

HMS 'Ulysses' and all that

Modelling Dido Class cruisers from Airfix kits described by Ian Fleming

IN THE LATE thirties the growing strength of the Luftwaffe made it apparent that a type of ship heavily armed against aircraft would be needed if convoys were to be adequately protected. Accordingly, the *Dido* Class was laid down, 11 ships with names of mythological characters (except

Cleopatra, who of course was no myth, the same blunder being perpetuated in the present *Leander* Class). They entered service between 1940 and 1942.

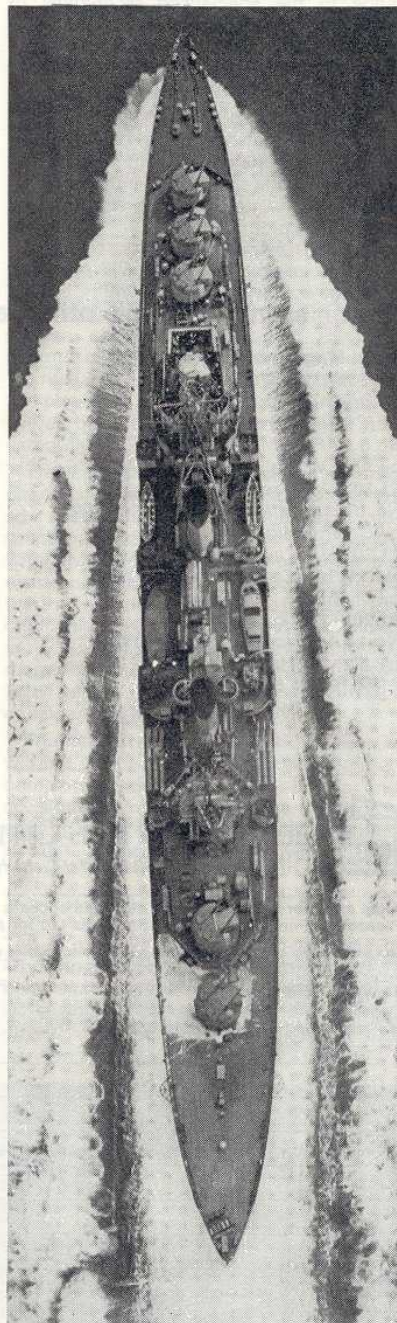
These ships retained the hull design of the *Arethusa* Class, but the superstructure and armament were revised completely. They mounted an impressive ten 5.25-inch guns, designed for use against aircraft or surface targets, together with two quad 3 pdrs and four or six 20 mm AA guns. However, production of the ships seems to have outrun that of their 5.25-inch turrets, on which the *King George V* Class battleships naturally had priority. *Dido* was completed with a single 4-inch gun in place of the third turret, which was fitted later when it became available; *Charybdis* never had her full quota of 5.25s. *Scylla* never had any; she was given eight 4.5-inch guns, and was, in effect, armed rather like a *Tribal* Class destroyer than a cruiser. Nevertheless, all ships gave valiant service both in the Mediterranean, where *Bonaventure*, *Naiad* and *Hermione* were sunk, and in the Western Approaches; *Charybdis* was sunk off Normandy in October 1943.

The modelling instructions detailed below are for *Argonaut*, using the Airfix *Ajax*; other variants are given also, to provide the modeller with a wide and interesting choice of subject.

Argonaut Shorten the hull by cutting squarely through it 13 cm from each end; discard the centre portion and cement together the bow and stern sections. Strips of 10 thou plastic card representing the armour belt will very nicely conceal the join.

The fo'c's'le deck needs to be shortened a little and the after deck extended with plastic card; some locating lugs and holes should be removed from both. Next, all the superstructure, which conveniently consists entirely of flat surfaces, should be made up from plastic card, taking measurements from the drawing. For the bridge windows, strips of transparent plastic with the frames painted on would be a tricky but effective refinement. Funnels are made with stiff paper bent round a former.

