



HMS AJAX & RIVER PLATE VETERANS ASSOCIATION

**Memorial Service
To Mark the 90th Anniversary
Commissioning of HMS AJAX
Portsmouth 15th April 1935**

**Held at the Normandy Memorial Wall
D-Day Story Museum, Portsmouth**

Saturday 27th September 2025 11.00 a.m.

Music by HMS NELSON Royal Naval Volunteer Band

March on by Veterans

Welcome

Chairman HMS Ajax & River Plate Veterans Association - Nigel Masters

Introduction

HMS Ajax & River Plate Veterans Association - Malcolm Collis

Reading of Members' names who have Crossed the Bar since our last Service in 2024

Let us remember before God and commend to his sure keeping, those who have died for their country in peace and war, those who we knew and whose memory we treasure and all that have lived and died in the service of mankind.

THE EXHORTATION

They shall grow not old, as we that are left grow old.
Age shall not weary them nor the years condemn.
At the going down of the sun, and in the morning
We will remember them

"We will remember them"

LAST POST

ONE MINUTE SILENCE

REVEILLE

PLACING OF WREATHS

THE NATIONAL ANTHEM

Closing Remarks



**HMS Ajax & River Plate
Veterans Association**

**Closing music
HMS NELSON Royal Naval Volunteer Band**

www.hmsajax.org

HMS AJAX



Pennant Number 22

HMS AJAX: the seventh Royal Naval ship to bear the name Ajax, the legendary hero of ancient Greece.

A Leander Class Light Cruiser, designed by Naval Constructor Albert 'Ajax' Adams, father of member Bob Adams, was Ordered on 01/10/32; Laid Down by Vickers Armstrongs Ltd at Barrow-in-Furness on 07/02/33 and launched on 01/03/34 by Lady Chatfield, wife of the First Sea Lord.

Following a year of Fitting-Out she sailed to Portsmouth where she was Commissioned

Brief History of HMS Ajax

First Commissioned at Portsmouth on 15/04/35 for the America and West Indies Station, following Final Technical Trials, she sailed from Middleslip Jetty, Portsmouth, on 11/06/35 for Malta for Working-Up. She finally departed for Trinidad on 22/07/35 but was soon recalled back to the Mediterranean for the mounting Italy and Abyssinia crisis, arriving Gibraltar 16/09/35. She would spend the next nearly a year in the Middle East and it wasn't until 11/08/36 that she finally rejoined the original cruise of South America. In January 1937, having taken the Governor of the Falklands across to South Georgia, she diverted to successfully rescue the missing explorers of Discovery 11 off the South Shetlands. In June 1937 they diverted to Trinidad to assist in quelling the Oilfields Riots, before finally arriving back at Portsmouth end of July, with the First Commission ending 17/09/37.

Following a short refit in Portsmouth, she Recommissioned on 11/01/38 and rejoined the America & West Indies Squadron. She was in the Chilean region at the end of January 1939 when a huge earthquake struck Concepción and, together with HMS Exeter, assisted in the rescue operation.

Following her return to the Caribbean, she deployed to The South America Division in the South Atlantic. She was on patrol off the Brazilian coast when war was declared on 03/09/39 and within three hours had intercepted two German merchant ships. On 27/10/39 she became Flag Ship to Commodore Henry Harwood and began the hunt for a German raider. On 13/12/39, Ajax, Achillies & Exeter engaged the Graf Spee in what would be later called 'The Battle of the River Plate', which resulted in Graf Spee scuttling off Montevideo, Uruguay.

Following repairs in The Falklands, Ajax made her way to Plymouth, arriving back in the UK end of January 1940. The Ajax & Exeter crew received a Royal reception in London while Ajax sailed to Chatham for a refit and end of Commission.

Ajax was in refit until July 1940 and during this time some of the crew were detached to assist in the Dunkirk Evacuations. She would spend the next two years engaged in convoy work in the Mediterranean and saw much action; Taranto, Suda Bay, Matapan, to name but

a few. Ajax eventually returned to Chatham for a much-needed refit, arriving on 27/05/42.

The long refit lasted until she Recommissioned on 24/10/42 and following Working-Up at Scapa Flow, joined the 12th Cruiser Squadron Western Mediterranean. However, she had only been back in the Mediterranean a matter of days when, in Bone Harbour, Algeria, on New Year's Day 1943, she was struck by a 1000lb bomb from a Ju87 during an air raid, putting two boiler rooms out of action and damaging another. She managed to get to Gibraltar for repairs before sailing to New York for permanent repairs, arriving 04/03/43. She remained there for nine months, with her crew billeted with local families, until finally setting sail for Portsmouth on 02/11/43 via Bermuda.

