

Rough Notes on HMS Locust - 1939 to 1968

Construction

HMS Locust was one of the four Dragonfly Class gunboats, her sister-ships being Dragonfly, Grasshopper, and Mosquito, all of which were named after insects. They were designed as China Station River gunboats for operations on waterways such as the Yangtze, and consequently were flat bottomed and of shallow draught. Ordered from Yarrow Shipbuilders Ltd at Scotstoun on 20 June 1938, she was laid down on 29 November 1938, and launched on 28 September 1939.

Specifications

Displacement: 585 tons.

Length: 197 feet.

Beam: 33 feet.

Draught: 5 feet.

Propulsion: 2 × Parsons geared steam turbines, installed power 3800 Shaft Horse Power; 2 × Admiralty 3-drum boilers; 2 × 78 inch, three bladed propellers; 3 × large bladed shallow rudders equally spaced across the stern.

Speed: 17 knots.

Range: 90 tons of fuel.

Complement: 74

Armament: 1939 to 1941:- Upper platform: 1 × 0.5-inch quad-barrel machine gun; Battery deck: 1 × 4-inch QF Mk V gun, 1 × 3.7-inch howitzer, 2 × 2-inch deck-mounted mortars;

Main deck: 1 × 4-inch QF Mk V gun, 1 × 0.5-inch quad-barrel machine gun.

Armament: 1941-1946:- Upper platform: 1 × 0.5-inch quad-barrel machine gun; Battery deck: 1 × 4-inch QF Mk V gun, 1 × 2-pdr 4-barrel pom-pom, 2 × 2-inch deck-mounted mortars; Main deck: 1 × 4-inch QF Mk V gun, 1 × 0.5-inch quad-barrel machine gun.

Armament: From 1946:- Upper platform: 2 × Oerlikon 20mm Mk VIIIA machine gun; Battery deck: 1 × 25-pdr gun, 1 × 2-pdr 4-barrel pom-pom, 2 × 2-inch deck-mounted mortars; Main deck: 1 × 4-inch QF Mk V gun, 1 × Oerlikon Mk VIIA machine gun.

Active Service

On 9 April 1940 Lieutenant Ackroyd Norman Palliser Costobadie RN (see *No.1 below*) was appointed to HMS Locust, which was finally commissioned on May 17 1940 with the pennant number T28. She began her active service when, on 27 May, she arrived from Portsmouth at the Royal Naval shore-base HMS Wildfire at Sheerness, having been transferred to the Nore Command for anti-aircraft defence and escort duties in the North Sea and English Channel.

Dunkirk (Operation Dynamo)

The shallow draft of HMS Locust was ideal for the role of evacuating troops from Dunkirk, and on 29 May 1940, during her first trip to Dunkirk, she took on tow the 1150 ton Sloop HMS Bideford which had been bombed and seriously damaged, and aboard which were many badly wounded men. HMS Locust not only pulled the vessel off the beach, but also towed her across the English Channel to within sight of Dover, where two powerful tugs took over, the whole operation having taken until the 31st, and lasted a total of 36 hours. The Locust returned to Dunkirk the following day, and it was later reported that between 28 May and 4 June she had evacuated a total of 2036 Allied soldiers.

Thames Estuary Defence Flotilla

HMS Locust then returned to resume her interrupted duty at Sheerness, to serve as an anti-aircraft ship in the Thames Estuary, and to undertake escort duties in the North Sea and English Channel. Then, on 8 October 1940, Locust detonated a German non-contact acoustic mine in 15 fathoms. The subsequent report stated that she had been proceeding at 14 knots in a position 3½ cable north of north-west Shingle Beacon when a heavy explosion occurred 10 to 15 yards astern of her.

The plating between frames was dished, up to a maximum of 1 inch from the middle of the engine room to the stern. The inboard arm of the port 'A' bracket was fractured and minor machinery damage was sustained. In addition, the hold was flooded from the fresh water tank aft. Although her fighting efficiency was seriously impaired, she was able to proceed under her own power until the weather deteriorated when she was taken in tow. Unfortunately, the damage put HMS Locust out of action for five months while repairs were carried out at Tilbury.

