



HMS London: Warships of the Royal Navy

Iain Ballantyne

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There is no current warship in the Royal Navy called HMS London, but vessels carrying the name have featured for better or worse in some of the most controversial episodes of British naval history.

For example, the wooden wall battleship HMS London of the late 18th Century could be called 'the ship that lost America' while the heavy cruiser of WW2 was command vessel for the escort force that failed to safeguard the controversial convoy PQ17.

In 'HMS London' the true stories behind those headlines are told, not least providing a grim insider perspective on the Arctic convoys, which literally broke the heavy cruiser in addition to demoralizing the sailors and marines who sailed in her.

It is, however, a tale of triumphing over the dark satanic seas of the Arctic, of learning from the mistakes of PQ17 and ultimately enduring in the face of the enemy, the elements and an ungrateful Stalin.

Examining the stories of HMS Londons all the way from the English Civil War, through the Battle of Copenhagen in 1801 - where Nelson famously ignored signals to break off the action displayed by HMS London - we also learn of the pre-dreadnought London's participation in the ill-fated Dardanelles campaign of WW1.

Iain Ballantyne's fascinating and lively account of the lives of British warships named London primarily looks at history from the perspective of the men who were there, including her post-WW2 mission under a storm of fire from Chinese communist forces to rescue the frigate Amethyst.

In addition to research in various archives, among the people Iain interviewed for the book were veterans of the Arctic convoys of WW2, the Yangtse Incident and warriors of the Cold War and 1991 Gulf War. It all adds up to a thoroughly researched and exciting narrative of naval history.

Adding to the authenticity of the tale, Iain even sailed to Russia in the last HMS London, a Type 22 guided-missile frigate, in August 1991. During a WW2 convoy re-enactment the ship was almost hit by a practice torpedo launched from a Soviet submarine and had to take evasive action.

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