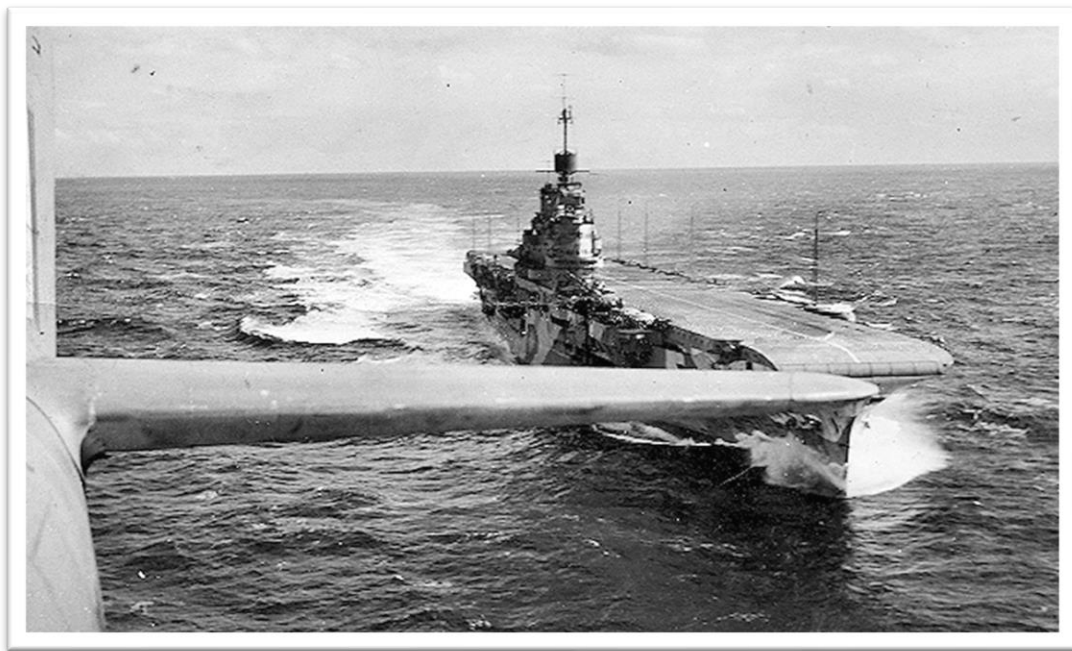


Eleven months aboard HMS INDOMITABLE



The diary of Gerald A. Hancock with the photographs of
Walter E Gelling



This page is formed from the wartime diary of Gerald A. Hancock who served on H.M.S Indomitable during the period September 10th 1941 to August 14th 1942. The diary was discovered in January 2012 after it was believed lost by his family; along with a few photographs this was submitted to the Royal Navy Research Archive.

Additional photographs used to illustrate the diary come from the wartime collection of Walter E Gelling who served on the ship during the same time. Others are from the Royal Navy Research Archive collection. By some strange coincidence both the diary and the photo collection were donated to the Archive in the same week.

1941

H.M.S. INDOMITABLE was a new ship preparing to sail for flying trials and a work up cruise in the West Indies in preparation for operations in the Far East. She carried four squadrons: 800 - 16 x Fulmar II, 827 - 12 x Albacore I, 831 - 12 x Albacore I, 880 - 9 x Sea Hurricane Ib]

Sept 10: Joined ship 08.00. Gladstone Dock Seaforth, Liverpool, Ammunitioning.

Sept 27-28: Last week-end leave

Sept 30: Saw Doris (sister) in the evening

Oct 1: Left Gladstone 08.00 - one destroyer and spitfire escort.

Oct 2: Lay off Bangor, Co. Down arriving am. Sailed for Greenock 20.00

Oct 3: Arrive Greenock during 1st Dog - no leave piped.

Oct 5: Under way 08.00 - Flying trials and speed trials - night lying off Ardrossan.

Oct 5 - 16: Trials in Firth of Clyde and off Ailsa Craig going in at night to Ardrossan. Week-end at Greenock - ashore Friday and Sunday - Glasgow and Gurock by train. Three of us spend 45 shillings on food.

