



VALE HRH THE DUKE OF EDINBURGH

By Petar Djokovic

On 9 April 2021, His Royal Highness Prince Philip, the Duke of Edinburgh, Earl of Merioneth and Baron Greenwich, passed away peacefully at Windsor Castle. Prince Philip, of course, had a very close relationship with the Navy, not just in his capacity as the royal consort, but also as a naval veteran of World War II.

Philip was born on the island of Corfu, Greece, on 10 June 1921; a member of the royal family of Greece and Denmark, and the maternal grandson of Prince Louis of Battenberg, who changed his surname to Mountbatten during World War I, and nephew of Lord Louis Mountbatten, both of whom held the positions of Admiral of the Fleet and First Sea Lord. Philip also took on the name Mountbatten when he became a naturalised British citizen.



Lieutenant Philip Mountbatten c1944

Following the Greco-Turkish War (1919-1922) and the subsequent September 1922 Revolution, Philip and his family were forced into exile in France having been evacuated from Corfu by the British cruiser, HMS *Calypso*. After a short period in France, the Prince moved to England in 1928 to

live with relatives there. He entered the Royal Naval College, Dartmouth, in 1939 where he excelled; he was awarded the King's Dirk as the best all-round cadet in his term, and the Eardley-Howard-Crockett prize as the best cadet. Future First Sea Lord and Chief of Defence Staff, and the Prince's contemporary, Admiral of the Fleet Lord Terence Lewin, once stated: *"No doubt about it. If he hadn't become what he did, he would have been First Sea Lord and not me."* It was after a royal visit to the college, during which Philip acted as escort to Princesses Elizabeth and Margaret, that he began regular correspondence with the future queen.



HMS Valiant in which Midshipman Philip Mountbatten participated in the Battle of Cape Matapan

Philip joined the venerable *Revenge* class battleship HMS *Ramillies* in Ceylon as a midshipman in January 1940. He made his first visit to Australia while serving in *Ramillies* as the ship escorted Australian and New Zealand troop convoys to Suez. *Ramillies* transferred to the Mediterranean later in the year and, after further service in HM Ships *Kent* and *Shropshire*, Philip moved to the *Queen Elizabeth* class battleship HMS *Valiant*. In March 1941 the 19-year-old Midshipman Mountbatten took part in the Battle of Cape Matapan in which the Italian Navy lost three cruisers and two destroyers as well as any chance of challenging British naval supremacy in the Mediterranean. In 2012 the Duke described his part in directing a searchlight during the action;

'I seem to remember that I reported I had a target in sight, and was ordered to "open shutter". The beam lit up a stationary cruiser, but we were so close by then that the beam only lit up half the ship.'

'At this point all hell broke loose, as all our eight 15-inch guns, plus those of the flagship



[HMS Warspite] and [HMS] Barham's started firing at the stationary cruiser, which disappeared in an explosion and a cloud of smoke.

'I was then ordered to "train left" and lit up another Italian cruiser, which was given the same treatment.

*'The next morning the battle fleet returned to the scene of the battle, while attempts were made to pick up survivors. This was rudely interrupted by an attack by German bombers.'*ⁱⁱ



A bearded Lieutenant Philip Mountbatten in Melbourne in 1945

Philip was Mentioned in Dispatches for his part in the battle and was later awarded a Greek War Cross.

He later joined the destroyer HMS *Wallace* as a sub-lieutenant and in October 1942 he became the ship's First Lieutenant. During the Allied invasion of Sicily in July 1943, he saved his ship from a German bomber attack by using a raft as a diversion. "I thought it was a frightfully good wheeze," the Duke later said;

*'I filled it with rubbish, set fire to it and launched it, hoping the aeroplane would think we were burning. It did. It went and had a go at it. We got away with it.'*ⁱⁱⁱ



Lieutenant Philip Mountbatten in Malta, October 1949

Former *Wallace* crewman, Harry Hargreaves, recalled that it was smoke floats in the raft, rather than actually setting the raft alight, that created the diversion, but he was in little doubt that the action saved the ship;

'It was obvious that we were the target for tonight and they would not stop until we had suffered a fatal hit. It was for all the world like being blindfolded and trying to evade an enemy whose only problem was getting his aim right. There was no doubt in anyone's mind that a direct hit was inevitable...

'It was less than five minutes after the aircraft had departed and, if the previous space in time was approximately the same, we had about 20 minutes to come up with something...

'The First Lieutenant [Philip] went into hurried conversation with the captain and the next thing a wooden raft was being put together on deck. Within five minutes they launched a raft over the side; at each end was fastened a smoke float. When it hit the water the smoke floats were activated and billowing clouds of smoke interspersed with



small bursts of flame gave a convincing imitation of flaming debris in the water...