While that work was being undertaken Lieutenant Costobadie relinquished command, his replacement, Lieutenant James Wolferstan Rylands, RN (see *No.2 below*), being appointed on 4 November 1940, and he remained in command until 11 December 1941. Meanwhile, on 7 January 1941, Locust had returned to her anti-aircraft and escort duties at Sheerness.

Dieppe (Operation Jubilee)

Lieutenant-Commander (retired) William John Stride, RN (*see No.3 below*), took command of HMS Locust on 11 December 1941, while the vessel went on to play an important part in the Dieppe Raid undertaken on 19 August 1942. Once again her shallow draft had been considered useful, as she had been allocated to the 'Cutting Out Force', that was to seize barges and trawlers and tow them back to England. On the outward trip she carried 172 men from Royal Marine Commandos and landed then directly in Dieppe Harbour. However, she then came under heavy fire from the German shore batteries which scored a single hit on her bridge superstructure, killing Able Seaman, C/JX 259757, Harry J. Antell and Marine, PO/X 101308, Samuel B. Northern, and wounding six others. Nevertheless, her fighting efficiency was not seriously impaired, and Locust was able to withdraw to a safer range and provide gunfire support for the landings, prior to returning to Portsmouth.

D-Day (Operation Neptune - Naval part of Operation Overlord)

Following the Dieppe action HMS Locust was out of action for a week, and following her refit was based in the Solent. She then took part in the D-Day landings on 6 June 1944 working off 'Sword' beach and acting as Group Headquarters Ship for Force S1. However, on 16 June, and while still off 'Sword' beach, HMS Locust was hit by a shell fired from a German shore battery. Although that was reported to have caused only slight damage and that its fighting efficiency had not been impaired, two of the crew were killed and 11 seriously wounded. Those who lost their lives were Wireman, D/MX 106930, Maurice J. Bebb, and Leading Motor Mechanic, P/MX 500211, Kenneth A.E. Carpenter. Finally, on the morning of 24 June, the Locust ignored the danger to rescue survivors from the SS Derrycunihy which had been blown apart by an acoustic mine. On 4 September 1944 Stride had handed over the command of HMS Locust to Temporary Acting Lieutenant-Commander John Percival Kilbee, RNR (*see No.4 below*).

Mine Clearance

HMS Locust then operated as a Mine-Sweeping Headquarters Ship based at Harwich from May 1945 and was involved in the management of the mine clearing operations from around the coast of Holland and in particular, the port of Rotterdam to allow food to arrive for the starving Dutch population.

Post World War Two

In October 1945 HMS Locust returned to Sheerness for a refit in preparation for Far East river service, but that was cancelled, and consequently Kilbee relinquished command on 5 March 1946. Then, in May 1946, Locust was placed in reserve before being converted into a drill ship for the RNVR Severn Division. On 20 September 1951 she was re-commissioned, and then moored behind the Flying Fox on Mardyke Wharf in Bristol. There HMS Locust, the last surviving RN river gunboat, remained until 1968 when, on 5 May, she was decommissioned out of the RNVR before being sold for scrapping to

Cashmores of Newport on 5 June, prior to finally being towed out of Bristol's floating harbour on 12 June.

Commanders of HMS Locust - 1940 to 1946

(1) Ackroyd Norman Palliser de Costobadie, DSC, RN

Commanded HMS Locust - 9 April 1940 to 4 November 1940.

Ackroyd Norman Palliser de Costobadie was born on 20 February 1909 at Midsomer Norton in Somerset, the eldest son of Dr. Hugh Palliser de Costobadie (1880 to 1918), a physician and surgeon, and his wife Ellen Constance Sleigh (1878 to 1962). He was baptized at Wilton near Taunton on 2 April 1909, educated at Downside School before entering the Royal Navy College at Dartmouth as a Cadet on 15 September 1922.

Naval commissions:-

Acting Midshipman: 1 May 1926.
Midshipman: 19 April 1928.
Acting Sub-Lieutenant: 1 May 1929.
Sub-Lieutenant: 16 February 1930.
Lieutenant: 16 August 1932.
Lieutenant-Commander: 16 June 1940.
Commander: 31 December 1942.

Important life events:-

16 August 1940: Awarded the DSC for his service with Combined Operations. He also served on the staff of Lord Louis Mountbatten in both England and the Far East, and was also connected with the inter-service planning in North Africa.