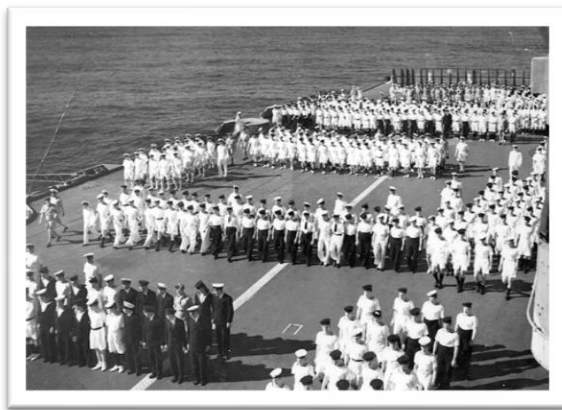
Oct 18: Left Greenock 02.00, last mail distributed 07.30.

Oct 19 - 20: In convoy. French liner PASTEUR for Halifax (Canada) Destroyer escort. Heavy seas breaking over flight deck. Only at 6 knots.

Oct 22: Left convoy

Oct 25 - 26: Two aircraft lost. Survivors from one picked up after 30 hours search.

Oct 27: Arrived Bermuda during last Dog. Four leaves during stay.



Left: Divisions held while in Bermuda note the variations in uniform ranging from full temperate rig to full tropical rig and all points in-between. Right: Captain H. E. Morse, DSO, RN, Commanding Officer.

Oct 31: Left Bermuda

Nov 2: 18.00 Arrived Jamaica. Ran on reef entering harbour.

Nov 3: 02.30 Got off reef. Clocks 6 hours back on B.S.T.

Nov 4: [Sailed] For Norfolk. V.A Max speed during passage 16 knots due to drainage.

Nov 8: Arrived off Norfolk during forenoon. Cold day.

Nov 9 – 10: At [Norfolk Naval Air Station](#). Eight leaves.

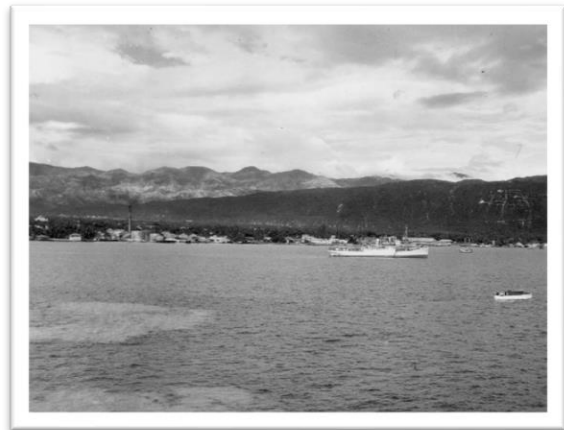
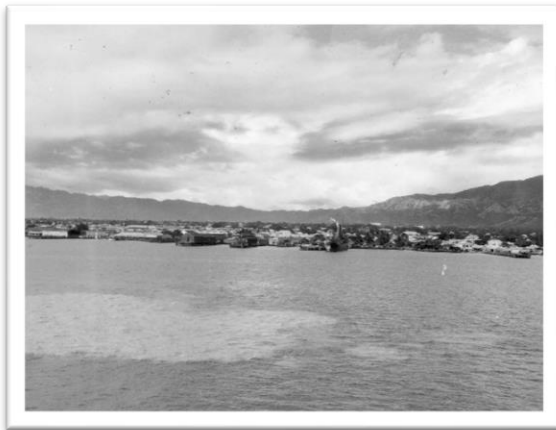
Nov 19: In [*Elizabeth*] river. Marsh fires caused bad visibility, returned to berth in the evening.

Nov 20: [*sailed*] For Jamaica

Nov 24 - 28: Lying off Jamaica. Kingston harbour. Out all week off Kingston fighting trials.

Nov 29: Back in harbour

Nov 30: Sent for week to H.M.S BUZZARD. [Palisadoes](#). F.A.A aerodrome.



Above: Kingston harbour, Jamaica. Below: two views of Kingston, Jamaica



Dec 6: Ship back in harbour. Returned to ship.

Dec 6 -12: Leave in Kingston.

Dec 13: [*sailed*] For Trinidad.

Dec 15: Sighted Trinidad. Lay off Port of Spain.

Dec 16: Submarine scare - F.A.A Cadets [*Fleet Air Arm Observers from H.M.S. GOSHAWK*, [R.N. Ait Station Piarco](#)] come to sea with us. Bad show. Two landing crashes.

