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BISMARCK BOOKS...BULGARIA'S 'NEW' FRIGATES...CHINA'S CARRIER PLANS...UK NAVAL HARRIERS

This month sees the 68th anniversary of the sinking of the German battleship Bismarck, one of the legendary episodes of history. To mark the event, we carry an extract from a new book on the Bismarck and look at some other recently published titles relevant to the tale of her ill-fated May 1941 breakout into the Atlantic, including the British battle-cruiser Hood, which was destroyed by the most feared ship in Hitler's fleet. Here, though, we begin our special section with an eyewitness account of the famous pursuit and destruction of Bismarck.

Below: A newspaper front page from May 28, 1941, the day after the Bismarck was sunk. It details the British side of the dramatic story, including how Winston Churchill broke the news to MPs.

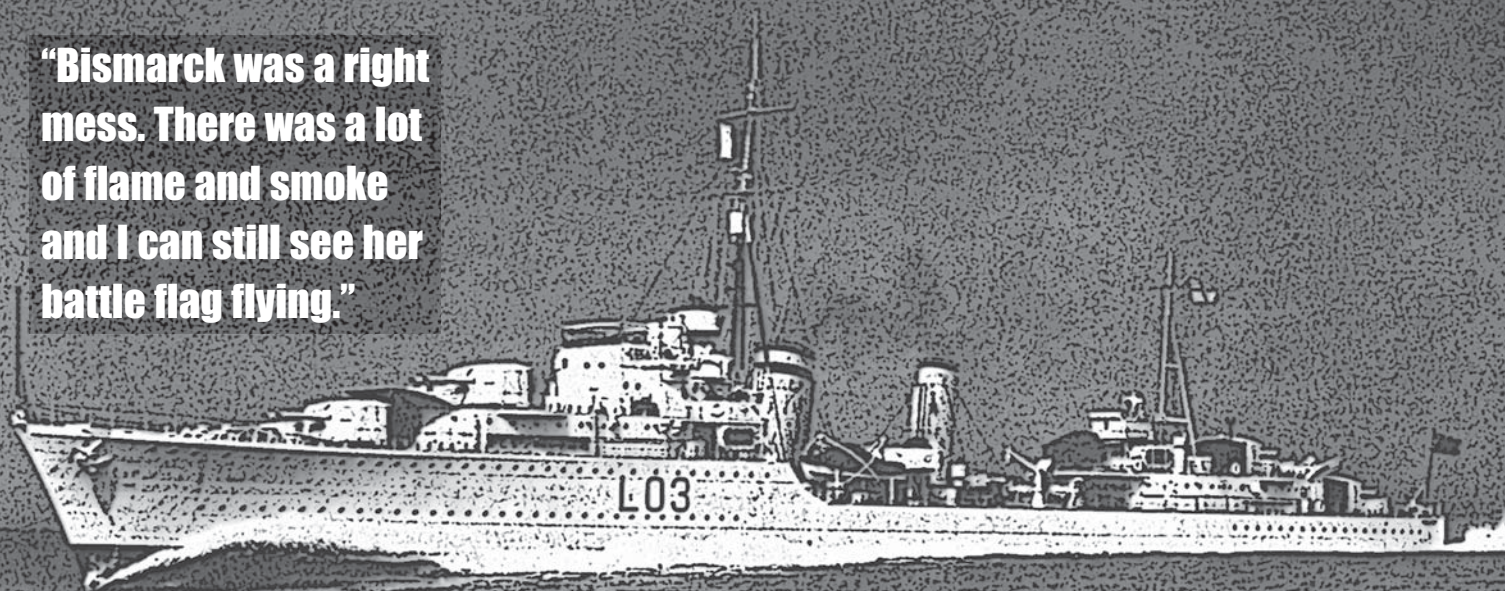
Bottom (left to right): Cossack veterans Ken Robinson and Fred Court (both 87) at last month's reunion in Worthing. Photos: Jonathan Eastland/Ajax.



AT THE HMS COSSACK ASSOCIATION 18TH ANNUAL REUNION AT THE CHATSWORTH HOTEL, WORTHING, ON ENGLAND'S SOUTH COAST, LAST MONTH (APRIL), WARSHIPS IFR EDITOR-AT-LARGE **JONATHAN EASTLAND** MET A VETERAN OF THE BISMARCK ACTION. HE ALSO TALKED TO OTHER SAILORS CONNECTED WITH THE LEGENDARY WARSHIP NAMED COSSACK BOTH IN WAR & PEACE.