The five turrets should be carved from $\frac{3}{8}$ inch (9 mm) dowel; with the awkward shape at the front it would probably not be feasible to mould them from a single former. Patience and a sharp knife and file will therefore be required. Quad pom-poms can come from the spares box or, better, be made up from scrap and plastic rod; 20 mm guns likewise, these being simply rod for the trunk and the barrel and card or even paper for the shield. *Argonaut* had six of these, as shown on the drawing. Do keep the left-over 4-inch guns, which are very



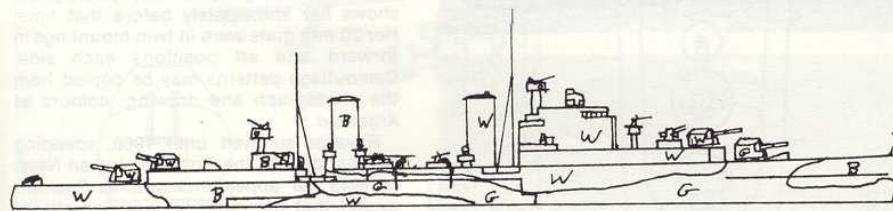
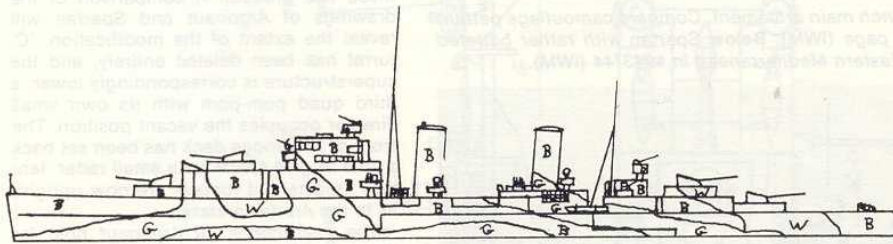
Argonaut at speed when new in October 1942 (IWM).



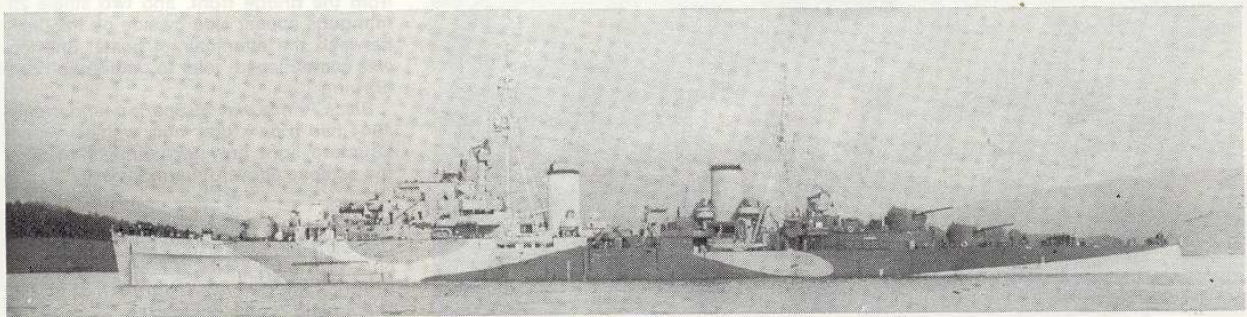
useful spares.

Finally, add remaining items such as directors — a new aft director will be required — searchlights, boats and davits; depth-charge rack on the quarter-deck, propeller-guards, triple torpedo tubes, ventilators, Carley rafts, and masts. The very clear photographs of *Argonaut* may give further ideas for super-detailing and sea settings, both of which are commended.

