



Wingfield at War (The British Navy at War and Peace)

Mervyn Wingfield

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Captain Mervyn Wingfield was one of the last of his generation of submariners who made their reputation in the Second World War. Pre-war he had served on the China station and lived the riotous life of a young officer; in the war he commanded three submarines, Umpire, Sturgeon and Taurus, survived a collision in the North Sea, spent a winter in the Arctic, penetrated the Norwegian fjords submerged through a minefield, surfaced off St Nazaire in view of German guns to act as a navigation marker for the raiding force, fought cavalry in the northern Aegean, and later, off Penang, was the first British submariner to sink a Japanese submarine – and barely survived the subsequent, vicious counterattack after Taurus was severely damaged and became stuck in the mud at the bottom. Any one of these incidents would have merited a place for Wingfield in the history of naval warfare and the pantheon of submarine heroes. The Royal Navy's most senior submariner, Admiral Lord Boyce, notes in his foreword that the diesel-powered submarines in which both men served were not so different, but the risks which Wingfield took in wartime were greater, and Lord Boyce admired the way in which Wingfield led his crew and was loved by them. Many men were burned-out by the war, but in the post-war years Wingfield enjoyed a successful peacetime career in the Royal Navy where, finally, his personal qualities and his diplomacy were put to the test as a naval attaché. In retirement Wingfield was well-known for hosting lively beef and stilton lunches at the London Boat Show! He was also one of the last of the generations of Anglo-Irish families who served the Crown and provided officers and men for the Army and the Navy, and his story additionally gives some insights into his early days, especially with regard to being a young officer in the Royal Navy in the 1930s.

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