Following additional refit work, she Recommissioned at Portsmouth on Christmas Day 1943 and after further trials and repairs she was heading back to the Mediterranean by the end of January 1944 to resume her duties. She remained there until May 1944 when she sailed for Scapa to Work-Up for the D-Day Landings.

On the morning of 06/06/44 she was off the Normandy Coast Gold Beach in readiness for the D-Day assault as part of Operation Neptune. At 05.30hrs Ajax was the first ship to open fire and destroyed her first target, a battery of 6 in. guns at Longues, in eight minutes, having fired 114 of her 6 in. shells at a range of 12,000 yards [nearly seven miles].

She returned a few times to Portsmouth, including on 22/06/44 when all her 6 in. guns were replaced. AJAX had dealt with 56 separate targets and fired a total of 2,587 6 in. shells in support of the Normandy beachhead.

On 15/08/44 she took part in Operation Dragoon providing fire support for the landings in the south of France.

On Christmas Day 1944, Winston Churchill and Anthony Eden went aboard Ajax at Malta, using her as their HQ prior to the Yalta conference [Meeting of World Leaders to decide post-war organisation of Germany and Europe]

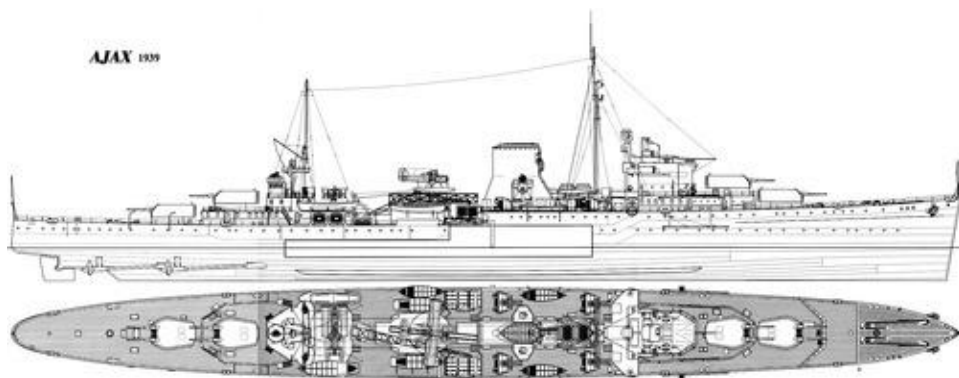
She was in Taranto, southern Italy, on VE Day, 05/05/45 and later underwent a 3 month refit in Malta at the end of 1945.

She sailed for South America on 09/01/46, which included acting as Escort Ship to the Highland Monarch repatriating 845 Graf Spee crew back to Germany from Uruguay & Argentina.

Following this, she once again returned to the Mediterranean, joining the 1st Cruiser Squadron at Malta. On 18/07/47 Ajax was ordered to intercept and turn back the 'Exodus 1947', a ship carrying 4,500 Jews hoping to set up an independent state in Palestine.

Ajax made her final return to the UK, arriving at Chatham, where she Paid Off, on 16/02/48 and was laid up on the River Fal to await an expected sale to the Chilean Navy. She remained there until the following March when Winston Churchill cancelled the sale and instead, she was placed on the Disposal List. She arrived at the Breaker's yard, Messers J. Cashmore Ltd, Newport, on 18/11/49. Her demolition was completed during 1950.

Her name, however, lived on when the Leander Class Frigate HMS Ajax was Commissioned in Birkenhead on 11/12/63.



BATTLE HONOURS

(as recorded by Association)

St Vincent	1780
Martinique	1780
Chesapeake	1781-82
St Kitts	1782
Saintes	1782
Nile	1801
Calders	1805
Trafalgar	1805
San Sebastian	1813
Baltic	1854
Jutland	1916
River Plate	1939
Mediterranean	1940-42
Matapan	1941
Greece & Crete	1941
Malta Convoys	1940-42
Aegean	1944
D-Day Landings	1944
South of France	1944



Original displacement 7259 tons [9512 tons fully fueled]; length 552 ft [168 m]; Beam 56 ft [17 m]

Six Admiralty 3-drum boilers with four sets of Parsons inputs/reaction turbines produced 72,000 shp, giving a top speed of 32½ knots and a range of 10,300 miles at 12 knots [2,200 miles at Full Speed]

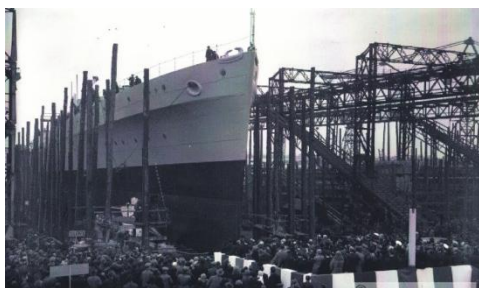
The ship's peacetime complement was 570, rising to 840 wartime.

