



HMS Valiant in the 1943-44 period as depicted in the author's drawing (B). The drawing shows port side camouflage and this view shows the starboard pattern (IWM-A21712).

'Queen Elizabeth' class battleships in World War 2

Conversion ideas for the Airfix HMS Warspite kit by I. M. Fleming

Of the mighty 'super-Dreadnoughts' of the British Grand Fleet, only the *Queen Elizabeth* and *Royal Sovereign* classes continued in service after World War 1. With their 15-inch guns and 13-inch armour, it was reckoned that they would be invaluable fighting units for a good time to come. Modernisation proved necessary by the 1930s, however, and all five of the *Queen Elizabeth* class were rebuilt in varying degrees as resources became available. Thus, *Warspite*, the class representative in the Airfix range, lost most of her original superstructure and two pairs of 6-inch guns, was given new bridgework, engines, funnel, four twin 4-inch AA guns, aircraft hangar and catapult, and emerged in 1937 with the appearance depicted in the Airfix kit.

The kit represents HMS *Warspite* as she appeared from then until 1940, after which the AA armament was increased. Airfix brought out this offering many years ago, and yet it is so accurate and highly detailed that, after comparison with the best photographs and large-scale plans available, it can confidently be stated that no correction or alteration whatever is required.

Credit where credit is due: Airfix, on this occasion, produced a winner. Only the colouring details are inaccurate — there is no such thing as a bronze anchor!

The correct colour scheme for the immediately pre-war period is as follows: hull and upperworks (and anchors!), light grey; planked decks, bleached teak; metal decks, dark grey; waterline, black, 1/8 inch thick (= 3 mm); hull undersides, dull red; barrels of multiple machine-guns and pom-poms, black (all other gun barrels light grey). During the Spanish Civil War, *Warspite*, like many British warships, carried national markings on 'B' turret: these were red (foremost), white, and blue stripes, each 2 mm wide in this scale, painted across the roof and down the sides of the turret, starting immediately behind the gun barrels. The Seafox aircraft were pale grey with 'A' type roundels.

Warspite changed her appearance little during the war, apart from acquiring various radar sets, a number of 20 mm AA guns, and camouflage. Thus, little extra labour is required to depict her as she was in 1942/3, when she was serving in the Mediterranean, where she took part in the

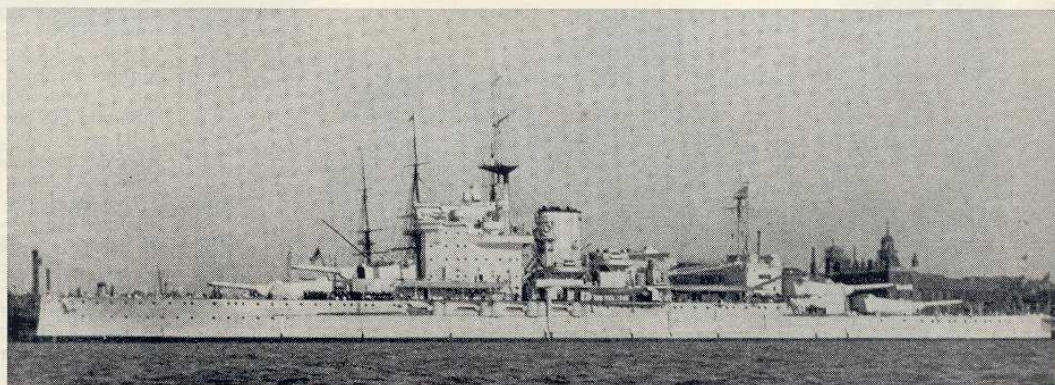
Allied invasion of Italy.