Dec 17: 23.00 To sea for Cape Town.

Dec 22: 19.00 Crossed the line.

Dec 25: Games and concert. Christmas dinner. Very hot.

Dec 31: Arrived Cape Town during afternoon. Leave in the evening.



Crossing the line ceremony. Above L: The Royal procession ascends on the lift. R: The Captain greets King Neptune.
Below L: The 'polywogs' must face the fearsome 'bears'. R: King Neptune and her Highness Amphitrite



1942

Jan 1: Leave in Cape Town.

Jan 2: [*Sailed*] For Aden.

Jan 10: In the Gulf - met by destroyer escort H.M.A.S NAPIER, NIZAM, NESTOR.

Jan 11: Arrive Aden during forenoon - disembarked 2 squadrons [*800 NAS with 18 Fulmars & 827 NAS with 12 Albacores to [RAF Khormaksar](#)*]. Leave (22,000 miles).

Jan 12: To Port Sudan, escorted.

Jan 14: Arrived Port Sudan. [*embarked*] 50 Hurricanes and crews for Singapore. Leave.

Jan 15: P.M to sea

Jan 16: Escort sent in to refuel at Aden - passed through Straits under cover of darkness.

Jan 21: P.M at Addu Atoll. Refuelling Pear leaf. [RFA]

Jan 22: Left P.M. for Cocos Islands

Jan 25: Cocos Islands to refuel. Difficulty in refuelling destroyers - one left behind. At sea again following morning.

Jan 27: Joined by third destroyer waiting all day to fly off RAF Hurricanes - 16 got off.

Jan 28: Essential that remainder get off. Destroyers running short of fuel. Swordfish lost. ASDICS pick up submarine, nothing developed. Hurricanes all off safely. Ship having closed the coast of Java which was just in sight. 8.5 hours ahead of GMT.

Jan 29 - Feb 1: Returning to Trincomalee having lost time in refuelling escort at sea.

Feb 2: Arrived Trincomalee.



Trincomalee, the Scapa flow of the east. Left: The main anchorage with a carrier in the center of the image, R.A.F. Station China Bay is the flat white area in the distance directly above the carrier. Right: A closer shot of the airfield that is R.A.F. Station China Bay.

Feb 4: Orders to proceed to Colombo cancelled due to sub activity.

[*In company with?*] REVENGE. ROYAL SOV. EMERALD. ENTERPRISE. VITA (HMHS) HERON. APPLELEAF. PEARLEAF. NAPIER. NESTOR. NIZAM. MANOORA. SUMATRA.

Feb 2 - 16: (32,000 miles) Boiler cleaning. Sub scare delayed sailing for two days.

Feb 16: [*Sailed*] For Aden

Feb 18: Reconnaissance a/c in search for enemy supply ship off Maldivian Islands.

Feb 22: USS WEST POINT from Singapore. Arrived Aden during forenoon mail - 70 bags - 13 letters, 1 tel : ashore. R.A.A joins ship. Captain H.E. Morse relieved of command by Captain Troubridge.

Feb 23: Left Aden for Port Sudan. [827 NAS re-joins ship, 831 NAS with 12 Albacores disembarked to [RAF Khormaksar](#)]

Feb 25: Arrived Port Sudan, took on more Hurricanes and RAF personnel for Far East.

Feb 27: Left P.Sudan. NAPIER NESTOR escorting. New skipper now in command.

Mar 6: 40 Hurricanes flown off.

Mar 7: Trincomalee. Remainder of planes flown off.

Mar 8 and 9: Ashore

RAMILLIES. ROYAL SOV. DORSETSHIRE. VAMPIRE. DECOY. FORTUNE. NAPIER. NESTOR. NIZAM. EREBUS. SUMATRA.

Mar 10: Left Trimco: DECOY and FORTUNE in company. For Aden 07.00

Mar 16: Arrived Aden. 150 bags of mail. Leave. COMMANDANT DOMINE. F.F.S. SS DRONTES (RMC) CORFU. KIWI (HMS) SS CLAN MACTAVISH. [800 NAS & 831 NAS re-join ship]

Mar 19: Left Aden. Main engines broken down from 13.15 - 22.00. DECOY FORTUNE in company 800,.827, 831, 880 squadrons complete.

Mar 23: Arrived Addu Atoll.