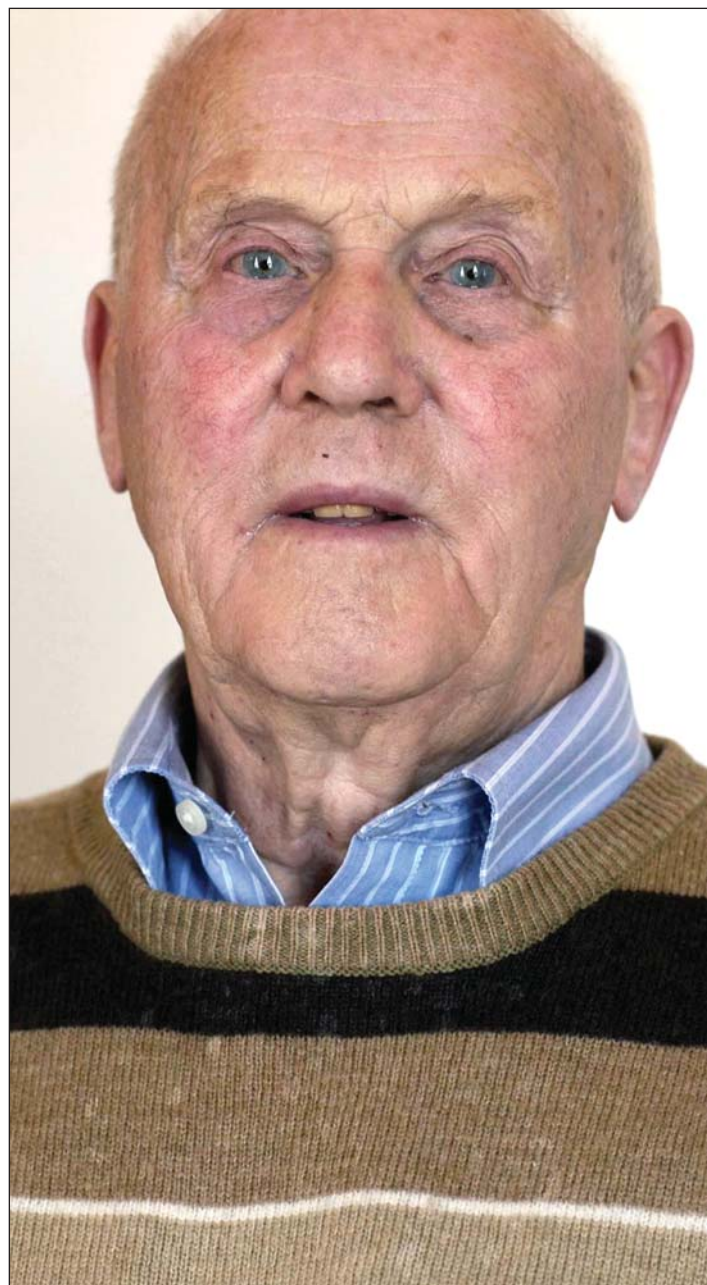


"Bismarck was a right mess. There was a lot of flame and smoke and I can still see her battle flag flying."



KEN Robinson, aged 87, from Tenby, Pembrokeshire, in Wales, was a rating feeding 2lb shells into Cossack's starboard, pom-pom anti-aircraft weapon during the Bismarck chase. He told me: "Our job was to shadow Bismarck, to try and slow her down. But she was fast. Normally, Cossack could do 38 knots, 40 with the sea up her backside. She corkscrewed quite badly and that made life difficult although most of the time Cossack was quite comfortable." Under the command of the dynamic and highly aggressive Captain Philip Vian, who led the 4th Destroyer Flotilla, Cossack had charged after Bismarck, determined to mark her down for the big battleships King George V and Rodney to destroy. On the night of May 26 1941, in mountainous seas, Vian decided the 4th Flotilla should try and slow Bismarck down by attacking her. Ken recalled: "I can't remember being all that worried. You were really involved in the job and responding to people around you. Eventually we were up with Bismarck and went in to attack line-ahead with the flotilla's other destroyers, Zulu, Maori and Sikh." The destroyers mounted a team effort, turning side on, with a total of 16 torpedoes fired in the first attempt. "Then it was up smoke [screen] and out as fast as you could go," said Fred. "We tried about four times to get within distance like that but each time Bismarck had our range and straddled us with her 15-inch guns. She was firing starshells and using gunnery radar. Then we were ordered to act independently, so we went in head to sea and fired a spread of four torpedoes. At the time, we

thought that one of them had hit but some of Bismarck's survivors said we hadn't. They managed to shoot away our aerials." But, with her steering damaged by a strike from Swordfish torpedo-bombers, the Bismarck could not get away and on the morning of May 27 the British battlewagons came hammering down upon the pride of Hitler's fleet. Cossack watched from a distance, the unfolding battle still vivid in Ken's memory. "We had a good view because we were screening the big ones from subs. Bismarck was a right mess. There was a lot of flame and smoke and I can still see her battle flag flying. The ship was just a massive wreck under all that fire and smoke. Occasionally, one of her guns would fire but she was stopped and they sent the cruiser Dorsetshire in to finish her off with torpedoes. I wouldn't like to have been aboard Bismarck. I think Maori picked up survivors but we were already escorting King George V back to Loch Ewe in Scotland." Next year sees the 70th anniversary of the episode that made the Cossack's name in the early days of WW2, the notorious Altmark Incident. This magazine intends running a short series of articles to commemorate the event, and also tell the story of the British destroyer's sinking in late 1941, after her part in the destruction of Bismarck. We will also look at later Cossacks and profile the Cossack Association. Among the veterans participating will be Fred Court, aged 87, who found himself staring down the barrel of one of Altmark's 6-inch guns during the famous episode of February 1940.



Above: The Cossack of the Altmark Incident and Bismarck battle era makes an impressive sight at speed. Image: Strathdee Collection. **Right:** Veteran Ken Robinson who recalled a battle with Bismarck. Photo: Jonathan Eastland/AJAX.