

Their history and evolution
by M.W. Williams.

British Battlecruisers

Part 5

Admiral class

The four ships of the Admiral class were conceived to counter the planned new German battlecruisers of the Mackensen class, then under construction just across the North Sea. These German ships (as well as the latest generation then in service) were superb ships, well-armoured and protected, but generally with a smaller calibre of gun compared to their British contemporaries. This was to change, however, in the Mackensens they were to be armed with eight 15.2in guns and have a maximum speed of around 30 knots. At this time the Royal Navy had nothing under construction or planned that would match them.

By February 1916, however, they had six different battlecruiser designs under consideration. It was finally decided to proceed with the No. 3 design, and this was approved by the Admiralty board on 7 April 1916, orders for three of these new ships were placed on 19 April, while the fourth was ordered on 13 July, at yards around the country. On 14 July the four battlecruisers became known as the new Admiral class and they were allocated the names, *Anson*, *Howe*, *Rodney* and *Hood*, all were subsequently laid down from September to November 1916.

After the Battle of Jutland had been fought, additional armour protection had been worked into the design, to finally create the strongest, most heavily-armed British battlecruiser to date. In early 1917 it became known to the Admiralty that work on the German battlecruisers had virtually ceased, in favour of U-boat and small craft construction, so the vital need for the entire class of four new British ships had now receded. In March 1917 requests were sent to the builders of the *Anson*, *Howe* and *Rodney*, to consider the orders as only 'stand by jobs', the further construction of which was to take a low priority. Only the *Hood* was to be proceeded with, to provide the fleet with an example of a new battlecruiser incorporating the latest details of ship construction and protection brought to light by recent battle experience.

It was not until 27 February that the Admiralty finally decided to cancel the three hulls which had occupied the slips for two years. The orders were sent out to the

builders on 17 March and existing structure was subsequently broken-up on the stocks.

Hood

The sole remaining member of the Admiral class, the *Hood*, was launched on 22 August 1918, various modifications to the original design having been carried out before she was finally completed. Commissioned into the fleet on 15 May 1920 as the flagship of the BCS, she was the largest ship in the fleet, a distinction that she was to hold for the next 21 years of her long and interesting career. Because of her status as the greatest ship in the Royal Navy, she was called upon to show the flag and pay courtesy visits to our allies and members of our loyal Empire. She visited ports in areas as far apart as Scandinavia and Brazil, during her first years of service.

From 1923-24 she formed part of the Special Service Squadron, which comprised the Battlecruisers *Hood* and *Repulse*, with five light cruisers, this fleet carried out one of the most successful world cruises undertaken by a squadron, when during these years it visited the Empire. She went to Portugal in 1925, then went on to do a number of home and local cruises in the next four years. Refitted at Portsmouth from May 1929 until May 1931, she emerged with an aircraft catapult and handling crane aft on the quarter deck, which was, however, to prove to be a failure in this position, and was removed in 1932 after her spring cruise to the West Indies.

The normal peacetime routine of cruises and visits continued during the early thirties. On 23 January 1935 there occurred the collision with the *Renown* already mentioned in my coverage of that ship. *Hood's* damage was aft on the starboard side, seriously damaging the outer propeller and shaft, and badly distorting some plates. After temporary repairs at Gibraltar final ones were eventually carried out at Portsmouth in late 1935.

From August 1936 she patrolled the Biscay area during the Spanish Civil War, followed by an extended stay in the

Western Mediterranean, all to look after British nationals and interests in the area. The *Hood* again received minor damage to her outer plating, when on 20 September 1938, she grounded in Gibraltar Harbour, and was subsequently repaired there in November. There was also a minor refit at Malta during her stay in the Mediterranean in 1938.

The *Hood* returned to home waters to receive a short refit from June until August 1939, to mainly strengthen her obsolete anti-aircraft armament. There had been plans to take her in hand for an extensive modernisation along the same lines as the *Renown*, but with the proximity of war in the late thirties, she could not be spared from the fleet for the work to be done, the result was that she was basically the same ship that had been completed twenty years before, with only the belated addition of some new light guns to improve her.