Armament: Eight 6 in. guns; Four 4 in. guns; and Three 0.5 in. guns together with Eight 21 in. torpedo tubes. Two ship-launched aircraft were fitted.

She underwent several re-fits during her 14 years of service which notably saw the addition of an early radar system and the removal of her sea planes.



The launch of HMS Ajax by Lady Chatfield, wife of the First Sea Lord Admiral of the Fleet Sir Ernie Chatfield



Launch of HMS Ajax Barrow-in-Furness 1st March 1934



Launch of HMS Ajax Barrow-in-Furness 1st March 1934



Royal visit by The Duke & Duchess of York (Later King George VI & Queen Elizabeth) Barrow-in-Furness 4th April 1935



HMS Ajax at Barrow-in-Furness



HMS Ajax leaving Middleslip Jetty, Portsmouth 11th June 1935



HMS Ajax



Ajax in action on D-Day

HMS Ajax V11 Casualties - Killed

Wednesday 13 December 1939 - Battle of the River Plate.

BASHFORD Cyril George: Corporal R.M.: age 23.

BURRELLS Albert Frederick Owen: Marine R.M.: age 20.

CLEMENTS James Henry: Corporal R.M.: age 29.

FARLEY William John: Ordinary Seaman: age 18.

FOLLETT Harry: Sergeant R.M.: age 29.

FRANCOM Ernest Albert Corbett: Steward: age unknown.

LAMBARD William Walter: Marine R.M.: age 20.

Saturday 1st June 1940/Sunday 2 June 1940

Thursday 27 June 1940/Sunday 30 June 1940 - Dunkirk evacuation.

McINALLY John Edward: Ordinary Seaman: age 22.

DAVEY John Gauthrope: Able Seaman: age 20.

WRAGG Lawrence Walter: Ordinary Seaman: age 19.

PARSONS John Henry Bickerseith: Leading Seaman: age 29.

ELEMS William: Able Seaman: age unknown.

SIMPSON William Ernest: Petty Officer: age 32.

Saturday, 12 October 1940 - Battle of Cape Passero Malta.

BORCHARDT Roger John: Able Seaman: age unknown.

EDWARDS Thomas Walter Mayes: Chief Petty Officer: age 28.

GAMON Maurice Partridge: Lieutenant: age 24.

HILLS George William: Boy 1st Class: age unknown.

HORNETT Frederick William: Chief Yeoman of Signals: age 39.

KENNEDY William John: Boy 1st Class: age 17.

MEEK Luther Grantham: Telegraphist: age 19.

O'DELL Harold John: Able Seaman: age 18.

OWENS Norman Donald: Bugler R.M.: age unknown.

PRESTON Samuel William: Ordinary Seaman: age 29.

REED Frederick: Corporal R.M.: age 21.

SMITH Walter: Ordinary Seaman: age unknown

STRATHY George Henry Kirkpatrick: Royal Canadian Navy: age 22

Saturday 1 March 1941 - Troop landings at Suda Bay, Crete.

CROKER Victor Gordon: Stoker 2nd Class: age 21.

HAND Albert James: Stoker 1st Class: age 20.

Monday 7 April 1941 - Piraeus, Greece

DAW, Ernest Frederick: Corporal R.M.: age 20.

Wednesday 28 May 1941/Thursday 29 May 1941 - Bombing Crete.

FOORD Herbert James: Engine Room Artificer: age 24.

GIBSON James: Stoker 1st Class: age 41.

PLOWMAN Rex Vernon: Ordinary Seaman: age 18.

SALT Joseph Edmund: Leading Stoker: age 21.

SMITH Victor William Richard: Stoker 1st Class: age 20.

STANLEY Frederick: Ordinary Seaman: age 25.

CRIPPS Leonard Raymond: Ordinary Seaman: age unknown.

Thursday 12 June 1941 - Believed Lebanon

GOODFELLOW John: Musician: aged 25

Friday 1 January 1943 - Bombing, Port of Bone, Algeria

BENTLEY John: Stoker 2nd Class: age 18.

BURNS James Kinloch: Stoker Petty Officer: age 30.

DEPLEDGE Dennis Sydney: Engine Room Artificer: age 23.

McKENZIE Benjamin: Stoker 2nd Class: age unknown.

McKINNEY Colin Michael: Marine R.M.: age 18.

TAYLOR William Archibald: Stoker Petty Officer: age 33.

YORK Charles Eric: Lieutenant: age 23



William John Farley:
age 18 - Killed River
Plate



Lawrence Walter Wragg:
age 19 - Killed Dunkirk
Evacuations



William John Kennedy: age 17 -
Killed Cape Passero [far right]

“We will remember them”

Full details can be found on www.hmsajax.org/ajax-crew-casualties