'Prince Philip saved our lives that night. I suppose there might have been a few survivors, but certainly the ship would have been sunk.'^{iv}



Lieutenant Commander Mountbatten in the early 1950s, possibly aboard HMS Magpie

Philip joined the newly commissioned W class destroyer HMS *Whelp* as First Lieutenant in July 1944. *Whelp* participated in Operation DRAGOON (the Allied invasion of Southern France) in August before joining the Eastern Fleet in the Indian Ocean. She later joined the British Pacific Fleet and spent much time in Australian waters visiting Sydney, Melbourne and Darwin. She entered Sagami Bay on 27 August 1945 as part of the flagship group (HMS *Duke of York* and USS *Missouri*), and was also present in Tokyo for the Japanese surrender on 2 September.



The Duke's first and only naval command; HMS Magpie

Post-war, Philip served in two training establishments ashore, and in the C class destroyer HMS *Chequers* based at Malta. In 1950,

following promotion to lieutenant commander, he took up his first and only command, the *Swan* class sloop HMS *Magpie*, where he acquired the shipboard nickname 'Dukey'.

Philip had married Princess Elizabeth on 20 November 1947 and on the same day was created Duke of Edinburgh, Earl of Merioneth and Baron Greenwich. Upon the death of King George VI on 6 February 1952 (just days before the Princess and the Duke were due to visit Australia), and the Princess's subsequent ascension to the throne, Philip gave up his promising naval career having attained the rank of commander.



The Queen and the Duke pose for a coronation portrait in June 1953

As the royal consort, many honorary naval appointments followed; he was made Admiral of the Fleet of the Royal Navy in 1953; Admiral of the Fleet of the Royal Australian Navy in 1954; Admiral of the Sea Cadet Corps from 1952 to 1992; Captain-General of the Corps of Royal Marines from 1953 to 2017; and was made Lord High Admiral of the United Kingdom in 2011; along with



numerous other honorary appointments across the Commonwealth.

Prince Philip made a record 22 royal visits to Australia and the Navy has been an important part of all them, both operationally and ceremonially, performing sea patrol and security duties, escort duties, and providing royal guards, sentries and communications.



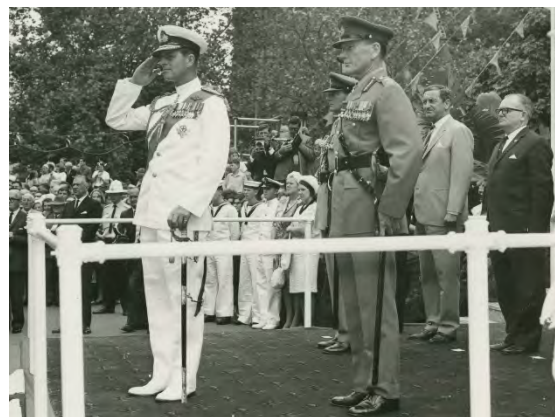
The Queen and the Duke at Parliament House in Canberra during the 1954 Royal Tour

The Duke's first royal visit was in 1954 as part of the Queen's six-month tour of the Commonwealth. On 1 February HMA Ships *Australia* (II) (flying the flag of the Flag Officer Commanding Her Majesty's Australian Fleet, Rear Admiral Roy Dowling, CBE, DSO, RAN), *Vengeance*, *Anzac* (II) and *Quadrant* rendezvoused with the royal yacht, *SS Gothic*, and her escort, HMNZS *Black Prince*, in the Tasman sea as they proceeded north-west from New Zealand. *Australia* and *Vengeance* both fired 21-gun salutes but a flypast of RAN aircraft was postponed due to inclement weather. The flypast went ahead the following day as Sea Furies and Fireflies from 808 and 817 Squadrons respectively

passed over the unit in 'V' formation and returned ten minutes later in 'E' formation.

HMA Ships *Condamine* and *Shoalhaven* joined the escort group on the morning of 3 February and the six warships led the royal yacht into Sydney Harbour, through a throng of civilian vessels, to Farm Cove. Over the next 58 days, the royal couple visited seven capital cities and 70 regional centres, covering some 43,500 km by land, sea and air.^v

The royal couple also visited many military memorials and shrines, as well as meeting ex-service people, some of whom had served in the Boer War and the Boxer Rebellion. The Duke spoke on behalf of the Queen on most of these occasions; his naval experience and pre-existing familiarity with Australia stood him in good stead, and he often turned out in uniform as the Admiral of the Fleet.



