



The battle cruiser Repulse which was sunk in 1941

# Wartime disaster marked by Navy

By R Barry O'Brien

A COMMEMORATIVE cover for stamp collectors has been issued by the Royal Navy to mark the 50th anniversary today of the sinking of the battleship Prince of Wales and battle cruiser Repulse in a Japanese air attack on Dec 10, 1941.

The loss of the ships, one of the major catastrophes of the Second World War, is recalled by reproductions of front pages from three newspapers, including The Daily Telegraph, inside the cover.

Japanese bombers and torpedo planes based in Indo-China attacked the ships in the South China Sea when they sailed from Singapore with four destroyers to resist Japanese landings at Kota Bharu in north-east Malaya.

A total of 762 officers and men, including Adml Sir Tom Phillips, C-in-C Eastern Fleet, and Capt John Leach, commander of the Prince of Wales, were lost. More than 2,000 of the 3,092 men in both ships were saved.

The disaster occurred three days after Japan destroyed the American Pacific Fleet at Pearl Harbour on Dec 7. Churchill, the Prime Minister, was criticised for sending

out the ships without air cover. The attack is depicted on the philatelic cover in a drawing showing gunners on the Prince of Wales firing at the bombers. An enclosed text gives details of the ships and backgrounds to their loss.

Newspaper front pages are reproduced on the back of photographs of the ships. The Daily Telegraph report gives an hour-by-hour account by an American radio reporter, Cecil Brown, of CBS, aboard the Repulse. He was one of the survivors.

The cover is one of a commemorative series by the Navy's philatelic branch. Two thousand have been produced for sale in aid of the Fleet Air Museum at Yeovilton, Somerset. Survivors have signed 250 of the covers.

Some covers were taken to Singapore last week by Mr Charles Stirling, the Navy's philatelic officer, for date-stamping today by the Singapore postal authorities.

More than 100 survivors visiting Singapore with their families will be taken today by the frigate Sheffield to the position, 60 miles off the Malaysian port of Kuantan, where the ships sank.

# MPs attack NHS over Aids money

By Jonathan Petre, Political Staff

GOVERNMENT health officials were strongly criticised by MPs yesterday for their handling of health authorities who "pinched" money earmarked to treat Aids for other purposes.

Mr Duncan Nichol, chief executive of the health service, was closely questioned by the Commons public accounts committee about the lack of disciplinary action against those responsible for significant lapses in Aids spending uncovered by the National Audit Office.

In a report in the summer, the Office found more than £15 million granted by the Government to combat Aids remained unspent or had been diverted to other work.

It identified North West Thames regional health authority as the worst offender, having syphoned off £8.5 million from its £36 million grant in 1989-90 to its building programmes.

Mr Nichol admitted no disciplinary action has been

taken against North West Thames or another under-spender, West Midlands health authority.

Responding to a suggestion by Mr Robert Sheldon, committee chairman, that North West Thames had just "pinched" the money, Mr Nichol said: "Yes they did. We sought redress which is now being recovered."

"It was something they should not have done and we have made this very clear."

But Mr Sheldon, Labour MP for Ashton under Lyne, added: "This is a serious matter. Money has been allocated in this way and there has been an abuse. Nobody has been disciplined."

Later, Mr Michael Latham, Tory MP for Rutland and Melton, described the authority's actions as "a gross failure of a management."

Mr Nichol said he had accepted the authority's explanation that it had given its districts all the funds they had requested.



leave London from a different station than usual, while others waited much longer for trains which moved more slowly because of the switch from power to hand signalling. British Rail was operating a skeleton service, which will continue until the damage is repaired.

A spokesman said: "The delays will carry on at least for today and maybe into Wednesday, because there is a lot of complex work involved in fixing the signalling failure. Once it is repaired we have to carry out safety tests."

Passengers reacted angrily to the delays, calling for refunds and lower fares. "I

again this Christmas after a be rededicated The largest bell. ing co

press company, and the newly privatised National Power electricity generating group.

Stagecoach has grown to become the largest private bus operator after 14 acquisitions in the past six years, raising turnover from £5 million to £100 million. The group is estimated to operate 2,800 buses.

It is understood Stagecoach would at first want to hire trains and staff from British Rail before being able to use its own trains and crews. Stagecoach gave up running London to Scotland bus services two years ago to concentrate on acquiring regional groups.

## NHS chief rebuked for Aids cash abuse

BY SHEILA GUNN  
POLITICAL CORRESPONDENT

A TEAM of MPs rebuked government officials yesterday for refusing to discipline health authorities for "pinching" money from their special Aids budgets for other services.

Members of the Commons public accounts committee closely questioned Duncan Nichol, NHS chief executive, and Sir Christopher France, the health department's permanent secretary, about serious lapses discovered by the National Audit Office in the government's Aids programme.

Mr Nichol admitted that no disciplinary action was taken against North West Thames and West Midlands health authorities for not spending all of their Aids budgets to treat and prevent the spread of the disease. The audit report found that North West Thames siphoned off £8.5 million from its £36.0 million in 1989-90 to its building programmes.

Robert Sheldon, the committee chairman, asked Mr Nichol: "How on earth did this happen? They just pinched the money?" Mr Nichol replied: "Yes, they did. We sought redress which is now being recovered. It was something they should not have done and we have made this very clear."

However, Mr Sheldon continued: "This is a serious matter. Money is allocated in this way and there has been an abuse. Nobody has been disciplined and you say you are trying to put it right financially and not in any other way."

Mr Nichol said he had considered disciplinary action but accepted the authority's explanation that it had trouble handling a doubling in their Aids budget, although later in questioning he admitted that the budget had not been doubled.

Terry Davis, Labour MP for Birmingham Hodge Hill, cited the case of West Midlands health authority for not spending 42 per cent of its Aids budget in 1989-90. Mr Nichol said that although he was the NHS accounting officer, he did not seek or receive an explanation of the underspending.

## Polys take lion

BY JOHN O'LEARY, III.

POLYTECHNICS scored a resounding victory over university rivals yesterday in the annual awards for the most innovative teaching in higher education.

Oxford and Cambridge won prizes for the first time, but only ten other universities featured among the winners. