

TIRPITZ Eagle

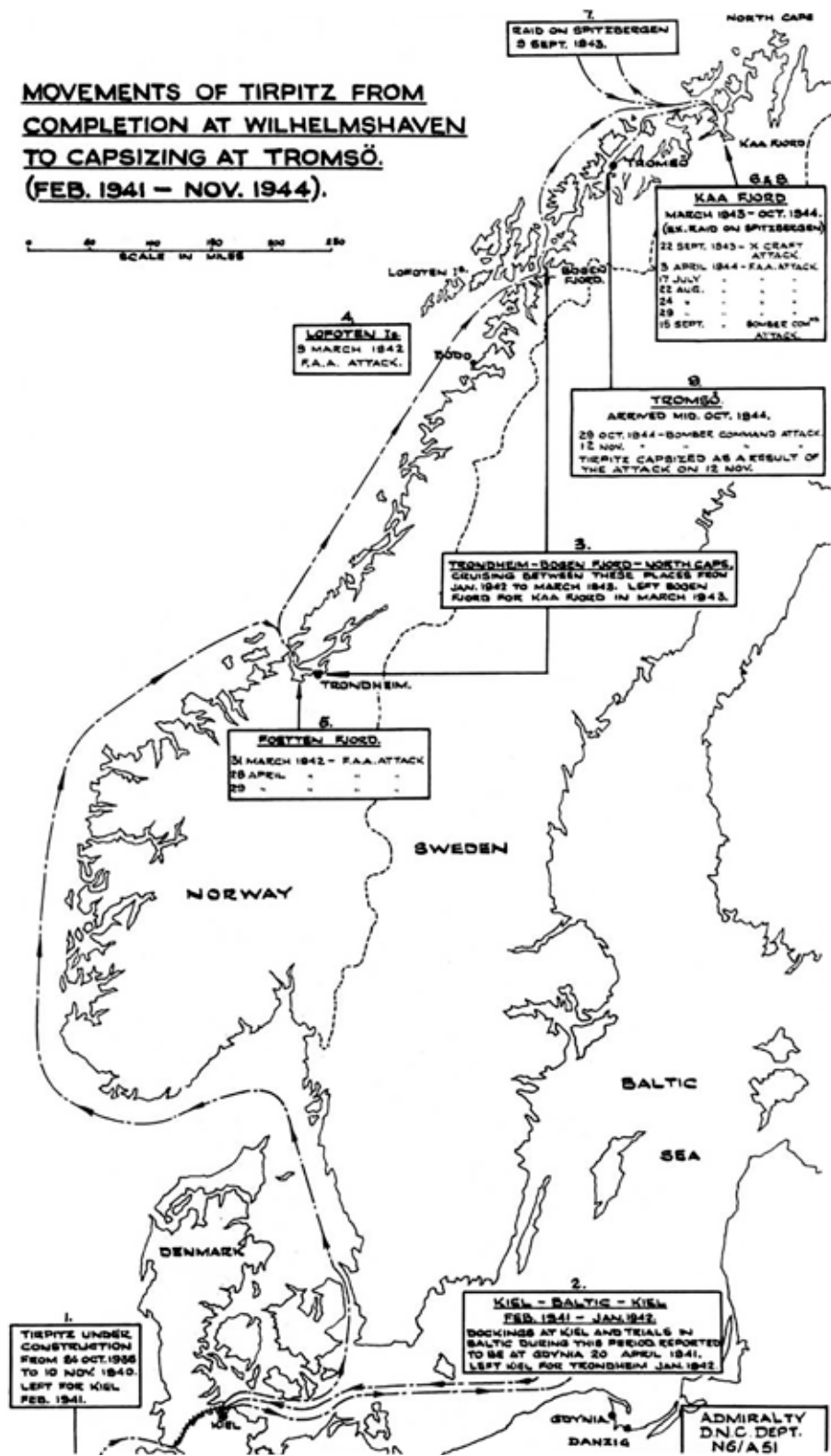
Staff Ride



 **ROYAL
AIR FORCE**
Eagles Scheme

**MOVEMENTS OF TIRPITZ FROM
COMPLETION AT WILHELMSHAVEN
TO CAPSIZING AT TROMSØ.
(FEB. 1941 - NOV. 1944).**

0 50 100 150 200
SCALE IN MILES



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Introduction

Welcome to Tirpitz Eagle 2019. We will study and commemorate the German battleship Tirpitz at the very site where she met her end seventy-five years ago. This action was one of several during World War Two that saw the demise of such capital ships because of Air Power.

The day will begin with a journey by ship from Tromsø harbour to where the Tirpitz was berthed on 12 November 1944. As a result of Operation CATECHISM the Tirpitz capsized at 0952 local time. We will commemorate the loss of the ship at this time, as indeed the Norwegians do every year. 971 of the crew were killed, whilst a further 82 were rescued by comrades. We will then return to Tromsø for a buffet lunch where will have a presentation by a local historian about Tirpitz. After that we will go to Tromsø Cemetery, where there are 37 Commonwealth War Graves, to pay our respects. This will be followed by a visit to the Tromsø Tirpitz Museum. Once there we will split into smaller groups and a Staff Ride Stand Discussion will take place to draw out some of the lessons that can be identified from Allied attempts to sink the ship. We will then have time to prepare ourselves for the formal dining-in night in the evening.

Staff Ride Stand Discussion

Allied forces had to display innovation and agility, with a great deal of resilience, in their attempts to sink the Tirpitz. Which of these factors have you identified from the campaign to sink the ship? Have you been involved with any operations that required similar innovation and fortitude? How do you think that the Bomber Command aircrew overcame their operational and occupational stress during their missions to sink Tirpitz? What tools should be available nowadays to help cope with stress?



Captain Friedrich Karl Topp inspects sailors aboard the battleship Tirpitz, 1941. Photo: Public Domain.



Battleship Tirpitz under the protection of anti-torpedo nets, Narvik area, July 1942. Photo: Public Domain.

Tirpitz Eagle - Staff Ride Phase Briefing

Purpose

Staff Rides have long been acknowledged as a highly valuable training tool as well as providing a stimulating and challenging environment. The concept of the Staff Ride was developed as long ago as the 19th century and since then has been used to appreciate and discuss all elements of the military craft on the ground at sea and in the air.

Tirpitz Eagle provides a rich Staff Ride arena on which to study not only the historical framework, but also allows for us to project the lessons identified for current RAF personnel at all levels. Throughout Tirpitz Eagle we will benefit from having a Spec Trg Wg SME on hand throughout the Exercise who will support the training environment and provide input for ongoing discussions. Whilst Stand preparation time may be limited, a poor Stand delivery that shows obvious lack of work is unacceptable.

Method

Staff Rides – A Staff Ride (SR) compares how we operated in the past to how we operate now and may do in the future.

Definition

1. An RAF Force Development (SR) is defined as:

‘The guided, participatory analysis of selected historical operations at relevant locations, in order to develop the moral and conceptual components of Air and Fighting Power across the RAF.’

Aim

2. The aim of the FD (SR) is the proactive analysis of past operations from which direct application can be made to current and future operational environments through the study of:
 - a. The spectrum of military activity.
 - b. The employment and development of Air Power.
 - c. Command and Leadership at all levels.
 - d. Deployed operations.
 - e. The Ethos and Heritage of the RAF.

Staff Ride Stand – “Explore, Translate, Project”:

3. This should follow the profile of “Explore” (tell the history), “Translate” (show how it is relevant to today’s RAF) and “Project” (look into the future and see what can be learnt from this, and how it may affect you or your role). A Staff Ride Stand should provoke a group discussion.

The post-Stand discussion is at the heart of a good Staff Ride. Whilst the Stand presentation presents a body of evidence and analysis to the group, the following group discussion provides a vibrant environment that encourages comment and personal experiences. A well-produced Stand may pose a

question to the group at the end of the main presentation, thus enabling the rest of the group to debate. Each Stand presentation should last no longer than 25 minutes. It is at the discretion of those presenting the Stand to apportion time between them – it is advised however that equal time be given to each part of the question. If you have been paired up with someone else to do a Stand it is recommended that one of you does the “Explore” part whilst the other does the “Translate” and “Project” parts. In answering the question given ensure that you stick to the question and do not, as often the case, stray into other non-relevant areas.

A good way to start a stand is to set the scene of the location – for instance, if it’s a memorial – what does it signify? When was it built? How many names/burials? Also, don’t forget to read out the question that you have been set so that everyone in the group is fully aware of the subject matter. The use of visual aids is encouraged. This may take the form of photographs and especially handouts and maps – these engage the audience at a deeper level and provide good evidence for you question. Whilst it is tempting to use laptops, iPad and other electronic devices for your notes, try and avoid these as they often freeze or in some cases have run out of battery. Mobile phones are not to be used for notes during the Stand presentation.

Conduct

Each Stand shall be delivered in an appropriate location, chosen by the SME. It is important that those personnel delivering the Stand are aware of the physical surroundings of the group; therefore, be conscious of noise and obstructions; i.e. a busy road, railway or inappropriate locations due to distractions. Holding the attention of the group is the responsibility of those delivering the Stand – they are your group. There will be full SME support, however the SME will not play a role during the Stand itself but may assist you in directing discussions at the end of the Stand.

Conclusion

Tirpitz Eagle is a tremendous opportunity for all participants to develop on numerous levels. The Staff Ride phase is designed to run parallel to other activities at the heart of the exercise and provide an understanding of why we study the past. There will be no examination and participants will not be marked on their performance, however each element of these activities is essential training and thus must be regarded as so. It is disrespectful to the group you are with – and more importantly to those who were involved in the conflict being studied – if you do not put the appropriate amount of effort into your stand. The Staff Ride phase is a highly rewarding and enjoyable element of the week and will without doubt contribute significantly to personal development.

The German Battleship Tirpitz

Seventy-five years ago, the Royal Air Force sank “The Beast”, the German battleship Tirpitz, in a Norwegian Fjord North of the Arctic Circle in a precision daylight attack carried out by 617 Sqn and 9 Sqn. This feat, the twenty-sixth planned Allied attack on the ship, is perhaps second only in fame in Royal Air Force history to The Dambusters attack on the Ruhr Dams by 617 Sqn in May 1943.

Sister ship to the Bismarck – sunk by the Royal Navy in the North Atlantic in May 1941 – Tirpitz was the heaviest battleship to ever serve in a European Navy and her very existence as a “fleet in being” tied down a disproportionate amount of Allied resources whilst she lived as the “Lonely Queen of the North” until she met her end on 12 November 1944.



The German battleship Tirpitz in Norwegian waters.

Photo: Naval History & Heritage Command Photographic Department - NH71318



The German battleship Tirpitz in Bogen Bay in Ofotfjord, near Narvik, Norway, circa 1943-1944. Photo: Public Domain.



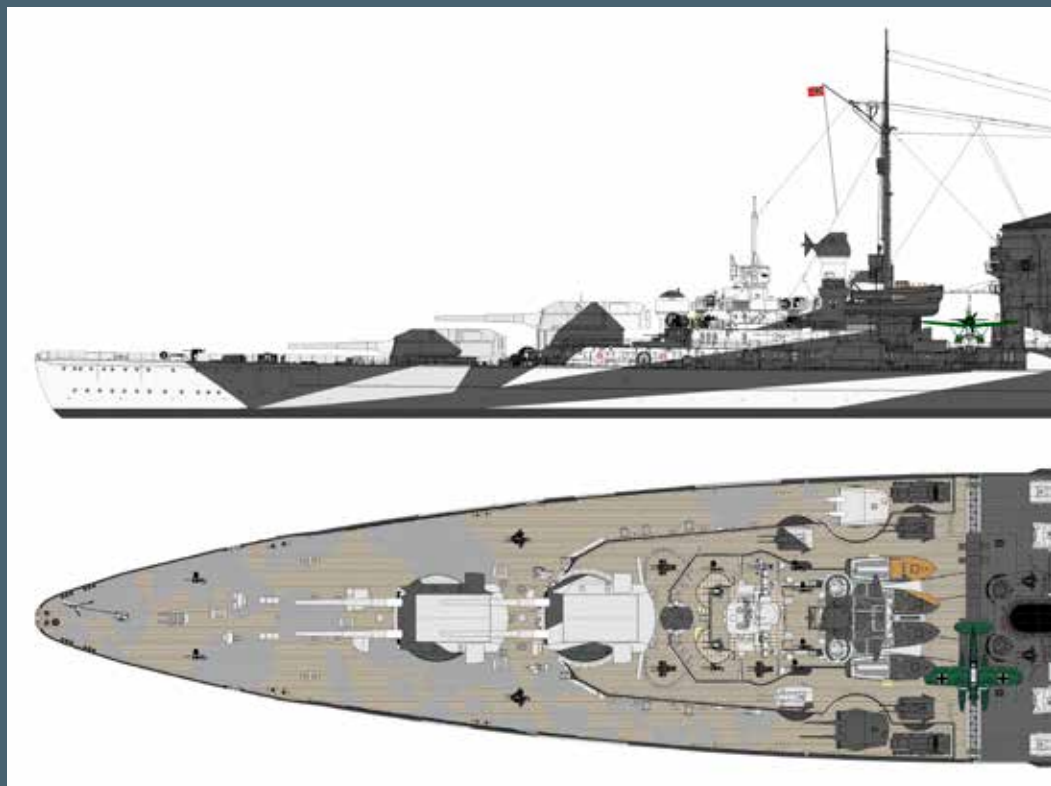
Crewmen on board the battleship, while she was moored in a Norwegian Fjord, circa 1942-44. One of the ship's 380mm (15) gun turrets is trained abeam, and several camouflage floats are in the distance.
Photo: U.S. Naval History and Heritage Command Photograph.

Schlachtschiff Tirpitz

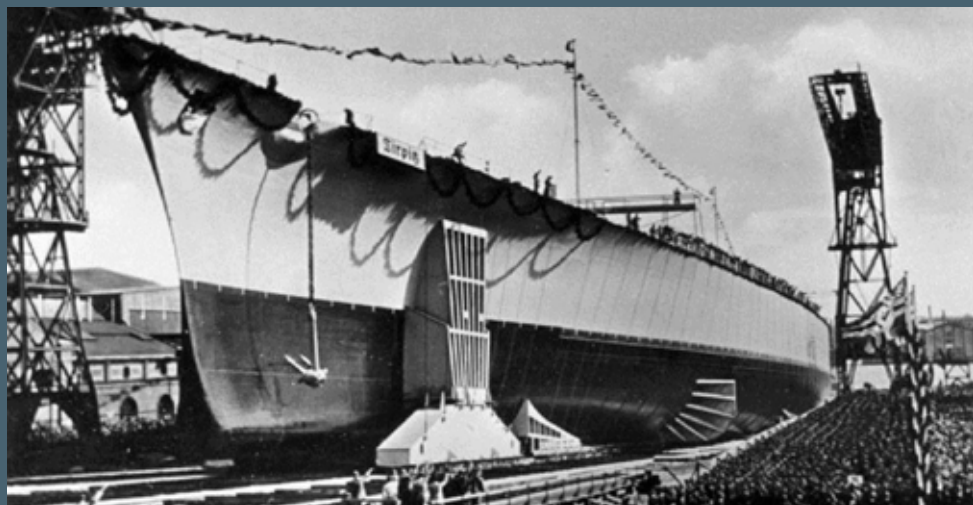
After 29 months of construction in the Wilhelmshaven Navy Yard the Tirpitz was launched on 1 April 1939 and was commissioned into service on 25 February 1941. By using a loophole in the post-World War One London Treaty that dictated the displacement and armament of battleships, the Germans were able to arm both the Bismarck and Tirpitz with higher calibre guns than comparable Royal Navy battleships of the time.

increasing to 53,500 tons when fully armed, supplied and crewed. She was 253 m long, had a beam of 36 m with a draft of 10.6 m at full load. Its maximum speed was 30 knots (35 mph) and it had a crew of 103 officers and 1,962 enlisted men. The main armament of 8 x 380mm (15") calibre guns mounted in four twin turrets were capable of firing 800 kg projectiles to a maximum range of 36.5km (22.7 miles).

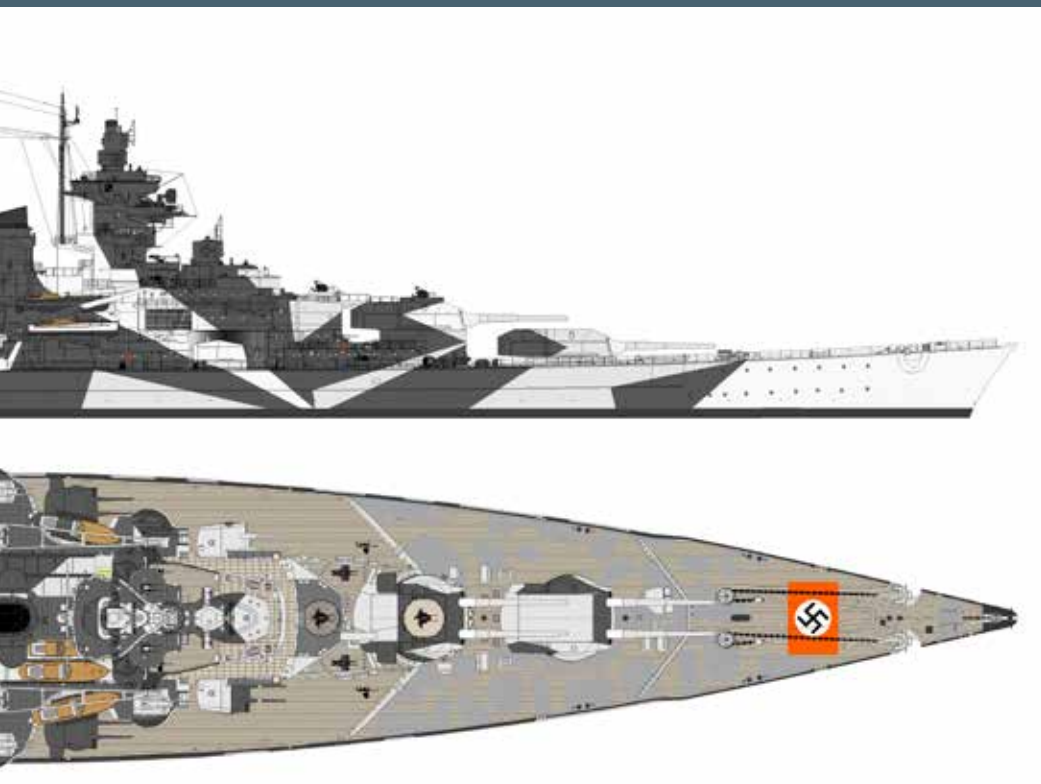
Slightly larger than the Bismarck, Tirpitz had a standard displacement of 42,900 tons,



Line drawing of the battleship Tirpitz in March 1944, Norway. Photo Credit: John Asmussen <http://www.bismarck-class.dk>.



Tirpitz sliding down the slipway at her launch on 1 April 1939. Photo Credit: Bundesarchiv DVM 10 Bild-23-63-40.



The Strategic Situation

After undergoing sea trials Tirpitz initially joined the Baltic Fleet for a short period. Germany had invaded the Soviet Union in June 1941 and they feared that the Soviet fleet would attempt to break out from its bases into the Baltic. Tirpitz's destiny however lay in the Norwegian theatre.

Norway was strategically significant for several reasons. It was an ideal base for both the Luftwaffe and the Kriegsmarine to launch attacks on the Allied Arctic convoys sailing to north Russia, along with giving the latter the opportunity to strike into the North Atlantic. The Germans also needed to secure their supply of iron ore from neutral Sweden via the Norwegian port of Narvik. In January 1942 Tirpitz was sent to Norway to be part of a force of heavy German warships intended to discourage any Allied thoughts of invasion. Tirpitz used four anchorages during her time in Norway. The Bogenfjord near Narvik served as only a temporary sanctuary, but her two main bases were the Faettenfjord near Trondheim (January 1942 to March 1943) followed by the Kaafjord, near Alten at the northernmost tip of Norway. Then from October 1944, Tirpitz was moored off the island of Håkøya near Tromsø. The work of the Norwegian resistance movement in helping to keep track of the ship should never be underestimated.

Attacking Tirpitz in her various Norwegian lairs threw up several planning considerations. These consisted of the range to the target,

the defences surrounding the ship (anti-aircraft guns and smokescreens), the German radar network, German fighter aircraft bases, the geography of each berth, the highly changeable Norwegian weather – all combined with huge seasonal variations in the amount of daylight. The ship itself also mounted a formidable array of anti-aircraft guns. Range was the biggest constraint – the Faettenfjord lay 632 miles from RAF Lossiemouth and neighbouring airfields in north-east Scotland. The Kaafjord was the most distant (well beyond the range of British bombers) at 1,146 miles. The Håkøya anchorage was 1,049 miles from Lossiemouth. Innovative solutions had to be found to overcome these problems. The Germans also had considerations of their own – a shortage of fuel for their fleet and keeping the ship's crew operationally effective whilst laying at anchor for most of the time.

Attacks on the Tirpitz

What follows is certainly not a blow-by-blow account of each of the twenty-six planned Allied attacks on the ship – that would go far beyond this handbook's remit. Instead we will look at some of the operations that are linked to Tirpitz Eagle, along with those of major strategic significance. Of note, we will be visiting Tromsø Cemetery during the trip. Six individuals buried there died whilst attacking the Tirpitz.

9 March 1942 - Twelve Fairey Albacore torpedo bombers from HMS Victorious attacked Tirpitz whilst she was at sea off the Lofoten Islands. The ship escaped without damage, but two Albacores were shot down with the loss of six naval airmen. After this attack Hitler decreed that in future the battleship would only go to sea if there wasn't an aircraft carrier threat.



On 9 March 1942, 12 Albacores from HMS Victorious were launched to attack the German Bismarck-class battleship Tirpitz at sea near Narvik. Based on information from one of six radar equipped aircraft already airborne, Albacores from 817 and 832 Squadrons launched torpedoes and some also attacked with their machine guns. One attack came within 30 feet (9.1 m) of success at the bow but the FAA's only torpedo attack on Tirpitz at sea failed, with the loss of two aircraft and damage to many others. Photo: Crown Copyright (Public Domain).

The Saint-Nazaire Raid

28 March 1942 – Operation CHARIOT – Carried out by the Royal Navy and British Commandos, it targeted the dry dock at Saint-Nazaire on the French Atlantic coast. The destroyer HMS Campbeltown, accompanied by 18 smaller craft, led the attack. She was rammed into the Normandie dock gates packed with well-hidden delayed-action explosives. When the ship detonated the dock was put out of service until 1948. A force of commandos landed to destroy machinery and other structures.

Of the 612 men who undertook the raid, 228 returned to Britain, 169 were killed and 215 became prisoners of war. Eighty-nine members of the raiding party were awarded decorations, including five Victoria Crosses. German casualties included over 360 dead, some of whom were killed after the raid when Campbeltown exploded.

The destruction of the dry dock meant that if Tirpitz sortied into the North Atlantic and was subsequently damaged by Allied forces she would have to return to Norway or Germany for repair – not able to make a run for France like the Bismarck had attempted in May 1941. Tirpitz never did go into the North Atlantic.

HMS Campbeltown after being rammed into the Normandie dry dock gates before she blew up.

Photo credit: Bundesarchiv, Bild 101II-MW-3722-22.



The Halifax at the RAF Museum Hendon

27/28 April 1942 – Taking off from RAF Lossiemouth, Kinloss and Tain, 31 Halifax bombers (from 10, 35 and 76 Sqns) along with 12 Lancasters (44 and 97 Sqns) attacked Tirpitz in Faettenfjord near Trondheim. The Tirpitz was undamaged during the attack for the loss of 5 aircraft. One of these, Handley-Page Halifax B Mk. II of 35 Sqn “S” for Sugar (tail number W1048) piloted by Flt Lt Don MacIntyre, crash landed on a local frozen lake. The crew survived, whilst the aircraft slowly sank through the ice. Remarkably the aircraft was recovered from the bottom of the lake in 1973 and is now on display at the RAF Museum at Hendon.

Handley-Page Halifax B Mk. II (Serial No. W7710), LQ-R, Ruhr Valley Express, 405 Squadron RCAF, ca 1942.
Note: Aircraft was not used to attack the Tirpitz, reference only. RAF Photo.

OC 10 Sqn, Don Bennett, was also shot down in his Halifax. He, along with some of his crew, managed to make their way into neutral Sweden from where Bennett was repatriated to become the commander of Bomber Command's new Pathfinder Force. Once he managed to get back to his unit he discovered that James “Willie” Tait had been put in temporary command of 10 Sqn. Tait would be OC 617 Sqn during their successful attacks on Tirpitz in 1944.



Handley-Page Halifax was assigned to No. 102 Sqn, then on the 9 April was transferred to No. 35 Sqn. On its first mission at night 27th/28th April was hit by Tirpitz flak during attack and crash-landed on the frozen Lake Hoklingen 25 miles east of Trondheim. Six crew escaped safely, one captured, five later repatriated after reaching neutral Sweden.

Royal Navy Missions

22 September 1943 – Operation SOURCE –
This Royal Navy attack used X-Craft mini submarines to lay explosive charges underneath the Tirpitz along with the Scarnhorst battlecruiser and Lutzow pocket battleship. Six X-Craft were used, each with a crew of four. X-5, X-6 and X-7 were to attack Tirpitz in Kaafjord.

The plan saw each X-Craft being towed by conventional submarines to their launch point off the Norwegian coast. The 600-foot-long manila hemp tow ropes supplied by the Navy proved to be too weak and three of the mini subs (X-5, X-6 and X-10) were fitted with far more robust and reliable RAF glider nylon tow ropes for the mission. In the event it seems likely that all three X-Craft allocated to Tirpitz managed to break through the underwater defences and lay their explosive charges. X-5 was seen to break the surface near to Tirpitz and was sunk by gun fire. The submarine, along with all four of the crew, has never been found. There is some debate as to if X-5, commanded by Henry Henty-Creer, managed to lay their explosive charges before being sunk.

Both X-6 (commanded by Don Cameron) and X-7 (commanded by Basil Place) did manage to lay their respective charges before breaking to the surface and being discovered. X-6 was scuttled by the crew with all four of them surviving and surrendering to the Germans. Place managed to get out of X-7 before it sank 120 feet to the bottom of the fjord with

the three other crew members still on board. Bob Aitken managed to escape to the surface, but Bill Whittam (buried in Tromsø Cemetery) and Willie Whitley (commemorated on the Plymouth Naval Memorial) did not. Both Place and Aitken were also captured by the Germans. When the explosive charges detonated under Tirpitz she was heavily damaged, repairs not being finished until 2 April 1944. Don Cameron and Basil Place were awarded the Victoria Cross for their actions.



The gravestone of Lieutenant Lionel Barnett Whittam (RNVR) at the Commonwealth War Graves section in the main cemetery in Tromsø, Troms, Norway.

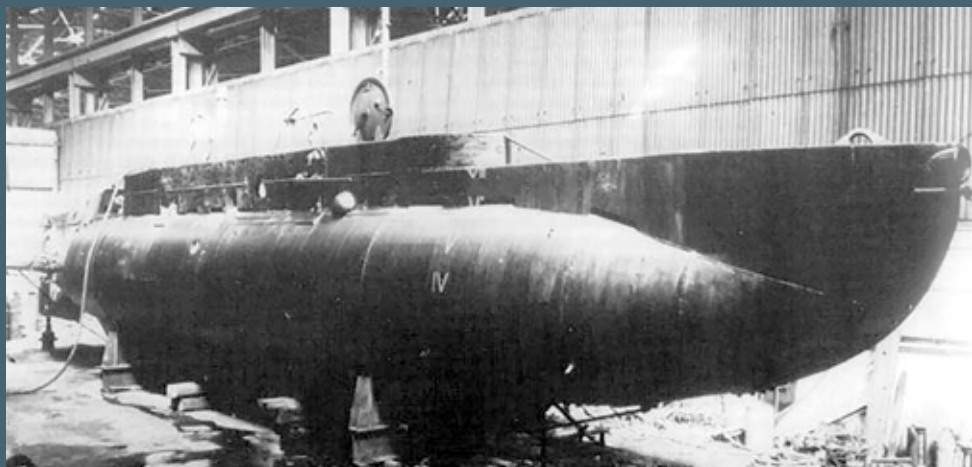
Photo credit: Manxruler



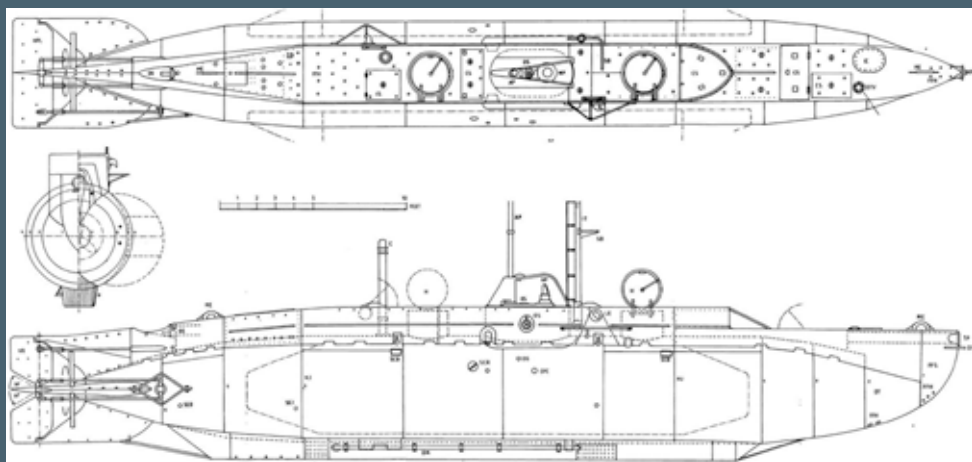
X-Craft mini submarine surface running. Photo: Crown Copyright (Royal Navy).



Sub Lieutenant K C J Robinson, RNVR, of Crosby, Liverpool, a Commanding Officer in an X-Craft at the Hydroplane controls whilst sailing in Rothesay Bay. Photo: Wikimedia Commons (Public Domain).



A British X-Craft mini submarine out of the water in dry-dock. This same craft was used to successfully attack the German battleship Tirpitz. Photo: <http://www.bismarck-class.dk>.



Line drawing of the British X-Craft mini submarine. Photo: <http://www.bismarck-class.dk>.



View of one of the side cargoes containing the explosives Amatex. Photo: <http://www.bismarck-class.dk>.

Aircraft Carrier Attacks

Between April and August 1944, the Royal Navy launched several attacks on Tirpitz using aircraft carriers whilst she still resided at Kaafjord. Of note is Operation TUNGSTEN launched on 3 April 1944, a two-wave air attack involving six aircraft carriers. The main strike aircraft was the Fairey Barracuda that carried a crew of three, a pilot, a navigator and a telegraphist air gunner (TAG). Single seat Corsair, Wildcat, Hellcat and Seafire fighters flew in support of the Barracudas, fulfilling the roles of escort, close air support and combat air patrol.

The first attack consisted of 21 Barracudas and during this action one 830 Sqn aircraft was lost with all three crew. The second wave attacked with 19 Barracudas about an hour later, with an 829 Sqn aircraft being shot down. This time the TAG managed to

bale out and survive but the two other crew members perished. All five of these Naval Aviators are buried in Tromsø Cemetery. 829 Sqn also lost another Barracuda when it crashed into the sea shortly after take-off with the loss of all three crew. The air strikes did not penetrate the main armour of Tirpitz but did cause significant damage to the ship's superstructure and inflicted serious casualties – over 100 German sailors were killed and some 300 were wounded.



A Royal Navy Fairey Barracuda II (s/n P9926) from Lee-on-Solent Fleet Air Arm Station, Hampshire (UK), with torpedo, in flight. The wooden plane that steadied the torpedo before it struck the water and broke off can be clearly seen at the rear of the weapon. Photo: Wikimedia Commons (Public Domain).