Mar 24: Fleet manoeuvres. RAMMILLIES. ROYAL SOV. REVENGE. RESOLUTION (flagship) . Escort - GRIFFIN. FOXHOUND and FORTUNE. DECOY. ISAAC SWEEN. D.S. NESTOR NAPIER. ?? LIMGAIN ??? NORMAN.

Mar 25: Fleet manoeuvres. Arrived back Addu Atoll Saturday (28th) PM

Mar 29: Left 23.00 Fleet sails for unknown rendezvous.

Mar 31: Joined by HMS WARSPITE. 4 Fulmars lost this week on exercises.

HMS FORMIDABLE. HERMES. CORNWALL. CALEDON. EMERALD. ENTERPRISE. HEEMSKIRK. DORSETSHIRE. PANTHER. PALADIN. VAMPIRE. FOXHOUND. GRIFFIN. ARROW. DRAGON. SCOUT.

Mar 31 - Apr 4: Unsuccessful search carried out; no contacts made with enemy. Returned to Addu Atoll April 4th midday.

April 5: 17.00 Reconnaissance a/c make contact. 1 Albacore lost, 1 shot up but returned safely 22.00. Lost contact. COLOMBO raided.

April 6: Search continued, enemy BS's raiding to the N.W. No sign of HMS DORSETSHIRE and HMS CORNWALL having failed to rendezvous.

Oct 1st to April 1: 45,986 miles. 31,000 tonnes oil fuel.

Apr 7: HMS DORSETSHIRE and HMS CORNWALL reported sunk. HMS ENTERPRISE and 2 DR's return with approx 1000 survivors, search continued - 7 ships reported sunk yesterday in Bay of Bengal.

Apr 8: Ado Atoll refuelling

April 9: HMS HERMES sunk. To sea for Colombo.

April 13: Arrive Bombay Monday

April 20: 01.30 Left Bombay for Colombo among those in company. WARSPITE - flagship. FORMIDABLE. HEEMSKIRK. NEWCASTLE. EMERALD. ENTERPRISE.

April 23: Colombo to take on aircraft. 1 new fulmar squadron. [806 NAS with 12 Fulmar IIs from [RNAS Ratmalana](#)]

April 24: Left Colombo with fleet

Fleet air arm losses since October: -

6 Fulmars, 1 Swordfish. Several Albacores badly smashed up. 1 lost April 5, Casualties 7 possibly 8. 3 lost April 5 and 1 injured.

Second boiler clean in Bombay

April 29: Arrive Seychelles to refuel. In company. Left Seychelles 19.00.

Transports in Company: -

KEREN, SOBIESKI, ORANSAY, ROYAL ULSTERMAN, DUCHESS OF ATHOLL,

WINCHESTER CASTLE. FRANCONIA. KARANJA. Also HMS HERMIONE. ?? lafonmey ?? LIGHTNING, DUNCAN, JAVELIN, INCONSTANT. ANTHONY.

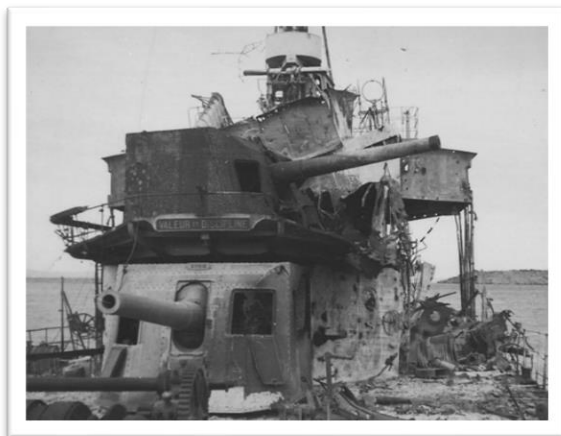
May 3: Join up with 8 transports. HMS ILLUSTRIOUS. RAMMILLIES. DEVONSHIRE 2 D.F'S - bound for Diego Suarez Madagascar.

May 5: Attack at dawn on town and aerodrome of Diego Suarez.



Above two views of Diego Suarez Madagascar, under attack during operation IRONCLAD.

Below: Two views of the wreck of the Vichy French Sloop FS D'ENTRECASTEAUX, crippled by bombs and torpedoes from aircraft flying from INDOMITABLE and ILLUSTRIOUS during 'Operation IRONCLAD'



May 8: French surrender. Our casualties about 500.

