

# BOY'S OWN PAPER



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*New Percy F. Westerman Serial Inside*

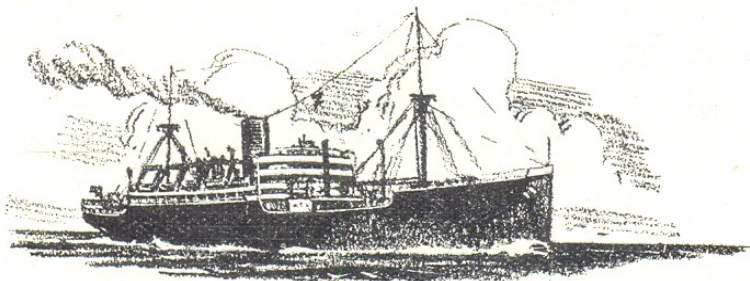
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## The story of

# H.M.S. JERVIS BAY

by A. R. Payne



A WINTRY but sunny day was November 5, 1940, in the North Atlantic. A convoy of nearly forty ships was proceeding steadily eastwards, about halfway between North America and the United Kingdom, homeward bound. The naval escort vessel was H.M. armed merchant cruiser *Jervis Bay*, a liner of 14,164 tons, formerly belonging to the Aberdeen Commonwealth Line, and engaged in the company's service between London and Australian ports. Her commander was Acting-Captain E. S. F. Fegen, R.N., and the convoy commodore was Rear-Admiral Maltby in the motor-ship *Cornish City*, 4,952 tons.



Suddenly, just before 5 p.m. a large warship was sighted far to the northward, on the port beam of the convoy; almost immediately gun-flashes were seen and then a salvo of heavy shells fell among the ships of the convoy. A German commerce raider! The attacking warship carried guns far heavier than anything in the convoy and was believed to be of the *Admiral Scheer* type, either that ship or the *Lutzow* (ex

*Deutschland*), mounting six 11-in. and eight 5'9-in. guns.

Captain Fegen at once altered course towards the enemy, dropping smoke-floats to screen the merchantmen as he did so and opening fire, though he and his men knew full well that they had no chance whatever against the powerful raider. Indeed, it is possible that the gallant crew of the *Jervis Bay* never even got within actual range, although they continued to fire until the ship had to be abandoned. She was hit very quickly—according to some accounts by the enemy's third salvo—and soon her steering gear was seriously affected and she was set on fire.

Meanwhile the convoy had scattered behind the smoke-screen put up by the *Jervis Bay* and by themselves as they turned away. The British ships of the port column also opened fire with their defensive guns as they could be brought to bear, though it is even more probable that they were never within range than was the case with their escort.

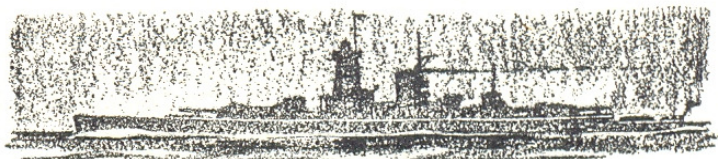
Out-gunned, out-ranged, and on fire, the *Jervis Bay* continued her courageous fight against hopeless odds and despite the damage to her steering gear held on her course towards the enemy, holding his complete attention.

Early in the engagement the bridge was hit and Captain Fegen's right arm was badly shattered. He went to the after-bridge to continue his work from that position; but later this, too, was hit, and he returned to what was left of his original post. He was not seen again. By this time the liner was burning from stem to stern, she had been holed below the waterline, was listing and settling by the stern. She sank three hours after the engagement had begun, but she had held up the German raider for over an hour, sacrificing herself, as indeed was her duty, in order that the ships under her care should at least have a chance of escaping. She succeeded so gloriously that no less than 32 ships were successful in evading the raider.

One of these ships, the Swedish *Stureholm*, Captain Sven Olander, pluckily took a chance by remaining in the vicinity and, by vote of her crew, returning after dark to the scene in the hope of finding survivors. By the time the Swedish ship arrived weather conditions had deteriorated considerably, nevertheless sixty-five survivors were rescued from the single boat and four rafts which were all that remained serviceable after the battering taken by the liner. It was only by great courage and skilful seamanship that the *Stureholm's* crew was able to effect the rescue. "There she rode like a hero," said the Swedish captain, speaking of the fight. "She did not have a chance, and we all knew it. . . ."

Captain Fegen and many of his men died that others might live and that food and supplies might reach the garrison of "our island fortress." They died fighting, as did Captain Kennedy and the men of that other armed liner, H.M.S. *Rawalpindi*, and worthily upheld the traditions of the Royal Navy, although two-thirds of the crew were formerly merchant seamen who had never before been in battle. "They fought like veterans. It was really astonishing," said a senior officer survivor. One little incident showing the spirit of the men was that when the ensign was shot away one of the crew ran up the rigging with another and nailed it to the mast.

On November 18 the Admiralty announced that H.M. the King had been pleased to approve the award of the Victoria Cross (posthumously) to the late Commander (Acting Captain) Edward Stephen Fogarty Fegen, R.N., for his valour in challenging hopeless odds and giving his life to save the many ships it was his duty to protect.



The following decorations were announced in the *London Gazette* of January 23, 1941, "for courage and devotion to duty . . .":—D.S.O.: Temp. Lt. N. E. Wood; D.S.C.: Midshipman R. A. G. Butler; Conspicuous Gallantry Medal: Ldg. Seaman J. H. Wood; D.S.M.: Petty Officer. C. Castle, A.B. J. C. Eggleston, A.B. W. J. A. Cooper and Seaman D. Bain. Mention in Despatches (posthumous): Mr. H. Williamson, senior radio officer. Following these names came the statement:—"Among those who went down in *Jervis Bay* there must have been many, and among the survivors others, whose gallantry, were the whole truth known, deserved decorations. The above appointment and awards should be taken as an honour to their ship as well as to those who earned them."