Argonaut was painted in white, dark green and light blue camouflage; the exact shades of camouflage colours were very



Top of page *Dido* in 1940 had incomplete main armament, and quad .5-inch machine-guns in place of 20 mm (IWM). **Above** Another view of *Argonaut* when new in 1942 (IWM). **Left top** Camouflage pattern for port side of *Scylla* (not to scale). **Left bottom** Camouflage pattern for starboard side of *Royalist* (not to scale). **Below** *Royalist*. Note camouflage pattern on this side compared with drawing above. Green is the darkest shade (IWM).





variable, so any light blue and darkish green will do. The patterns for the respective sides should be apparent from the photograph and drawing. Fo'c's'le and after decks were wood, other decks, and the fo'c's'le deck forward of the breakwater, were dark grey. As normally, the hull below the black waterline band was dull red.

Cleopatra was in mid-1942 the flagship of Admiral Vian in the Med. She and *Euryalus* had separate small directors for their quad pom-poms, and an extra pair of searchlights, both on platforms by the after funnel, as shown on the drawing of *Spartan*. Each had a dark grey hull, fore funnel and 'A' turret; the remainder was light grey.

Naiad was as *Argonaut*; all her hull and superstructure up to the level of the fo'c's'le deck were dark grey, the rest light grey. This illustrates how widely colour schemes could vary!

Phoebe by 1944 had her 'C' turret replaced by a pom-pom, with directors on platforms for all three as *Spartan*. She was at that time light grey overall, but with a dark blue area extending from the waterline to after-deck level, and from 'A' gun to 'Y' gun. *Sirius* at the same time was as *Cleopatra*, except that instead of 20 mm she carried three single 40 mm guns, one each side in the position below the bridge and one right up in the stern. *Sirius* was very light grey, almost white, with a blue

area as *Phoebe*. Oddly, the mainmast (only) was black.

Scylla, as the odd man out of the class, had a number of significant differences, and thereby makes a most interesting modelling subject. The modeller should refer to the photograph and drawings for structural differences and camouflage patterns. The colours are as *Argonaut*. 20 mm guns appear on a platform in front of the bridge; in sponsons beside the bridge; each side of the after director; and in twin mountings below the bridge each side.

Five further ships completed in 1943-44 represented a modified version of the *Dido* class. (The famous but fictional 'HMS *Ulysses*' was based upon a combination of these two groups). A comparison of the drawings of *Argonaut* and *Spartan* will reveal the extent of the modification. 'C' turret has been deleted entirely, and the superstructure is correspondingly lower; a third quad pom-pom with its own small director occupies the vacant position. The front of the bridge deck has been set back a little to give space for a small radar 'lantern'; masts and funnels are now upright, as in the *Arethusa* class.

The instructions for *Argonaut* hold for this class also, represented on the drawing by *Spartan*. She was the only member of the group to be lost, during the Anzio landings in January 1944. The photograph shows her immediately before that time. Her 20 mm guns were in twin mountings in forward and aft positions each side. Camouflage patterns may be copied from the photograph and drawing; colours as *Argonaut*.