3 April 1942: Mentioned in Despatches.

14 August 1944: Retired from Royal Navy.

10 February 1947: Ackroyd Norman Palliser de Costobadie of 'White Lodge' in Boughton Monchelsea in Kent, and the Junior Carlton Club, Pall Mall in London S.W.1., died unmarried aged 37, at the King Edward VII Sanatorium, Midhurst, Sussex. His funeral service took place on 13 February at Chilcompton Church in Somerset, followed by interment in the churchyard of Midsomer Norton parish church, where a bugler from HMS Royal Arthur sounded the 'Last Post', and rounds were fired at the graveside. Otherwise known as Ackroyd Norman Palliser, he left effects valued at £12,782 6s 5d.

(2) James Wolferstan Rylands, RN

Commanded HMS Locust - 4 November 1940 to 11 December 1941.

James Wolferstan Rylands was born on 19 May 1911 at Down House, Tockington, near Thornbury in Gloucestershire, the third son of Thomas Kirkland Rylands (1866 to 1923), a land agent, and his wife Betha Nisbet Wolferstan Thomas (1870 to 1953). He later entered the Royal Navy as a Cadet.

Naval commissions:-

Midshipman 1 May 1929.
Sub-Lieutenant: 1 March 1932.
Lieutenant: 1 August 1933.
Lieutenant-Commander: 1 August 1941.

Commander: 31 December 1947.

Important life events:-

Late 1937: At Hartlepool, Co. Durham, he married Diana Elizabeth Goldstone (11/9/1918 to 1993).

September 1939: Rylands was listed as a Lieutenant RN serving with the K-Class destroyer HMS Khartoum (F 45) newly launched by Swan Hunter, and was living with his wife at 70 Routhwood Gardens, Newcastle upon Tyne.

4 November 1940 to 11 December 1941: He commanded the river gunboat HMS Locust (T 28).

6 June 1941: Mentioned in Despatches.

12 December 1941: He took command of HMS Grove (L 77), an escort destroyer and remained in command until 12 June 1942.

12 June 1942: At 05.37 hrs on 12 June 1942 HMS Grove was hit by two torpedoes from the German submarine U-77 and sunk north of Sollum in Egypt in position 32°05'N, 25°30'E. Although two officers and 108 ratings were lost, there were 60 survivors. The destroyer had been part of the eastern convoy MW-11 under Rear Admiral P.J. Vian during Operation Vigorous, a supply convoy to Malta.

30 August 1942 until 10 March 1945: He commanded the destroyer HMS Kimberley (F 50).

20 May 1956: Retired from Royal Navy.

2 October 1984: James Wolferstan (otherwise Wolfreton) Rylands, of 'Tudor House', Bacton near Stowmarket in Suffolk, died aged 73. He was subsequently buried at St Andrew, Blo' Norton in Norfolk, leaving effects valued at £77,637.

(3) William John Stride, DSC, RN

Commanded HMS Locust - 11 December 1941 to 4 December 1944.

William John Stride was born on 3 October 1888 at Portsea Island in Hampshire, the son of John William Stride (born 1861), a farm labourer, and his wife Mary Ann Childs (1865 to 1896). He began his career as a gardener, but on 3 October 1906 he joined the Royal Navy at Portsmouth, initially signing on for 12 years. Then, on 14 August 1915, he was appointed Acting Gunner, and that was confirmed on 31 December.

Naval commissions:-

Commissioned Chief Gunner: 14 August 1925.

Lieutenant: 30 June 1929.

Lieutenant-Commander: 30 June 1937.

3 October 1938: Placed on Retired List as Lieutenant-Commander, but immediately re-employed from that date under the conditions of A.F.O.

Important life events:-

29 December 1923: At St Mary's church in Chidham near Chichester he married Grace Dorothy Moffatt (born 26 May 1895), daughter of Arthur Edward Moffatt of Eastney in Portsmouth, a Bandmaster in the Royal Marines.

