



HMS ACHILLES Pennant Number 70

Fortiter in Re – Bravery in Action

Fifth in the Royal Navy to bear that name, HMS Achilles was a Leander class light cruiser and sister ship of HMS Ajax. Both designed by Royal Navy Constructor, Albert 'Ajax' Adams.

7,500 tons, built by Cammell Laird, Birkenhead, Liverpool, as No. 983. Laid Down 11th June 1931; launched 1st September 1932 by Lady Stanley, the wife of the Parliamentary Secretary for the Admiralty; and, following trials, handed over to the Royal Navy on 5th October and sailed for Portsmouth on 6th October 1933 under the command of Captain Colin Cantlie, where she was officially commissioned on the 10th October 1933.

Initially out of service, Achilles commissioned for the Royal Navy's New Zealand Division at Chatham on 31st March 1936, departing Sheerness on 22nd April. After calling at Spithead to embark her Walrus aircraft, the ship sailed on 26th April for New Zealand. Nine weeks were spent with the Home Fleet at Gibraltar before Achilles sailed on 1st July via Jamaica, Panama and various small mid-Pacific islands before arriving at Auckland on 6th September 1936.

After arrival from England, Achilles toured New Zealand ports and also participated in exercises in home and Australian waters, as well as undertaking Pacific Islands winter cruises. Departing Auckland via Panama, the ship returned to England at the end of 1938 to change Royal Navy loan personnel and undergo a short refit. A severe storm was encountered in the Atlantic which caused some damage to the ship and the Walrus, which was not replaced. Achilles arrived Portsmouth 24th January 1939, recommissioning on 27th January and sailed again for New Zealand on 21st February with approximately 60% of her crew New Zealanders. She reached Auckland 8th May 1939 having travelled via Suez and Singapore.

Sailing from Auckland 29th August 1939, Achilles made for Panama and then patrolled down the west coast of South America to Chile, searching for German shipping. The ship passed through the Straits of Magellan on 20th October 1939 to join the newly designated South Atlantic Station, based on the Falkland Islands comprising of HM Ships Ajax; Exeter; Cumberland; and now Achilles. From there, similar patrols against German shipping and for the protection of British shipping, were conducted. War was declared on 3rd September 1939 against Germany.

Together with HM Ships Ajax & Exeter, she saw action in The Battle of the River Plate 13th December 1939 off the Uruguay coast under the command of Captain William Edward Parry, later Admiral. The Battle resulted in the scuttling of the German Admiral Graf Spee, suffering 39 dead; Exeter was badly damaged and lost 66 crew; both Achilles & Ajax, although damaged, were able to remain in service with four and seven dead respectively.

She remained in the area on patrol becoming the Flag Ship of, now, Rear Admiral Harwood, on transfer from Ajax. She later set sail on 2nd February 1940 for New Zealand where she underwent a refit through to May 1940. She then spent the rest of the war in the Pacific.

She served with the Royal Navy's New Zealand Division up to the creation of the Royal New Zealand Navy on 1st October 1941, into which she was transferred and recommissioned as HMNZS Achilles on 1st October 1941.

On 5th January 1943, whilst providing naval gunfire support off Guadalcanal in the Solomon Islands, she was hit on X gun turret during air attacks and with 13 dead, she was badly damaged. Following temporary repairs, she made for Melbourne and on to Auckland, arriving 3rd February 1943. She then headed for the UK for repairs arriving at HM Dockyard Portsmouth 22nd March 1943.

During the refit, a huge explosion occurred on 22nd June 1943 killing several workers and causing extensive structural damage [not reported at the time]. The refit completion date was deferred from September 1943 to May 1944.

On 23rd May 1944, although not yet ready for operational deployment, she was commissioned for service with Royal New Zealand Navy and ordered to leave Portsmouth on 2nd May for Scapa Flow to prepare for the Normandy Invasion. However, machinery defects during the passage meant she was taken in hand for repairs at Greenock and thus was not involved D-Day.

She returned to action in the Pacific and after the war was deployed as Guardship in Tokyo in October 1945, returning to New Zealand in March 1946. She left for the UK on 17th July 1946, arriving at Sheerness 10th September 1946 and paid-off at Chatham 17th September 1946. She reverted to the control of the Royal Navy and after refitting was sold to the Royal Indian Navy and commissioned as HMIS Delhi.

In 1948 William Parry, her Captain at the River Plate, became Chief of Naval Staff (Commander-in-Chief) of the Royal Indian Navy. By 1950 the ship became INS Delhi. She represented the Indian Navy at the Queen's Coronation Review in 1953. From 1958 she was used for training purposes but she did manage a final visit to Auckland and Wellington in October 1969.

She was formally decommissioned in Bombay on 30th June 1978 and scrapped, despite attempts by New Zealand to preserve her. Her "Y" Turret and Director Control Tower were, however, saved and now are displayed at the Devonport Naval Base in Auckland.