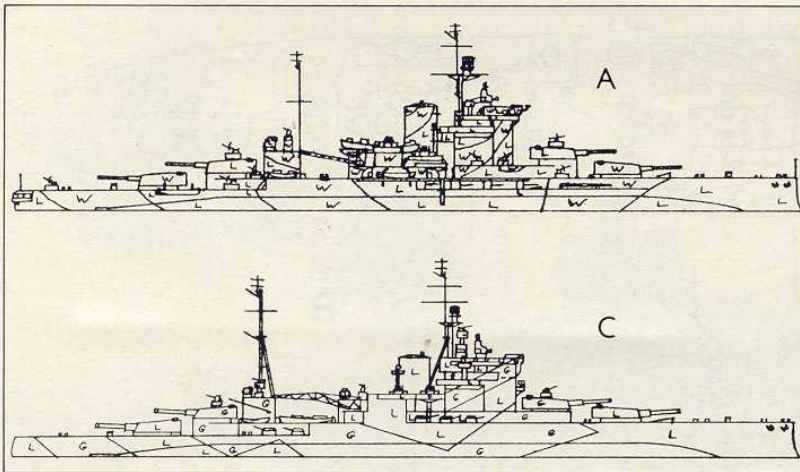
For this conversion, Parts 106-109 should be omitted and replaced by single 20 mm guns. These are easily made with fine rod for the barrel, slightly thicker rod tapered at the top for the trunk, and thin card or paper for the shield; the pattern will be found on drawing B. Other single 20 mm guns are sited in the following positions: one each side on the main deck close by 'B' turret base; two each side on the outboard edges of Part 32, 10 and 21 mm from the rear of that part; one each side on the main deck beside the forward corners of 'X' turret; one each side on the quarterdeck beside the centre of 'X' turret; one centrally on the quarterdeck 15 mm from the stern; total 15 guns. All of these are protected by circular screens 5 mm in diameter and 2 mm in height; these can be made by rolling strips of card around a paintbrush handle, gluing the end down with sufficient overlap to grip, and trimming *when dry*.

The following radar sets must be added: Type 285, 'fishbone'-style, on the HACS directors (Parts 41 and 42); Type 282, for AA barrage direction, centrally on Part 55, and one each side on Part 38, 5 mm from its front edge; Type 279 Air Warning at the mastheads; Type 284 on the main 15-inch director; these are all made very simply from rod and card. The Type 273 Surface Warning 'lantern', made from dowel, is sited at the foretop; to make room for it on the prototype, the fore topmast was stepped behind instead of before the lower mast, and so Assembly 9B should be mounted back to front. Patterns for all radar aeries are given on drawing B.

Two radar offices are also required: a nice quick job with plastic card. One of these is mounted across Part 35 between the searchlights, in place of the two ladders; the foremast passes through its roof

Simplest of all projects discussed here is *Warspite* in the 1938-39 period in peacetime light grey with red/white/blue neutrality stripes on 'B' turret. The blast bags are white, tops black, and topmasts white (David MacGregor).





The other is sited on the underside of the same part against the back of the tower. Both measure 4 x 4 x 16 mm, with the long edge athwartships. Part 59 is omitted.

The aircraft, if fitted, should be a Walrus (available in *Belfast* and *Suffolk* kits), camouflaged in Dark Slate Grey and Extra Dark Sea Grey with Sky undersides and 'B' type roundels. The ship herself was painted in light grey and white, with medium grey decks, and was still wearing that scheme when she went aground at Prussia Cove, Cornwall, in April 1947. Drawing A shows the pattern, which was the same on both sides: L = light grey, W = white. That drawing is not to scale.

Queen Elizabeth and *Valiant* were more

bridgework on *Valiant* is quite different from *Warspite's*, and must therefore be made up from plastic card with careful measurement from the drawing. This is also the case for the midships structure around the hangar, and the extension aft of the deck (but not the sides) of Part 32. Apart from the curved screens around the two pairs of multiple pom-poms, and the columns supporting the forward pair, all surfaces are flat, and no difficulty should arise in assembling this from card. Note the searchlight positions on the aft side of the funnel and on front of the bridge, overhanging 'B' turret.

Searchlights also appear on a platform above the after superstructure, which is

Ploughing through an unfriendly northern sea is *Queen Elizabeth*, freshly painted and on her way back from a refit in USA. Author's drawing (C), above, shows paint scheme on the other side (IWM-A19044).



extensively reconstructed than was *Warspite*, as can be seen from drawing B which depicts *HMS Valiant* as she appeared towards the end of the war when her aircraft and catapult had been removed and the ship camouflaged. She differs from *Warspite* principally in that her 6-inch guns have been removed, the sides and main deck extended to follow the lines of the hull in that area, and new turrets fitted, each carrying two 4.5-inch dual-purpose guns. Three such turrets appear each side amidships, and two by the after superstructure where the main deck narrows to make space for them. The turrets can be made up from quarter-inch (6 mm) dowel, or perhaps moulded.

Above the flagdeck (Part 35), the

structure also carries a pair of HACS directors mounted side by side on a common base; a further pair are sited between the main director and the foremast, in the same manner as on *Renown* which was reconstructed at the same time as *Valiant*. In general it appears that *Queen Elizabeth* and *Valiant* represent something of a cross between *Warspite* and *Renown*, whose wholesale reconstruction (for which see the new *Airfix Annual for Military Modelers*) was broadly similar, notably in the bridgework, aircraft hangar, secondary armament and layout of directors.

Each of these directors carries a Type 285 radar aerial; other aerials are as described for *Warspite* except that *Val-*

iant's Type 282 sets are carried on circular platforms rising from the flagdeck, and on rectangular mountings above the cranes. The positions of these and of the 11 single and four twin 20 mm AA guns are shown in the drawing.

The camouflage colours of *Valiant* were three shades of blue: pale (P on drawing), medium (B), and dark (D). The pattern of the port side should be taken from the drawing, of the starboard, from the photograph.

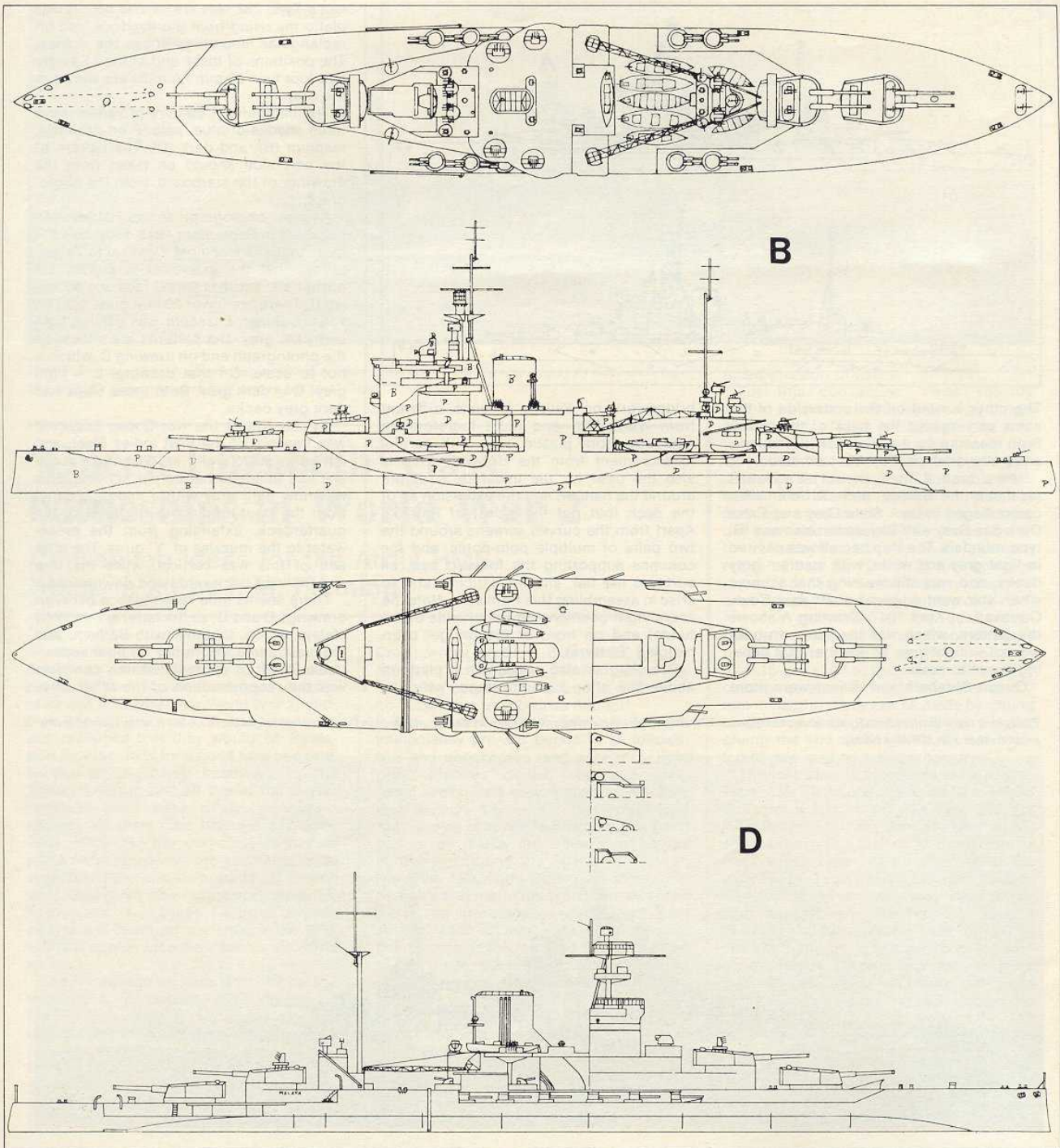
Another photograph shows *HMS Queen Elizabeth* in September 1943. From this it is clear that she is almost identical to *Valiant* except that the mainmast is higher, set further aft, and has tripod legs angled forward. There are fewer 20 mm guns than on *Valiant*. *Queen Elizabeth* was painted light and dark grey; the patterns are shown on the photograph and on drawing C, which is not to scale. On that drawing, L = light grey, G = dark grey. Both these ships had dark grey decks.

