

Peter SANDERSON

Born: 26 June 1921

Parents: Son of Henry Cecil and Dorothy Florence Sanderson of Chichester Sussex

School Years: 1932-1935

Armed Forces Record

Service Rank: Able Seaman

Service Number: P/JX 156 294

Service Base: HMS Hood

Date of Death: 24 May 1941



Battlecruiser HMS Hood

Bismarck



Upon leaving Chichester High School for Boys in 1935 *Old Boy* Peter SANDERSON known as 'Sandy' entered the Royal Navy. He trained at *HMS Vincent* before joining the battle-cruiser *HMS Hood* in 1939 as an Able Seaman. He was 19 at the time of his loss. The 'School Notes' in the 'Martlet' of June 1941 described him as a "most keen athlete".

Prelude – The Battle of Denmark Straits

On the 18th May 1941 the German battleship *Bismarck* accompanied by the heavy cruiser *Prinz Eugen* sailed from the Polish port of Gdynia. The capital ships were heading for the Atlantic, the aim to cause as much damage as possible to convoys shipping supplies into Britain. The ships passed Norway and entered the Denmark Straits between Iceland and Greenland where they were detected. *HMS Hood* and *Prince of Wales* were ordered to intercept.

The Sinking of *HMS Hood* – 24th May 1941

Of the modern *Bismarck* the British writer and broadcaster Ludovic Kennedy wrote “There had never been a warship like her No German saw her without pride, no neutral or enemy without admiration”. In contrast the aging “*Mighty Hood*” had been built and launched during the First World War. Although sailing around the Empire in peacetime as the “embodiment of British sea power” her deck armour had been compromised for speed.

In the early hours of 24 May 1941 the twenty one year old *Hood* and escort *Prince of Wales* faced the two year old *Bismarck* and escort *Prinz Eugen* from a distance of thirteen miles. During the engagement the *Prince of Wales* took several hits. Meanwhile the *Bismarck* turned her attention onto the *Hood*. Within 20 minutes one of her salvo’s struck the vulnerable upper deck of the *Hood* which penetrated the ammunition room causing a catastrophic explosion. The ship spliced in two and within 5 minutes she sank with the loss of 1,421 crew including *Old Boy* Peter Sanderson. There were three survivors. (Footnote)

The Sinking of the *Bismarck* – Night of 26/27th May 1941

The British public reeled in shock, stunned by the loss. Churchill reflected the public mood and issued his famous battle cry “*Sink the Bismarck!*” The *Bismarck* struck by a shell was now leaking oil. Captain Lindman made for St. Nazaire for repair. For a time his ship was lost to the R.N fleet. Then a stroke of luck. A Coastal Command Catalina reconnaissance aircraft flying from Northern Island spotted *Bismarck* by her trailing oil slick and reported her position.

A *Royal Navy* fleet ‘armada’, eventually numbering forty-one warships, was despatched. Their chase to join the hunt drew in ships from Scapa Flow, Gibraltar and existing convoy Atlantic escorts. On the night of 26/27th May in atrocious weather conditions a Swordfish aircraft launched from the carrier *HMS Ark Royal* attacked and hit the *Bismarck* with a torpedo damaging her steering gear and jamming her rudder. Unable to follow a set course her fate was sealed. During the night six British destroyers shadowed and harassed her, launching torpedoes.

Unable to steer and losing speed due to the oil leak she came under constant gun and torpedo attack from the Battleships *Rodney* and *King George V* plus the cruisers *Norfolk* and *Dorsetshire*. With *Bismarck* low in the water, her upper structure now totally destroyed, “abandon ship” was ordered. Her First Officer Hans Oels commenced scuttling the ship. The *Bismarck* went under the waves at 10.39am on the 27th May. One hundred and ten survivors were picked up but due to a U-boat threat RN ships *HMS Dorsetshire* and

Maori had to abandon the remainder of the 2,200 crew to the mercy of the waves. U-74 was despatched in an attempt to retrieve the logbook and picked up three survivors and a German weather ship rescued another two.

Footnotes:

HMS Hood – three survivors – Picked up by the destroyer *HMS Electra*.

Ordinary Signalman Ted Briggs – born Redcar 1923 – Entered Royal Navy in 1933 and trained at *HMS Ganges*. Assigned to the *Hood* in 1939 age 18. Sucked under the sinking *Hood*, then propelled back up to the surface by air escaping from the ship. Died Portsmouth 2008 age 85.

Able Seaman Bob Tilburn – Born in Leeds 1921. Assigned as Gunner aboard the *Hood*. When, in the water he was hit by a collapsing aerial that snagged a boot which he cut clear with knife. Kept alive for two hours in the freezing sea by clinging to rafts and communal singing. He died 24th February 1995.

Midshipman William Dundas – Born Edinburgh 1923 – Midshipman - Youngest and most senior of the survivors. Retired from Navy as Lt. Cmdr. in 1958. Ran a successful mink farm in Argyll. Died of injuries in 1965 following a road accident. Never spoke of his escape either in private or in public.

“I Sank the Bismarck”

Fifty nine years later Lt. Cmdr. John Moffat learns of his place in 2nd World War history. He finds out what a pivotal role he played when the torpedo he fired crippled the 50,000 ton German battle ship *Bismarck* on the night of the 26th/27th May 1941. Flying in an open cockpit his Fairy Swordfish was launched from *HMS Ark Royal* in horrendous conditions, the carrier pitching sixty feet with water running continuous across the flight deck into an 80 miles an hour wind. In these conditions it took ten men per aircraft to unfold the wings.

Commemorated

Chichester High School for Boys

Chichester War Memorial

Panel 49. Column 2 Portsmouth Naval War Museum Hampshire

HMS Hood –

An illuminated Roll of Honour–Church of St John the Baptist - Boldre - Hampshire