The Duke takes the Royal Salute at Sydney Town Hall during Churchill Week in February 1965. Events held during the week raised money for the Churchill Memorial Trust

In Canberra the royal couple witnessed a combined-services parade, the Navy contingent 1,000 strong out of some 4,500 participants. The Duke visited various naval establishments during the tour, sometimes in company with the Queen, sometimes unaccompanied. He presented a new Queen's Colour to HMAS *Cerberus* on 2 March where he inspected some 2,300 officers and sailors. While presenting the colour, the Duke reflected;



'I had the good fortune to serve with Australian seamen on Australian ships in the last war in the Mediterranean and in the Pacific. I have a first-hand respect for their qualities. You have a splendid tradition to live up to and I hope this Colour will always serve to remind you of the valour and achievements of the men of the Royal Australian Navy.'^{vi}



CO HMAS Ardent, Lieutenant John Riley, farewells the Duke as he disembarks at HMAS Cerberus in March 1973



The Queen and the Duke review the Australian Armed Services Silver Jubilee Parade in Canberra on 8 March 1977. Behind them are CDFS General Sir Francis Hassett (right) and Parade Commander Brigadier Don Weir

He relaxed in the wardroom afterwards where he encountered a number of former shipmates and acquaintances serving in the establishment. Upon being offered a beer by a senior officer *"The Duke quickly agreed, but waving towards his former*

colleagues, and to two ranks of petty officers... he said: 'What about these other chaps?'"^{vii}

That first visit came to an end on 1 April 1954 as the royal couple departed Fremantle embarked in *Gothic* and escorted by HMA Ships *Vengeance*, *Anzac (II)* and *Bataan*, while the RAN band performed on the wharf.

The Duke became a regular visitor to these shores and was back in Australia just two years later to open the Olympic Games in Melbourne, which included a visit to HMAS *Albatross* and a flight in a Bristol Sycamore helicopter. He opened the Commonwealth and Empire Games in Perth in 1962, and 11 RAN members served aboard the royal yacht, HMY *Britannia*, during the royal visit in 1963.



The Duke embarks in HMAS Cook to conduct the Fleet Review on 4 October 1986

Many of the Duke's later visits lacked the pomp and pageantry of those earlier tours (the 1977 Silver Jubilee tour being a notable exception), and may be described as 'working visits', such as his 1968 visit to attend the Duke of Edinburgh's Commonwealth Study Conference. When ceremonial duties were performed, the Navy was routinely a central component. The Duke was, for instance, the reviewing officer at the 1986 Fleet Review celebrating the 75th Anniversary of the 'Royal' title being bestowed on Australia's naval forces.



The Duke, accompanied by Command Warrant Officer Terry Casey, appointed Lord High Admiral of the Royal Navy in 2011.

At age 90, the Duke, accompanying the Queen, made his final visit to Australia in October 2011.

The 11-day visit took in Canberra, Brisbane, Melbourne and Perth where the Queen attended the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting. The royal couple opened Melbourne's new Royal Children's Hospital and the Duke even flipped a steak at the Big Aussie BBQ on Perth's Esplanade.

The Duke finally retired from public life in 2017 at the age of 97. His final appointment was, fittingly, his attendance at the Royal Marine's Captain-General's Parade at Buckingham Palace that August. The Duke will be remembered for a great many things; one of those being his deep association with, and respect for, the Royal Australian Navy.



The Duke at his final official public appearance; the Royal Marine's Captain-General's Parade in August 2017

- ⁱ Garner, Tom, 'The Tragedy of Young Prince Philip: The Nazis, The Navy and the Broken Home', *History Answers*, 7 November 2016, <https://www.historyanswers.co.uk/kings-queens/the-tragedy-of-young-prince-philip-the-nazis-the-navy-and-the-broken-home/>.
- ⁱⁱ Martin, Arthur, "All Hell Broke Loose": Duke of Edinburgh Gives First Account of His Role in 1941 Naval Battle That Sank Italian Cruisers', *The Daily Mail*, London, 17 April 2012, <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2130665/Duke-Edinburgh-gives-account-role-1941-naval-Battle-Cape-Matapan-sunk-Italian-cruisers.html>.
- ⁱⁱⁱ Warren, Jane, 'When Prince Philip Went to War: How a Dashing Young Naval Officer Won

a Princess's Heart', *The Express*, London, 13 June 2014,

<https://www.express.co.uk/news/royal/482094/When-Prince-Philip-went-to-war>.

- ^{iv} Smith, David, 'Prince Philip's War Heroics Come to Light After 60 Years', *The Guardian*, London, 28 December 2003, <https://www.theguardian.com/uk/2003/dec/28/monarchy.davidsmith>.

^v Connors, Jane, *Royal Visits to Australia*, NLA Publishing, Canberra, 2015, pp. 82-84.

^{vi} '5,000 Attend Melbourne Garden Party', *The Canberra Times*, Canberra, 3 March 1954, p.1.

^{vii} 'Duke's Yarn With Old Shipmates', *The Sydney Morning Herald*, Sydney, 3 March 1954, p.4.