The *Hood* was at sea when the war started on 3 September 1939, and as it turned out this was to be a very familiar part of her company's life in the months ahead, when she was called upon to patrol the northern waters, or support light forces. She was bombed on one of these supporting missions on 26 September but only received minor damage, and the routine of war patrols continued for most of the next seven months. She received yet another short refit at Devonport from March to May 1940, to enable extra 4in unit aircraft guns to be added and the remaining old 5.5in low angle guns to be removed.

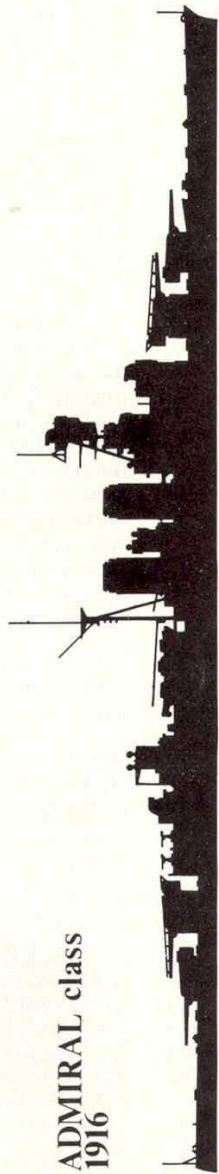
After this she escorted another convoy, before joining up with the *Ark Royal* on 19 June. Heading for Gibraltar were the battleships *Valiant* and *Resolution*, a force of cruisers and destroyers awaiting them, and on the 23rd they arrived and the combined group now became known as Force H. They were needed to perform an extremely distasteful but very necessary task. After the fall of France the main units of the powerful French Fleet were transferred to Oran, where there could be no possibility of these ships falling intact into Axis control. A peaceful solution through negotiations proved to be impossible, and Force H regrettably bombarded the French Fleet into impotence on 3 July.

BRITISH BATTLECRUISERS

The last battlecruisers

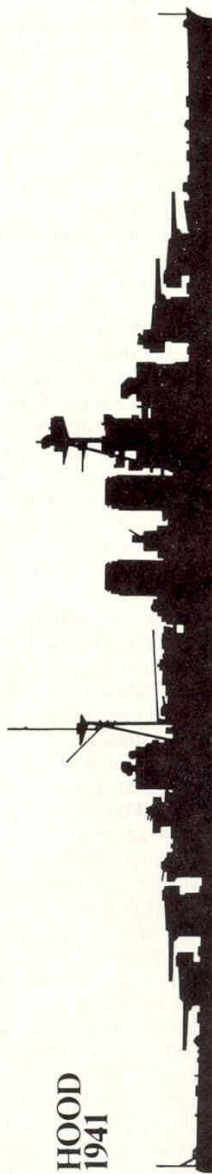
Laid down	Oct -Nov 1916	31 5 16	ordered Oct 1921
Completed		5 3 20	
Fate	cancelled Feb 19	sunk 24 5 41	cancelled Feb 1922
Deep load, tons	41,000	48,500	53,190
Max knots	32·0	28·0	32·0
Belt inches	12	12	14
Main guns, (No & inches)	8 15	8 15	9 16
Sec, guns	16 5·5	14 4	16 6
Torp, tubes	2 21	4 21	2 24·5
Aircraft	2		1
Feet overall	860	860	862

MWW

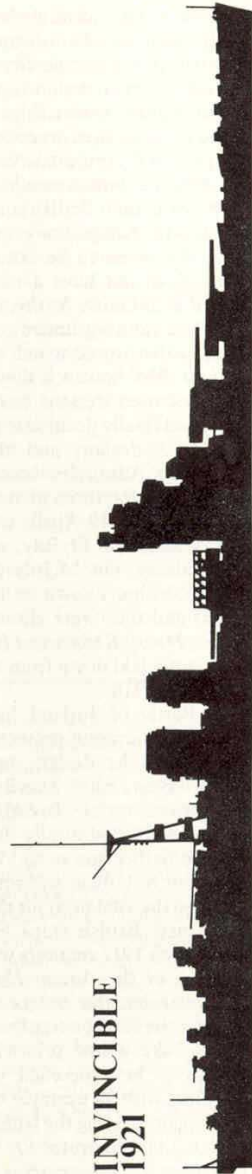


**ADMIRAL class
1916**

ANSON, HOWE and RODNEY, the HOOD was originally of this class.