The men and machines of HMS Furious which took part in the Fleet Air Arm attack on Tirpitz in Alten Fjord, Norway. Here Bob Cotcher, of Chelsea, chalks his message on a 1,600 pound bomb just before the attack. Comment: The aircraft is a Fairey Barracuda. Date: 3 April 1944. Photo: Crown Copyright (Public Domain).



The Fairey Barracuda bombers and their fighter escort approaching Alten Fjord. Another fjord along with the snow covered mountains surrounding it can be seen below the aircraft.

Photo: Crown Copyright (Public Domain).



Grumman Hellcat pilots of the escort carrier HMS Emperor studying a model of the German battleship Tirpitz and its hide-out in Alten Fjord on the flight deck just before the Operation TUNGSTEN attack, which left the Tirpitz blazing, began. Two of their aircraft can be seen in the distance.

Photo: Crown Copyright (Public Domain).



Fleet Air Arm attack the German battleship Tirpitz with heavy and medium sized bombs as she was about to move off from her anchorage at Alten Fjord, Norway, on the morning of 3 April 1944.

Photo: Crown Copyright (Public Domain).



Fleet Air Arm personnel fusing bombs for Fairey Barracudas on the flight deck of HMS Victorious, before Operation TUNGSTEN, the attack on the German battleship Tirpitz in Alten Fjord, Norway. Date: April 1944.

Photo: Crown Copyright (Public Domain).



Fleet Air Arm attack on the Tirpitz in Alten Fjord, Norway on board HMS Furious, 3 April 1944. Sub Lieut E D Knight, of Wincanton, reporting to his captain after arriving back from the attack.

Photo: Crown Copyright (Public Domain).

The RAF Returns to the Fray

RAF Bomber Command now refocused its gaze on Tirpitz. Using specially modified Lancaster bombers, 617 Sqn and 9 Sqn were given the task to deliver the knock-out blow using 12,000 lb Tallboy bombs, another invention of Barnes Wallis who had of course also produced the Upkeep bouncing bomb used during The Dambusters raid. Tallboy was designed to bury itself in the ground and explode to produce an earthquake effect. To achieve this the weapon had to be dropped from high altitudes and had to be tough and aerodynamically efficient.



Barnes Wallis

one foot long with fins arranged to give it an increasingly rapid spin to give it gyroscopic stability, passing through the speed of sound during its descent before penetrating the ground to a depth of about 100 feet. Tallboy did not have to score a direct hit to destroy its target. 617 Sqn used the highly advanced Stabilized Automatic Bomb Sight (SABS), whilst 9 Sqn used the less accurate Mark XIV sight. A clear sight of the target was required for a successful attack. Another Barnes Wallis anti-ship weapon was Highball – a smaller version of Upkeep launched from Mosquito aircraft of the specially formed 618 Sqn. It was never used operationally.



Lancaster B Mk. III (Special).

Made of molybdenum steel it contained 5,200 lbs of Torpex explosive, it was twenty-



Types of bombs used by Bomber Command. Photo: Department of National defence / National Archives of Canada, PA-213867.



A 12,000 lb Tallboy bomb being dropped by a Lancaster B Mk. I (Special). The bomb was so big only one could be carried.
 Photo: Crown Copyright (Public Domain).



A 12,000 lb Tallboy bomb is hoisted from the bomb dump to its carrier at Woodhall Spa, Lincolnshire, to be loaded into an Avro Lancaster. Photo: Crown Copyright (Public Domain).

Operation PARAVANE

15 September 1944 – Operation PARAVANE – 38 Lancasters of 617 Sqn and 9 Sqn departed the UK on 11 September to fly to Yagodnik airfield near Archangel in northern Russia. The Lancasters' mid-upper gun turrets were removed to increase range. Tirpitz was still in Kaafjord, only 610 miles from Yagodnik. Only 27 Lancasters, plus another with a camera crew on board to film the attack, were available for the raid on 15 September. 21 aircraft were loaded with Tallboy bombs, whilst the remainder carried

several "Johnny Walker" oscillating anti-ship mines. Dropped by parachute into water, an internal buoyancy tank brought it back to the surface where hopefully it would then strike the bottom of a ship and detonate. If this didn't happen then the mine would sink again whilst propelling itself forward, then rise again. It would continue this "walking" motion until it struck a target or, once the buoyancy gas was exhausted, it would self-destruct. Weighing 500 lbs each, a Lancaster could carry twelve of them.



Lancaster bomber over Kaafjord during Operation PARAVANE, 15 September 1944. Photo: Crown Copyright (Public Domain).

The attack itself caught Tirpitz by surprise, a smoke screen only just beginning to obscure the target as the first Tallboys were released at 1256. One of them – possibly from Willy Tait's aircraft (OC 617 Sqn) or from Flt Lt James Melrose's 9 Sqn aircraft - hit the battleship on the bow. This caused severe damage to the Tirpitz, the Germans estimating nine months of repairs to make it seaworthy again. The strike force then all returned to Yagodnik, whilst the film crew Lancaster flew on to RAF Waddington. The remainder of the force flew home to

Lincolnshire the next day, one 617 Sqn Lancaster crashing near Nesbyen in Norway, killing all those onboard.



Operation OBVIATE

29 October 1944 – Operation OBVIATE – The Kriegsmarine no longer considered Tirpitz a fully operational warship so chose a suitable spot for her to be defended by her guns, but in an anchorage shallow enough that if hit she could not be sunk. She limped to Håkøya Island, 3.5 miles west of Tromsø, setting off at noon on 15 October to arrive at her new berth by 1500 the next day. Crucially, this move edged her a fatal step closer to British air bases. The removal of the Lancasters' mid-upper gun turrets had already improved their range, but the stripping out of other equipment and the installation of extra fuel tanks, giving a total fuel capacity of 2,406 gallons, gave further gains. Finally, the replacement of existing engines with more powerful Merlin T-24s and paddle blade airscrews allowed this 2,250-mile operation to be carried out.

It would involve a 14-hour flight time for the return journey.

Between 0103 and 0255 on 29 October thirty-six Lancasters, 18 from 617 Sqn and 18 from 9 Sqn, took off from Lossiemouth, Kinloss and Milltown, all carrying Tallboys – the Johnny Walker experiment had been abandoned. They were accompanied once again by a film unit Lancaster. Unfortunately, a bank of cloud came in to cover the battleship just before the first Lancaster was ready to bomb. 32 aircraft released their Tallboys on the estimated position of the target, but no direct hits were scored, only one near miss causing damage to the battleship's port propeller shaft. All but one aircraft, a 617 Sqn Lancaster damaged by flak that crash-landed in Sweden, made a safe return to the UK.



Tirpitz moored off Håkøya Island near Tromsø, October/ November 1944. Photo: Crown Copyright (Public Domain).