BATTLE HONOURS

Belle Ile 1761
Trafalgar 1805
Leopard 1917
River Plate 1939
Guadalcanal 1942-3
Okinawa 1945

Class and type: Leander-class light cruiser

Displacement

7,270 tons standard: 9,740 tons full load

Length: 555.5ft (169.3m): Beam: 56ft (17m): Draught: 19.1ft (5.8m)

Speed: 32.5 knots (60km/h)

Range: 5,730 nautical miles (10,610km; 6,590 miles) at 13 knots (24km/h)

Complement: peacetime 550; wartime 680. (At time of River Plate approx. 60% were from New Zealand)

Armament:

8× 6in guns, twin turrets 'A' & 'B' Turrets forward; 'X' & 'Y' Aft

4× 4in guns, single mounts

2× 0.5in machine guns.

8 (2×4) 21in torpedoes.

**BIRKENHEAD BUILT
CRUISER**

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**SUCCESSFUL TRIALS OF
H.M.S. ACHILLES**

H.M.S. Achilles, one of the three cruisers ordered under the 1930 programme, which left Cammell Laird's, Birkenhead, for her trials on the Clyde about three weeks ago, returned to the Mersey yesterday. The paint was flaked off her bows, due to the high speeds and heavy weather which she encountered.

Mr. R. S. Johnson, managing director of Cammell Laird's, told the *Daily Post* that she had done "wonderfully well" in all respects, both in regard to speed, gun trials, and other Admiralty tests. After her completion at Birkenhead she

Liverpool Post and Mercury
14 Aug 1933 Mon Page 5

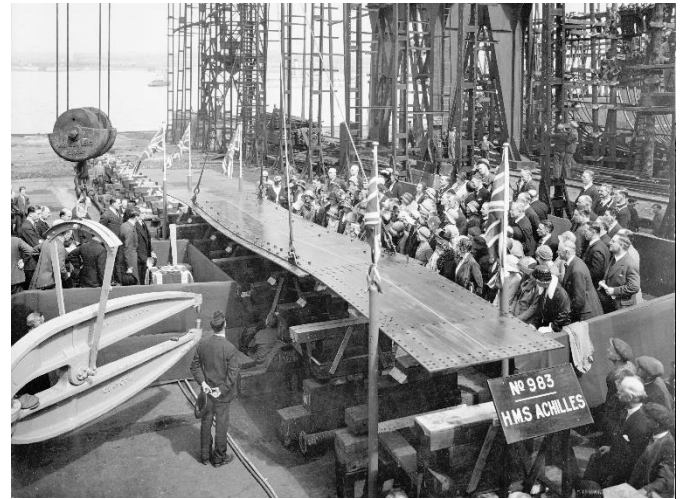
ACHILLES LEAVES

H.M.S. Achilles, one of the three cruisers ordered under the 1930 programme, left the Mersey today for Portsmouth to take up her commission. She was commanded by Captain Colin Cantlie.

This 7,000 ton cruiser was built by Messrs. Cammell Laird and Company at Birkenhead.

Evening Express (Liverpool)
6 Oct 1933 Friday

HMS ACHILLES C70 – LAUNCH IMAGES



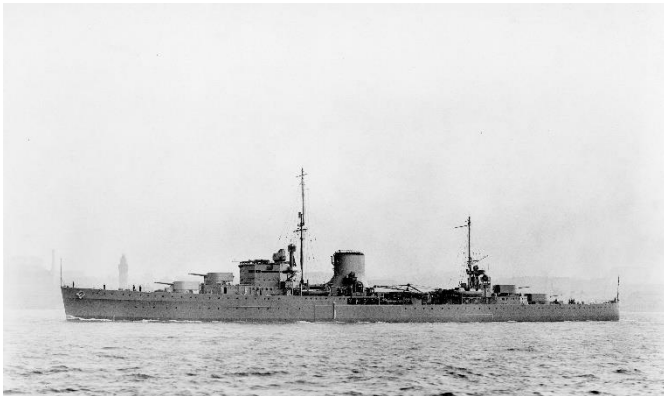
Keel Laying Ceremony of No 983 HMS ACHILLES Cammell Laird 11 June 1931



The Launch of HMS Achilles by Lady Stanley, the wife of the Parliamentary Secretary for the Admiralty 1st September 1932



HMS Achilles undergoing Trials



6th October 1933 Achilles leaves the Mersey for Portsmouth where she was commissioned on 10th October 1933

All above Images curtesy Wirral Council/Wirral Archives Service



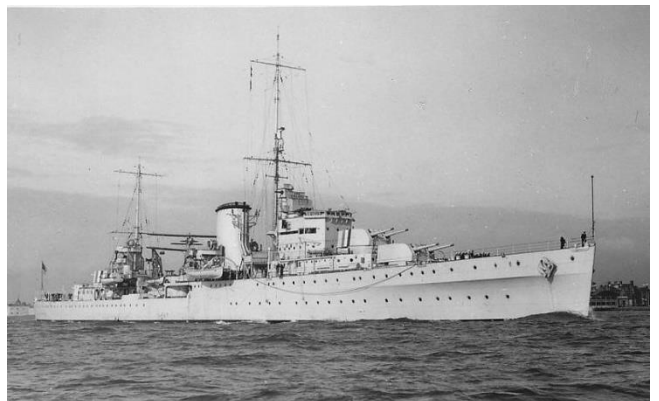
HMS Achilles arrives back in Auckland, February 1940, after The Battle of the River Plate



Y Turret from Achilles in Auckland - with former crewmen



Achilles from Ajax - River Plate



HMS Achilles Mediterranean 1936