and after a short period as flagship C-in-C Home Fleet became part of the battleship training squadron in August of 1946. She was sold being broken up for scrap by Thomas Ward & Co. at Inverkeithing in March 1949.

(THE PAINTING OF BRITISH WARSHIPS)

During W.W.I. the Royal Navy experimented with a variety of camouflage and dazzle schemes intended to make spotting, identification and range finding of its ships more difficult to the enemy. At the end of the war the Admiralty were still unconvinced as to the effectiveness of these measures.

With the coming of peace standard paint schemes for the ships of the Royal Navy were laid down by the Admiralty and these were as follows:

Ships of the Home and Atlantic Fleet were painted in an all over finish of dark grey (AP 507A), those of the Mediterranean Fleet in light grey (AP 507c), for ships serving in the Far East, East Indies and the Pacific, white being a heat reflective colour was widely used in varying degrees. On the China station ships with white hulls and pale grey upperwork were a common

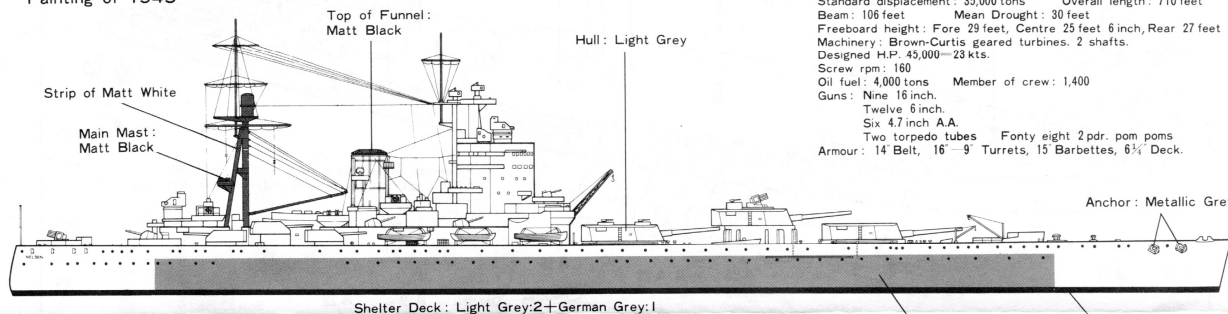
sight in the 20's and 30's. On other "tropical" stations such as the East Indies, ships were painted in an all over white scheme with funnels and masts finished in a bright buff yellow colour. There has always been a friendly rivalry between the Merchant Service and the Royal Navy, and when this latter finish was adopted such ships were humorously labelled "P. & O. boats", a reference to the famous shipping company's passenger liners of the day which were painted in the same way.

When modelling a ship of the inter war period, it should be remembered that the men of the Royal Navy took great pride in "their ship", and it was always, in the sailors terms, "tight and tiddly" therefore on such a ship paintwork was immaculate, bare metals such as brass and steel sparkled as did any linoleum fitted, and in those days it was said of a ship with an expanse

of wooden decking that "you could eat your breakfast off it", the inference of course being it was so clean that no germ could survive on such a spotless surface! Therefore a ship model of this period to be accurate must reflect these attitudes. In late 1939, shortly after the outbreak of World War II, camouflage schemes, many unofficial, began to appear. In the early days the Admiralty issued a number of directive on the subject, and by 1943 an official handbook had appeared which laid down several official schemes, provided sample colour chips for matching purposes and even expounded the theory of camouflage, colour tones, etc. The painting of H.M. ships during the six years of W.W.II is possibly the most badly documented subject in the whole spectrum concerning the period and on which many questions can never be answered.

PAINTING

Painting of 1945



(Main Specification of Nelson)
 Standard displacement : 35,000 tons Overall length : 710 feet
 Beam : 106 feet Mean Drought : 30 feet
 Freeboard height : Fore 29 feet, Centre 25 feet 6 inch, Rear 27 feet
 Machinery : Brown-Curtis geared turbines. 2 shafts.
 Designed H.P. 45,000 - 23 kts.
 Screw rpm : 160
 Oil fuel : 4,000 tons Member of crew : 1,400
 Guns : Nine 16 inch.
 Twelve 6 inch.
 Six 4.7 inch A.A.
 Two torpedo tubes Forty eight 2 pdr. pom poms
 Armour : 14 Belt, 16" - 9" Turrets, 15 Barbettes, 6 1/2" Deck.

Comouflage of 1943

