

Remembering hero of Jervis Bay

Son visits memorial to crew who launched doomed attack on Nazi battleship

By Katie Bennett

Advancement Officer

The Museum was recently contacted by Christopher Davison of Sandwich, Kent, who was planning to visit the memorial at Albuoy's Point in Hamilton to the cruiser HMS *Jervis Bay*, sunk by a Nazi pocket battleship in 1940. Davison's father Thomas was one of the *Jervis Bay* survivors.

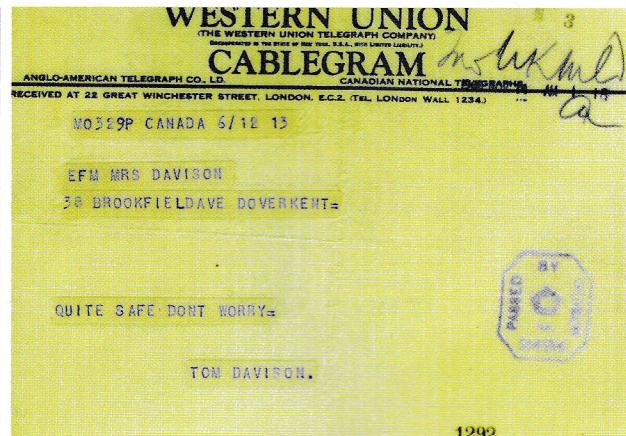
Jervis Bay, built in 1922 as a Commonwealth Line steamer, was commandeered by the Royal Navy at the beginning of the Second World War to serve as an armed merchant cruiser. Carrying seven 6-inch guns dating from the late 1800s, she was assigned to Bermuda convoy escort duty in May 1940, and from June that year to the Bermuda and Halifax escort service.

On November 5, 1940, *Jervis Bay* was the only armed escort for 37 merchant ships of Convoy HX84 out of Halifax bound for Britain when she met the German heavy cruiser KMS *Admiral Scheer* south of Reykjavik, Iceland.

Captain Edward S. Fogarty Fegen, commanding *Jervis Bay*, ordered a straight course towards the *Admiral Scheer*: a heroic but suicidal decision which allowed the convoy to escape as best it could. *Jervis Bay*'s small and outdated guns were no match for the German warship, whose armaments included six 11-inch guns, eight 5.9-inch guns, anti-aircraft batteries and a pair of deck-mounted torpedo launchers, not to mention her size and heavy steel armour-cladding.

In action for only 15 minutes, the *Jervis Bay* sank two hours later, losing 190 men, including Captain Fegen.

Awed by the bravery of the *Jervis Bay*, the neutral Swedish vessel *Stureholm* broke convoy protocol and turned around to look for survivors, rescuing 68 men, three of whom later died of their injuries. Thomas Davison recounted floating in the icy water not knowing if the *Stureholm* coming towards him was friend or foe, flashing his torch and hoping for rescue.



Thomas Davison during the Second World War and his "quite safe" telegram

HERO OF JERVIS BAY SEA BATTLE TELLS HIS STORY!

A true experience of THOMAS F. DAVISON, Dover, England, of the hero-ship, *Jervis Bay*.

"PROTECTING A BRITISH CONVOY, the merchant crew of the *Jervis Bay* fought a surface raider to the death," writes Mr. Davison. "Ablaze from stern to stern, we were sinking fast. With others, I dove overboard, clutching a flashlight."

"UNDER DEADLY SHRAPNEL fire, fourteen of us managed to board a flimsy raft. For hours, we sat in icy water up to our chests. Huge waves battered us ... swept us into the sea. Half dead, we crawled back. Three men died of cold or wounds."

"AFTER ELEVEN HOURS, the soaked flashlight saved us." The Swedish freighter *Stureholm* saw its beam and picked us up. "Without those dependable 'Eveready' fresh dated batteries, we would have died miserably."

(Signed) Thomas F. Davison

FRESH BATTERIES LAST LONGER... Look for the DATE-LINE

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Davison's torch was so important to his rescue that he was featured in an ad for Eveready batteries

Davison was given two weeks' survivors leave and then was back to war on the HMS *London*. When King George VI visited HMS *London*, Davison was told to take one step forward, so the King could thank him for his heroism on the *Jervis Bay*. Davison survived the war, later rising to the rank

of Petty Officer. He died in 1986 aged 74, in his home town of Dover, Kent.

