

# HMS

# WHITEHAVEN



After her completion in November 1941 HMS Whitehaven was allocated to the 14th Minesweeping Flotilla (Mediterranean Fleet). She left the Scottish port of Greenock on 1 March 1942, arriving on station at Alexandria (Egypt) on 6 June 1942.

'Whitehaven' was the senior officer's ship of the group escorting convoys between Alexandria and various ports in the Eastern Mediterranean. This was also the period of the war when Malta was under siege and desperate for supplies from any convoy vessels that could get through. On 18 November 1942 one such Malta convoy vessel - the 'Arethusa' - was torpedoed by aircraft about 70 miles from Alexandria and 'Whitehaven' was sent to assist, helping to bring the 'Arethusa' safely back to Alexandria harbour.

Coincidentally, this was also an active period of minesweeping following the Allied victory at El Alamein and 'Whitehaven' led the 14th Minesweeping Flotilla in this important task. Over several months the 14th Flotilla, led by 'Whitehaven', swept the North African ports of Mersa Matruh, Bardia, Tobruk, Benghazi, Tripoli, Sousse and Sfax. In recognition of her part in the North African victory General Bernard Montgomery visited 'Whitehaven' in March 1943.

By the middle of 1943 the siege of Malta had also been lifted. During May and June of that year 'Whitehaven' joined in the clearance of the sea channels around Malta which also helped prepare for the imminent invasion of Sicily. In mid-June 1943 King George VI sailed into Valetta, Malta with 'Whitehaven' having the honour of sweeping in the 'Aurora' - with the king's party on board - into the Grand Harbour.



During the invasion of Sicily (July 1943) 'Whitehaven' had a particularly important role. On 12 July, with fighting still taking place in Syracuse and despite coming under fire from the air and shore batteries, 'Whitehaven' broke the boom into Syracuse harbour. This action enabled a naval landing party with explosives to clear the port facilities and help establish the use of the harbour for the Allies.

After additional convoy duties in the Mediterranean, 'Whitehaven' was sent back to Benghazi, arriving on 27 October 1943 to protect convoys in that area from U-Boat attack. On 13 November 'Whitehaven' was sent to Port Said, leaving there with the rest of the 14th Flotilla on 1 December 1943 and headed for home waters.

Arriving in Plymouth on 7 January 1944 'Whitehaven' was then refit to the end of March in preparation for the Normandy Landings, where she was assigned to 'Force U'. This was part of the Western (United States) Task Force under Admiral D.P. Moon of the U.S. Navy, and made the assault on the Varreville area.

In many respects it was fitting that HMS Whitehaven assisted the US Navy given the historic close connection of the Cumbrian port of Whitehaven and to the French navy. For example, the paternal grandmother of George Washington (first President of the United States) is buried in St Nicholas Churchyard, Whitehaven.



The Officers & crew host a party, for the mayor and councillors, on board HMS Whitehaven.

## Naval Phrases In Everyday use

**PULL YOUR FINGER OUT:** *Sailors would keep the gunpowder in place in the cannon with their finger, leading to the shout to Pull your finger out when it came time to fire*

**GOT YOU OVER A BARREL:** *Sailors were tied over a barrel before being flogged.*

**IT'S A LONG SHOT:** *Used when a gunner would fire a cannon way beyond its range with little real chance of hitting the target.*

**TRUE COLOURS:** *Naval etiquette allowed for false colours to be flown when approaching an enemy ship but a ships true colours had to be flown before battle commenced.*

**FELLING GROGGY:** *Too much grog, the Naval term for the rum ration.*

During and shortly after the Normandy campaign 'Whitehaven' was employed in keeping the channels clear for the Allied supply ships and troop ships and minesweeping off Cherbourg and Brest. Between November 1944 and January 1945 'Whitehaven' was engaged in minesweeping around the southern approaches to Britain and the French ports (Bristol Channel, Scilly Isles, St Malo, Channel Islands etc).

In February 1945 the 14th Flotilla was dissolved and 'Whitehaven' joined the 15th Flotilla, based on the eastern coast of Britain around the Humber. After VE Day (8 May 1945) 'Whitehaven' was employed in clearing the outer channels to Germany and the Netherlands, and general mine clearance around the British coastline. In October 1945, as seen in the above photograph, HMS Whitehaven and its crew paid a goodwill and thanksgiving visit to the port that gave its name to the vessel. 'Whitehaven' was finally decommissioned and scrapped in 1948. It had been deemed her useful life had come to an end.