May 9: Fleet enters harbour. 08.00 French sub fires 1 torpedo at INDOM. Missed us by about 20 yards.

May 19: Left for Mombasa with ILLUSTRIOUS.

May 22: Arrive Mombasa as home to C in C's office. [800 squadron left the ship disembarking to [RNAS Tanga](#). 806 & 880 squadrons disembarked to [R.B. Air Section Port Rietz](#) - 'A' flight 806 re-equipped with 6 Martlet I fighters and reembarked on June 11th, 'B' flight remained ashore. 880 re-embarked on June 10th]

May 26: In hospital

June 12: To Nairobi hospital.

June 15: Left Nairobi

June 16: Arrive Mombasa, sent to ?? Lihoni Camp. 7 days excused duty. INDOM arrives back from patrol.

July 4: Return to ship

July 9: [sail] For Durban ?? LAFONEY ?? LIGHTNING. LOOKOUT. ISLE DE FRANCE. BRITTANNIC in Durban.

July 13: Arrive Durban

July 14: Leave for Cape Town.

July 17: Arrive Cape Town.

July 18: Leave for Freetown.

July 28: Arrive Freetown forenoon. PHOEBE. UNION. VINDICTIVE. In harbour.

Aug 1: Left Freetown to rendezvous with VICTORIOUS and EAGLE off North-West Africa

Aug 6: Rendezvous AM with EAGLE. VICTORIOUS. ARGUS about 300 miles off Gib.

Aug 8: In Gib to oil - not successful. Left 04.45 (27 Knots)

Aug 9: JOINED CONVOY FOR MALTA pm. NELSON. RODNEY. KENYA. FURIOUS. MANCHESTER. NIGERIA. SIRIUS. etc Through straits during dark hours. Refuel ourselves in Gibraltar Bay (1000 tons)

MALTA CONVOY: - 4 AIRCRAFT CARRIERS, 2 BATTLESHIPS, 9 CRUISERS, 15 MERCHANT SHIPS about 60 ships in all with Destroyer screen - oilers and tugs.

Aug 10: 'DI' Overtake convoy pm. Proceeding 12 knots due east, reduced visibility - sea choppy, no incidents.

Aug 11: 'DI' Action stations 05.40. - no incidents. Shadows all forenoon.

13.00 Submarine attack - EAGLE hit and sunk - several torpedoes fired at us - obviously more than one submarine - doubtful whether any were sunk - Pompoms opened up on periscope - EAGLE sank approx 13.24.



Above two views of a carrier under heavy air attack during operation PEDESTAL

Action stations on and off all afternoon - convoy intact proceeding at about 12 knots.

20.00 Action stations - Dusk - torpedo bombers, attack all guns opened up - no hits secure about 22.15.

Aug 12: 'DI' (Action stations all day). Between the straits of Sardinia and African coast, no incidents.

10.30 approx - JU 88's terrific barrage - no hits - several raids reported coming in, small formations not more than 20 at a time - C.O 880 sqdn shot down and lost. Afternoon-torpedo attack on convoy. HMS NELSON and RODNEY open up with 16 inch flack.

16.00 - 18.15 Quiet and peaceful - none of the convoy lost out of 15 ships.

18.30 J.U. 87 dive bomber and torpedo attack.

18.45 Attack on INDOM. Three hits - forward aft and mid ships port side. Malta fighters overdue hence inadequate fighter protection.

19.15 approx. Turned due west - 12 knots

19.45 approx. Steaming due west. 20 knots. NELSON RODNEY VICTORIOUS and screen in company - HMS MANCHESTER. NIGERIA KENYA and CAIRO etc proceed with convoy. More gunfire heard in the distance. Damage considerable but above the waterline.

22.00 approx. Darken ship. Security from the night - next operation abandoned.

Aug 13: No incidents. 2 dud action stations.

21.30 approx. VICTORIOUS and NELSON turn east to cover returning ships and light convoy out of Malta. Speed 18 knots - due in Gibraltar tomorrow.

We accounted for 28 a/c.

Aug 14: Arrive Gibraltar 18.00

Dry dock for temporary repairs.

End of diary entries.

Thanks to Mr. Tim Hancock for submitting a digital copy of his father's diary and pictures covering his time with the ship and to Mr. John Gelling for the donation of photographs belonging to his father, Walter Gelling, who served as a Petty Officer in fleet air arm.