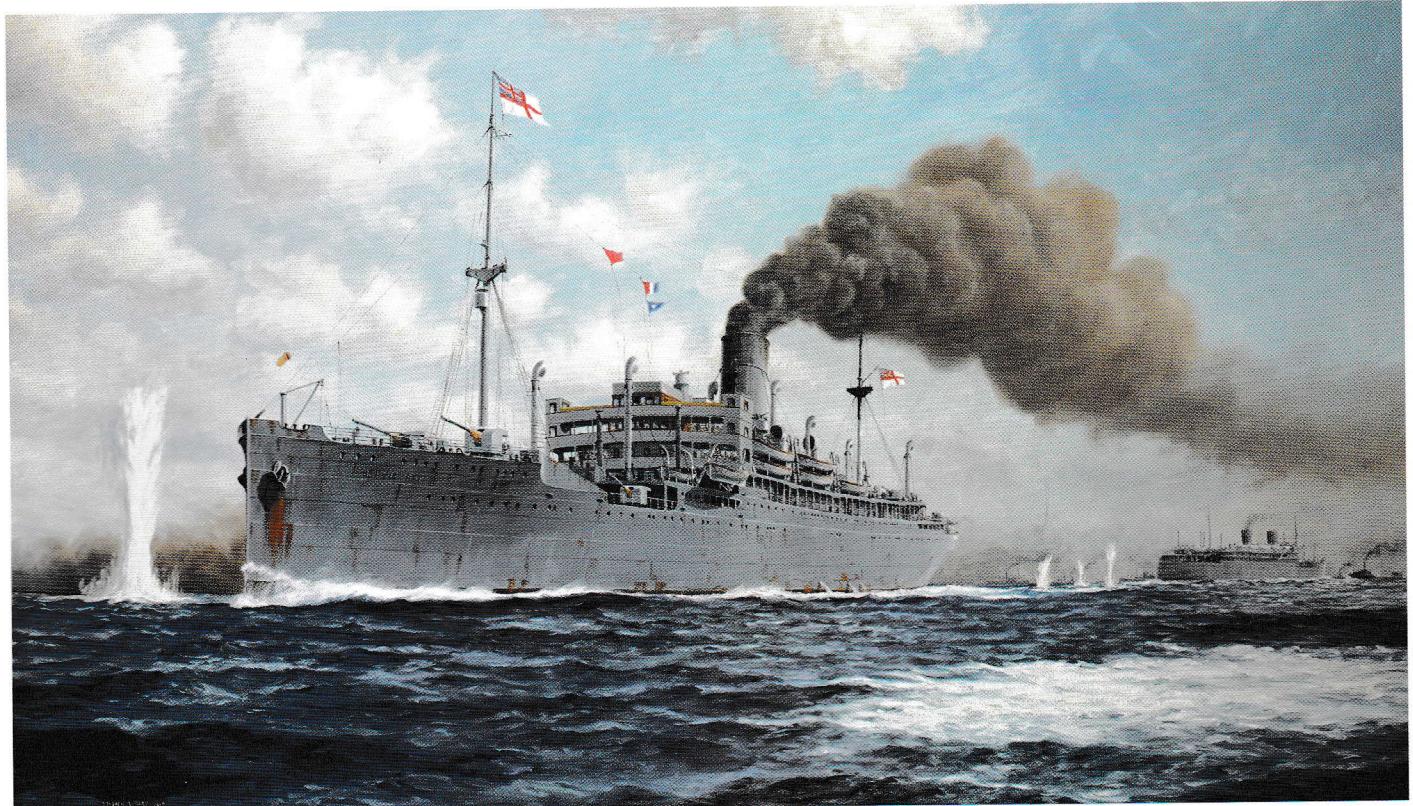
His son Christopher spent 30 years at sea with the Merchant Navy on cross-Channel ferries from Dover to France and sailed as Chief Engineer with P&O Ferries. While in Bermuda in March with his wife Carol, he visited the Bermuda Sea Cadets, telling them his father's survival story, and some of his own tales from years at sea.

Davison laid a wreath on the *Jervis Bay* memorial in memory of his father and the *Jervis Bay* crew, watched by the Sea Cadets, Hamilton Mayor Charles Gosling, Hamilton Town Crier Ed Christopher and Canon Norman Lynas.

The Davisons visited the National Museum a few days later, and generously donated photographs of Thomas Davison and books and poems about the

Jervis Bay. Curator Dr. Deborah Atwood showed Davison a nameplate from one of the *Jervis Bay* lifeboats left in Bermuda before its sinking. He also left the Museum a copy of his father's telegraph to his wife upon rescue that read simply:

"QUITE SAFE, DON'T WORRY." ■



Jervis Bay during its fateful engagement with the Admiral Scheer, portrayed by marine artist Stephen J. Card

THIRTY EIGHT SHIPS

Thirty Eight ships with food for you
 Thirty Eight ships that must get through
 Atlantic calm and dusk of day...
 and a shell screamed over the Jervis Bay

Thirty Eight ships, full steam ahead
 Off with their needed cargoes sped;
 But over there where the warships lay,
 Guns ablaze went the Jervis Bay

This was the end, her Captain knew;
 Fegen knew it and all his crew.
 Buying minutes with lives to pay...
 Lord, they were men in the Jervis Bay

Pounded, shattered and smashed and lame
 Fighting on with decks aflame,
 She sank with sun shining at the death
 of the day
 And a gun still spoke from the Jervis Bay

Thirty Eight ships with food for you
 Thirty vessels came safely through;
 But the finest ship that has docked today
 In the Empire's heart is the Jervis Bay

—Dick Dewsknap
HMS Shropshire, 1940



At the Jervis Bay memorial (from left): Hamilton Town Crier Ed Christopher, Carol and Christopher Davison, Mayor Charles Gosling, Lieutenant Commander Michael Frith, RNR (SCC), and Canon Norman Lynas