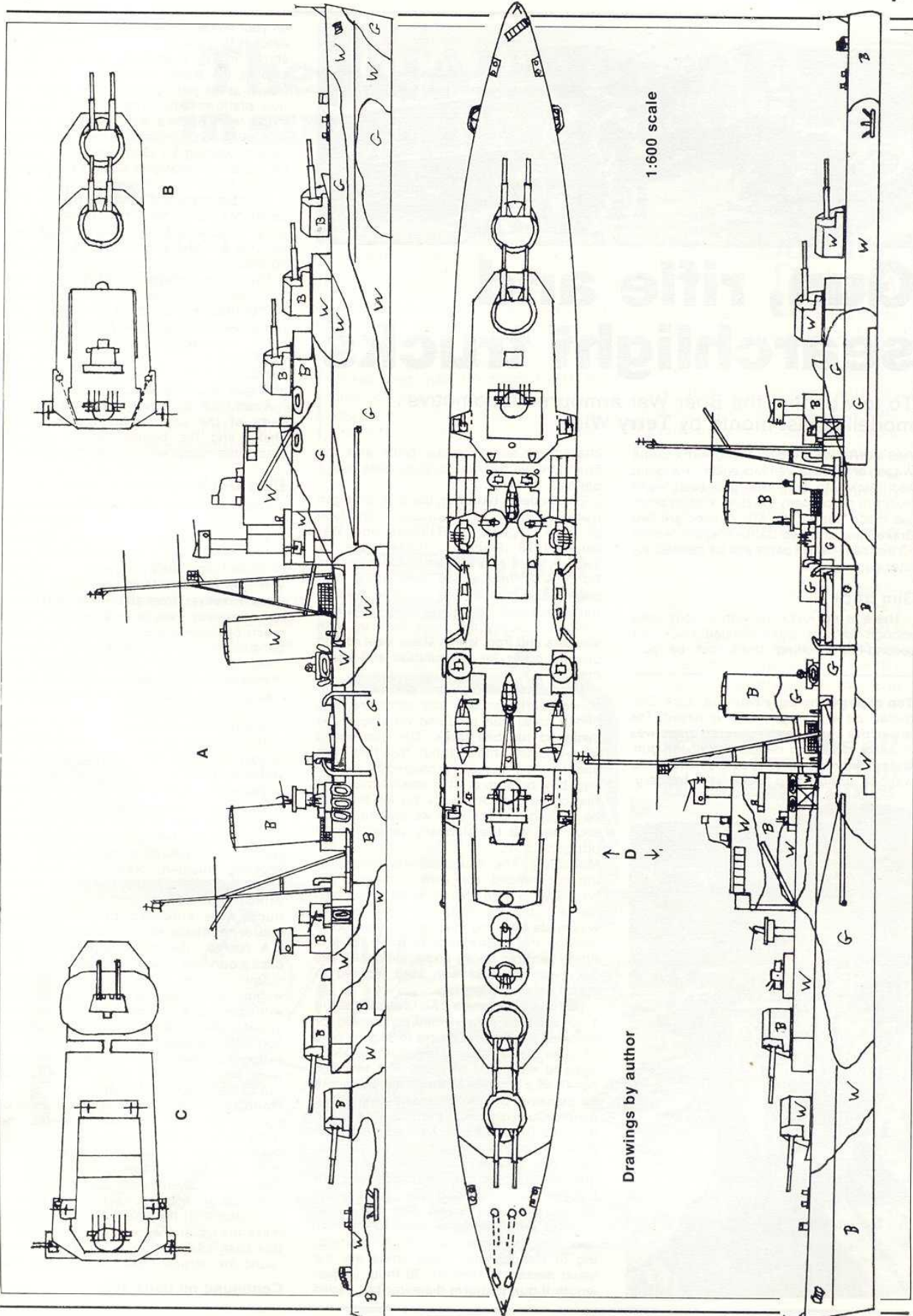
Royalist survived until 1966, spending her last days in the Royal Australian Navy. In 1943 her appearance was as *Spartan*, except that the radar lantern was absent from the bridge front, and two single 20 mm guns appear side by side on the deck between the after pair of boats. She too was camouflaged; refer to photograph and drawing.

Black Prince was as *Spartan*, and in July 1944 had a dark grey hull, with all superstructure light grey including, unusually, the screens above the armour belt.

Key to drawings. A Profile of *Argonaut*. Camouflage pattern. W = white, B = light blue, G = dark green. B Forward gundeck of *Argonaut*. C Forward gundeck of *Scylla*. D Plan and profile of *Spartan*.

Top of page *Scylla* with her unique 4.5-inch main armament. Compare camouflage pattern on this side with drawing on previous page (IWM). **Below** *Spartan* with rather battered paintwork (IWM). **Bottom** *Sirius* in the Eastern Mediterranean in 1943/44 (IWM).





1:600 scale

Drawings by author