Operation CATECHISM

12 November 1944 – Operation CATECHISM – The plan for this attack was largely the same as for Operation OBVIATE, the only difference being that a new intelligence report said that a squadron of German Focke-Wulf 190 single-seat fighters had recently arrived at Bardufoss airfield, 42 miles south of Tromsø. The strike force launched from Lossiemouth, Milltown and Kinloss on a bitterly cold night. De-icing of the aircraft before flight proved problematical for some. Six of the 9 Sqn Lancasters were unable to depart because of this, including that to be flown by OC 9 Sqn, Wg Cdr James Bazin. Eighteen 617 Sqn and thirteen 9 Sqn aircraft, again accompanied by a film crew Lancaster from 463 Sqn, took off between 0259 and 0325.

The weather over the target was clear this time and the strike force approached Tirpitz flying at a range of heights from 12,650 to 16,000 feet. The first of 28 Tallboys was released at 0941 by OC 617 Sqn, Wg Cdr Willy Tait, his Sqn attacking with all 18 of their aircraft from 0941 to 0945. Ten of 9 Sqn's aircraft then attacked from 0945 to 0949. At least two, possibly three, Tallboys hit Tirpitz, with many more landing close by. Tirpitz capsized at 0952 – the time that the Norwegians commemorate the sinking of the ship. Tirpitz did not have its full compliment on board at the time. According to the Tromsø Tirpitz museum, 971 of the crew were killed. A further 82

men were rescued by comrades cutting through the bottom of the hull.

The chaotic response of the Luftwaffe fighter force based at Bardufoss has thrown up many theories. It may be that the unit did not know the precise location of Tirpitz, and this, coupled with inaccurate plotting and poor communication, meant that they never were able to intercept any of the strike force. If they had then both 617 Sqn and 9 Sqn could have been annihilated. Fortunately, all the force, save one 9 Sqn Lancaster that diverted to Sweden, made it back to the UK. "The Beast" had finally been sunk.



Dramatic end of the Tirpitz.

Photo: Wikimedia Commons (Public Domain).



Wing Commander J B Tait, Commanding Officer of No. 617 Squadron RAF (fifth from left), standing with his crew by the tail of their Avro Lancaster B Mk. I (Special), EE146 'KC-D', at Woodhall Spa, Lincolnshire, on returning from Lossiemouth, the day after the successful raid on the German battleship Tirpitz in Tromsø Fjord, Norway.

Date: 13 November 1944. Photo: Wikimedia Commons - Public Domain.



Low-level oblique photographic-reconnaissance aerial taken from De Havilland Mosquito PR Mk. XVI (NS637) of No. 544 Squadron RAF, showing the capsized German battleship Tirpitz, lying in the Tromsø Fjord near isle of Håkøya.

Photo: Wikimedia Commons (Public Domain).

Aftermath

The wreck of Tirpitz remained in place until after the war, when a joint German-Norwegian company began salvage operations. Work lasted from 1948 to 1957. It may be that up to 20% of the ship, mostly from the bow, remains stuck in the mud. Part of the working platform that was built alongside the ship used for the scrapping operation is still there. A German memorial resides close by on Håkøya Island.

A propeller shaft bulkhead from Tirpitz was presented formally by the Royal Norwegian Air Force to the Royal Air Force in 1950. It has a painting of Tirpitz on it underneath the words „gegen Engeland“ (“against England”). It was a highly prized trophy for both 9 Sqn and 617 Sqn that has been “owned” by both squadrons over the years until 2002. At this point it was handed over to the RAF Museum Hendon where it now resides as a fitting memorial to two of the Royal Air Force’s most famous squadrons.



Flight Lieutenant (Flt Lt) Kenneth George Hesketh during a visit to the wreck of the German battleship Tirpitz in Tromsø Fjord, Norway after the war. Flt Lt Hesketh (right) is accompanying Wing Commander James Brian "Willie" Tait, RAF, DSO and Three Bars, DFC and Bar, who led the bombing raid that successfully sunk the Tirpitz on 12 November 1944. Photo: AWM - Copyright expired - Public Domain.



The German battleship Tirpitz, lying capsized in Tromsø Fjord, attended by a salvage vessel. The hole in the hull by the starboard propeller shaft was cut by the Germans to allow access to salvage crews.

Photo: Wikimedia Commons (Public Domain).



Stephen Bone; The Wreck of the Tirpitz, June 1945.

Photo: IWM - Public Domain.



Tirpitz was chopped up after the war. Here, two children play at a crater made by a Tallboy bomb.
Photo: Morten Kasberg's collection.



The wreck of the Tirpitz being scrapped after the war. Photo courtesy John Asmussen <http://www.bismarck-class.dk>.



Tirpitz sunk 1945. Photo: Wikipedia

Between 1948 and 1957, the wreck of the Tirpitz was broken down and sold as scrap by the Norwegian company Einar Høvdning Skippershuggin.



Monument for sinking of German battleship Tirpitz on Håkøya island, Tromsø, Norway. Photo credit - MiraculixHB.




 * FOR FRIHET
 TIL MINNE OM ALLIERTE FLYMANNSKAPER
 FRA ROYAL AIR FORCE
 DREPT UNDER ANGREP OG REKONNASSERING
 PÅ DET TYSKE SLAGSKIPET TIRPITZ
 I FÆTTENFJORD 1942
 I TAKK OG ÆRBJØIGHET
 TIL DE SOM OFRET LIVET
 FOR VÅR FELLE SAK
 REIST AV LOKALE KREFTER I 1985
 FOR FREEDOM
 IN MEMORY OF THE ALLIED AIRCREWS
 FROM THE ROYAL AIR FORCE
 KILLED IN ATTACKS AND RECONNAISSANCE
 ON THE GERMAN BATTLESHIP TIRPITZ
 IN THE FÆTTENFJORD 1942
 IN GRATITUDE AND VENERATION
 TO THOSE WHO GAVE THEIR LIVES
 FOR OUR COMMON CAUSE
 ERRECTED BY LOCAL PEOPLE 1985

War memorial near the Fættensfjord in Norway, in memory of the allied aircrews killed in attacks and reconnaissance on the battleship Tirpitz in 1942. Photo Credit - Petey21 (Public Domain).

Tromsø Cemetery

Tromsø Cemetery is the most northerly Commonwealth plot in the world. It contains 37 burials, three of them unidentified. Research shows that several individuals have a direct connection with British attempts to sink the Tirpitz.