**HOOD
1941**



**INVINCIBLE
1921**

plus the INFLEXIBLE, INDOMITABLE and INDEFATIGABLE.

The *Hood's* next operation in mid July was against the real enemy, when along with the *Resolution* she escorted the *Ark Royal* on an air-attack mission to Sardinia, successfully avoiding several high-level bombing attacks on the way back. A similar raid on Cagliari followed on 1 August. The *Hood's* time in the Mediterranean was now at an end, and she was ordered to return to the Home Fleet, arriving at Scapa Flow on 10 August. She sailed from here on numerous occasions for sweeps and patrols until January 1941, when she was sent to Rosyth for a refit which lasted until 18 March. The Prime Minister and later King George VI visited her at Rosyth.

Further sweeps followed her refit, but in May her presence was required to help prevent the recently completed German battleship *Bismarck* and supporting ships, from breaking out into the Atlantic. On 21 May the *Hood* in company with the brand new *Prince of Wales*, sailed to block the *Bismarck's* possible Icelandic escape routes. The German force was located by the cruisers *Suffolk* and *Norfolk* in the Denmark Straits, the *Hood* and *PoW* to the South raced to intercept. The engagement which followed between these two forces in the early morning of 24 May 1941, resulted in the old *Hood* receiving a number of telling hits early in the action, which caused a massive fire on the boat deck, and finally a sudden end after five minutes in action when the after main magazines detonated. The career of what was undoubtedly the fleet's best-remembered battlecruiser had come to a tragically swift end.

Invincible class

One of the main reasons for not proceeding with the three remaining Admiral class vessels in 1919, was that they were by now over three years old in basic design and the fleet had by now accumulated battle and damage experience which they wanted to incorporate into a completely new design to match the new ships planned by Japan and America. These two former Allied powers had embarked upon massive naval building programmes during the later stages of the war, to even then prepare themselves for a future clash of interests in the Pacific. These proposed new ships would completely outclass the existing ships of the Royal Navy. Even the latest design, the *Hood* would be inferior to them, especially in gun size.

Work started in 1919 on a brand new ship and by 1920 the first sets of initial designs had been completed, they were eight altogether; the K2, K3, J3, I3, J3a, H3b, H3c and the G3. But by 13 December 1920 only the G3 and the H3 designs remained for consideration, finally the G3 design was chosen as the base for the new battlecruiser on 17 December, the initial design of which is shown in my artwork.

As can be appreciated, however, the specifications and particulars of a great ship such as the G3, are subject to numerous improvements and alterations to the original design during the long process of completing the final construction and layout drawings, before work can actually start on the ship. The G3, the *Invincible* design, was subjected to a number of changes

during early 1921, the main points being the redistribution of the eight secondary 6in turrets, the angle of the internal armour belt, armour thickness increased in many areas, but perhaps the most obvious areas can be seen from the silhouettes, there was a redesigned higher bridge structure, the odd twin funnels were placed further apart with the mainmast just aft of them.

Orders for these four ships were placed at yards around the country in October 1921, and it was planned that this class would be completed in three years time, in late 1924, and be due for commissioning in early 1925. In July 1921, America had invited all the major naval powers to Washington to discuss a naval limitation treaty, and by late 1921 they had come to an agreement. The majority of the new American and Japanese construction was to be scrapped, and the British 'Invincibles' were at first suspended on 18 November, and then finally cancelled on 13 February 1922.

So ended the last attempt to build battlecruisers for the Royal Navy. By the early thirties when capital ships were again being considered, developments in the fields of marine engineering and ship construction brought about by the various inter war naval treaties, meant that now heavily armoured ships could be given speeds usually associated with battlecruisers, the age of the fast battleship had arrived and had superseded the pure battlecruiser type.

The Hood photographed in the middle 1920s. It is interesting to note that the ship carries a catapult on 'B' turret in exactly the style proposed in the original design. The aircraft is a Fairey Flycatcher. The catapult was subsequently removed (NMM).