11 May 1937: Appointed an MBE on the Coronation of HM King George VI and Queen Elizabeth.

16 May 1938 to 5 November 1940: Commanded the Minesweeper HMS Tedworth (J 32).

11 December 1941 to 4 September 1944: Commanded the River Gunboat HMS Locust (T 28).

2 October 1942: Mentioned in Despatches for his part in the Dieppe Raid of 19 August 1942.

14 November 1944: Awarded the DSC for the part he played in the Normandy landings.

17 September 1947: Due to health problems declared unfit for further naval service.

7 March 1952: William John Stride died of asthma and chronic bronchitis aged 63. On Friday 14 March 1952 The Hants Telegraph published the following obituary of Lieutenant-Commander Stride:-

"Many in Portsmouth have learned with regret of the death of Commander W. J. Stride, D.S.O., M.B.E., who commanded the flagship Victory in Portsmouth Dockyard from 1945-47. After cremation at Woking yesterday, his ashes were being brought to Portsmouth to be taken to sea from H.M.S. Excellent, where he served as Lieutenant of the Island from 1934-38. Joining the Navy at the age of 15, Commander Stride was gunner in the Vindictive at Zeebrugge in World War 1. As a Lieutenant-Commander he was captain of the diving ship Tedworth which went to the spot of the sinking of the submarine Thetis in 1939, and eventually salvaged her. At the Normandy landings he commanded the gunboat Locust. Commander Stride was deeply interested in his post in the Victory, for his interests were centred on the old sailing navy. As a boy living at Langstone he used to look out to sea to watch the sailing ships assembling, and during his command of the Victory he grasped the opportunity of continuing his study of naval history. He was always a most interesting talker on his favourite topic. After a period of illness he was invalided from the service and went to live at Maida Vale, London, subsequently moving to Chalfont St Peter in Buckinghamshire where he died."

(4) John Percival Kilbee, DSC, RNR

Commanded HMS Locust - 4 December 1944 to 5 March 1946.

John Percival Kilbee was born at Folkestone in Kent on 28 May 1911, the only son of Captain Robert Hitchings Kilbee (1879 to 1933), a Master Mariner, who for many years was Commodore of the Southern Railways Channel Fleet. His mother was Ethel Jane Gilmour (1886 to 1976). He was baptized at St Mary & St Eanswythe at Folkestone on 2 July 1911, and went on to become the third member of his family to adopt the sea as a career. He was also appointed a Probationary Midshipman in the RNR in 1930, while in early 1937 he joined the Southern Railways Channel Fleet, and in the autumn of 1938 was serving aboard the SS Canterbury.

RNR commissions:-

Probationary Midshipman: 11 January 1930.

Acting Sub-Lieutenant: 28 May 1932.

Temporary Sub-Lieutenant 14 August 1940.

Temporary Lieutenant: 15 November 1940.

Temporary Acting Lieutenant-Commander: 4 September 1944 ?

Important life events:-

14 September 1938: At Folkestone Parish Church, John Percival Kilbee of 60 Castle Hill Avenue in Folkestone married Ethel Grace Castle, the only daughter of Alderman A. Castle, Mayor of Folkestone.

10 June 1942 to 26 October 1942 commanded the ASW Trawler HMS Duncton (T 220).

8 March 1943 to 1 August 1944 commanded the ASW Trawler HMS Northern Wave (FY 153).

8 May 1943: Escorting convoy ONS-7 from Liverpool to Halifax, Nova Scotia.

17 May 1943: HMS Northern Wave picked up survivors from the British merchant ship Aymeric that was torpedoed and sunk by German U-boat U-657 east of Cape Farewell in position 59°42'N, 41°39'W.

4 September 1944: Took command of the river gunboat HMS Locust (T28).

1 January 1945: Kilbee, who had been on active service since the beginning of the war, was awarded the DSC.

September and October 1945: In temporary command of the frigate HMS Cranstoun (K 511) prior to it returning to the U.S. Navy on 3 December 1945.

5 March 1946: Finally relinquished command of HMS Locust.

27 December 1957: Still recorded with the London Division, as a Temporary Acting Lieutenant-Commander of the Royal Naval Volunteer Supplementary Reserve, John Percival (otherwise Perceval) Kilbee of 19A Cherry Garden Avenue, Folkestone in Kent, died aged 46 at the Royal Victoria Hospital in Folkestone. He was buried in Hawkinge Cemetery & Crematorium on 31 December leaving effects valued at £4767 17s 3d.