By the end of the war *Queen Elizabeth* was flagship of the East Indies Fleet, and although structurally as described above she had changed her colour scheme. This was now light grey with a mid-blue panel from the boot-topping to the level of the quarterdeck, extending from the breakwater to the muzzles of 'Y' guns. The after end of this was vertical, while the fore end inclined backwards and downwards.

There seems little resemblance between drawings B and D; as the latter shows *HMS Malaya* which, together with *Barham*, was the least altered from her original appearance, it will be appreciated how complete was the reconstruction of the other three

ships of this class. The only substantial alterations made to *Malaya* were amidships: where originally these ships had two cylindrical funnels, the fore rising from the main deck just abaft the bridge with the second some 45 feet further aft, these were trunked together on *Malaya* and *Barham* in a most unsightly fashion. That daylight can be seen between the two funnel bases is clear from the photograph of *Barham*; on *Malaya*, this is obscured by the presence of an aircraft hangar. There cannot have been as much space in *Malaya's* hangar as in *Warspite's*, for the after funnel rose through it.

As the drawing shows, *Malaya* retained her full set of six 6-inch guns each side amidships; further aft, beneath the quar-



terdeck, it is still apparent that provision was once made for two more each side, whose casemates have been plated over, but not following the line of the hull sides. Dowel and plastic card and rod will quickly accomplish the necessary alterations to the *Warspite* kit hull and 6-inch batteries.

A great deal of plastic card, and patient and accurate measurement from drawing D, will be required for the construction of *Malaya's* tower, bridge, and spotting-top. Part 56 is resited abaft 'B' turret, its original position on *Warspite* also; a number of drum-shaped directors, for the 15-inch and the 6-inch armament, appear at various points on the bridgework as drawn. Two

HACS directors are fitted, one on the spotting-top, the other on the aft superstructure; no radar was fitted at the period depicted (1939). AA armament is similar to that in *Warspite*: two twin 4-inch guns each side amidships, two multiple 0.5-inch machine-guns on each of 'B' and 'X' turrets, and one eight-barrelled 2 pdr pom-pom (two in *Warspite*) each side on the roof of the hangar.

The funnel can be made up from the fore and aft ends of the kit parts, with plastic card inserted for the sides, and carved wood (or even plastic mouldings) for the trunk rising from the former fore-funnel base. Other details should be taken from

the drawing.

Malaya was light grey, with wooden decks bleached and others (that is, all above the gundecks) dark grey. Her Seafox aircraft were pale grey with 'A' type roundels. The spotting-top was white; mainmast from the top of the funnel to the 'starfish', black; boats, dark blue hull with white upperworks and white below the waterline.

Finally, HMS *Barham*, shown in a photograph, differed from *Malaya* in a few respects. These are: Admiral's walk fitted to the stern as in *Warspite*; no hangar; extending catapult, of girder construction, fitted to the roof of 'X' turret; AA rocket launcher on 'B' turret roof; lower aft super-



The 15-inch guns of Warspite firing on German shore positions during the ship's famous bombardment of the French coast on June 6, 1944. This configuration makes an ideal adaptation from the Airfix kit (IWM-A23916).

structure; tripod legs on mainmast with the after HACS director on a platform between them; higher main topmast; pom-poms and after 4-inch guns further aft; different arrangements of searchlights; boats handled by a derrick extending forward from the mainmast base, and by a crane mounted on the port side of the aft superstructure. All these points should be clear enough from the photograph.

Barham was light grey overall, with

decks as *Malaya*, and a white band at the top of the mainmast tripod. She was wearing this colour scheme on November 25 1941, when she was torpedoed and sunk by U-331 in the Mediterranean, the only member of this class lost to enemy action.

As will be obvious any of the conversion projects detailed here are quite complex in terms of small detail work, even though the actual work is straightforward. Though it

should be possible to do the basic work from my sketches and drawings there is certainly no substitute for close study of further photos of these ships in books like *British Battleships of World War II* and others. I have given brief mention of colours — itself a complex subject — and for more details of precise shades and mixes I commend Peter Hodges' book *Royal Navy Warship Camouflage* (Almark).

Barham in August 1940 showing trunked funnels, catapult atop turret, and crane arrangement — a more difficult model project from the kit (IWM-A106).