Lt LB Whittam RNVR (Grave D8). Was on mini sub X-Craft X-7 during Op SOURCE 22 September 1943, attacking the Tirpitz in Kaafjord. Each X-Craft had a crew of four. Two of X-7's crew survived (Place and Aitken) but Whittam (2ic of the sub) and Engine Room Artificer William Whitley did not. Whitley is commemorated on the Plymouth Naval Memorial (Panel 81 Column 2).

Five Fleet Air Arm aircrew who took part in Op TUNGSTEN, a two wave air attack involving six aircraft carriers whilst Tirpitz was in Kaafjord on 3 April 1944.

Fairey Barracuda (carried a crew of 3) of 830 Sqn (aircraft "M") – first wave attack force – HMS Furious – Sub Lt (A) Thomas Bell (Grave D5), Sub Lt (A) Robert Drennan – (Grave D6) and Leading Airman George Burns – the Telegraphist Air Gunner (TAG) (Grave D7). Shot down by flak – engine damaged – seen "going down in a controlled glide".

Fairey Barracuda of 829 Sqn (aircraft "M") – second wave attack force – HMS Victorious – hit by flak over the target they continued on their attack, dropping their ordnance onto Tirpitz before crashing into a hill side

in flames. The TAG (Leading Airman Ernest Carroll) managed to bale out and survive, but Sub Lt (A) Andrew Cannon (Grave C7) and Sub Lt (A) Hubert Richardson (C8) perished.

Two RAF identified graves.

Fg Off Gavin Walker – 27 September 1942 (Grave B5) – 1 Photographic Reconnaissance Unit - PRU Spitfire PR Mk. IV (D) BP889 - Taking part in Op ORATOR that was to give air power support to convoy PQ18 – Temporarily based at Afrikanda airfield, Murmansk Oblast, North-West Russia – shot down near Lakselv, Norway during a sortie to Altafjord seeking out the Tirpitz and other German naval forces, either by ground fire (after been forced to descend to low level due to low cloud) or by Gefreiter Kurt Dobner of II/JG5 (Focke-Wulf Fw190 from Banak airfield). Luftwaffe records indicate that Dobner shot Walker down between 1130 and 1200.

Not directly connected to the Tirpitz - FS William Daly (Grave B8) – 18 July 1944 – Wireless Operator/Air Gunner – Consolidated Liberator of 86 Sqn Coastal Command that carried out anti-submarine patrols.

Other individuals not connected to the Tirpitz.

Leading Airman Donald Morton (Grave C5) – 8 June 1940 – on board the aircraft carrier HMS Glorious that was sunk that day by

the German Battlecruisers Scharnhorst and Gneisenau some 300 miles to the West of Narvik in the Norwegian Sea. The total killed or missing from HMS Glorious was 1,207 with only 38 survivors.

Three Fleet Air Arm aircrew who took part in OP EF (1941) – 828 Sqn Fairey Albacore – HMS Victorious – 30 July 1941 – Sub Lt Donald McKay (A7), Leading Airman Dennis Corner (A6) and Sub Lt John Paton – twelve Albacores from 827 Sqn & eight from 828 Sqn attacked shipping in the Northern Norway port of Kirkenes – eleven

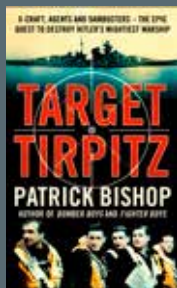
Albcores were shot down by German fighters (Me 109 & Me 110).

SS Chulmleigh – the ship ran aground on 06 November 1942 on South Cape, Spitsbergen. Only 9 (including the ship's master Captain Daniel Morley Williams) of 58 crew survived a six week ordeal. 16 of the victims are buried in the cemetery.



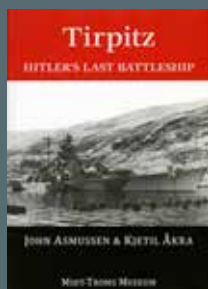
The view from Håkøya Island nowadays. The remains of the working platform built by the salvage company alongside the wreck of Tirpitz is in the foreground. Photo Credit - Snurre86 (Public Domain).

Further Reading



Target Tirpitz –

Patrick Bishop
(Harper Press)



Tirpitz, Hitler's Last Battleship –

John Asmussen & Kjetil Akra
(Midt-Troms Museum)



Tirpitz, The Life & Death of Germany's Last Great Battleship –

Daniel Knowles
(Fonthill)



Tirpitz, The Halifax Raids –

Nigel Smith
(Air Research Publications)

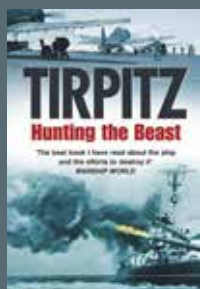
The author is the son-in-law of Sgt Vic Stevens, the Flight Engineer on the Halifax that was shot down whilst attacking Tirpitz in April 1942 and now on display in the RAF Museum Hendon.



Sink The Tirpitz 1942-44 –

Angus Konstam

(Osprey Air Campaign #7)



Tirpitz, Hunting the Beast –

John Sweetman

(Sutton Publishing Limited)

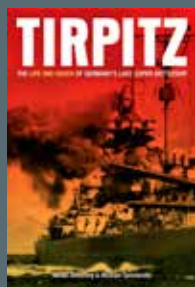


Sinking The Beast, The RAF 1944

Lancaster Raids Against *Tirpitz* –

Jan Forsgren

(Fonthill)



Tirpitz, The Life and Death of Germany's Last Super Battleship –

Niklas Zetterling & Michael Tamelander

(Casemate Publishers)

Notes

[illegible]



Italian Airship "ITALIA" – Just North of the Sydspissen hotel is a memorial to the airship – another story of resilience.

A semi-rigid airship it was being used for an expedition to the North Pole.

Based at Kings Bay on the island of Spitsbergen, the third flight from there successfully reached the North Pole at 0024 on 24 May 1928.

During the return leg the next day the airship crashed onto the ice in the middle of nowhere, 75 miles northeast of Nordaustlandet, Svalbard. Of the crew of sixteen, 1 died in the crash, 9 survived whilst, suddenly relieved of the weight of the gondola, the envelope of the airship began to rise taking 6 crew members with it. Those 6, nor the airship, have ever been found. One crash survivor subsequently died of exposure whilst awaiting rescue, and a total of 15 rescuers also perished. The airship dog did survive though!



A bulkhead from the German battleship Tirpitz on display at RAF Museum Hendon. This bulkhead was the subject of a long-running contest to claim it between Nos. 9 and 617 Squadrons RAF until it was donated to the RAF Museum in 2002. The bulkhead was painted by members of the battleship's crew. Photo: Wikimedia Commons (Public Domain).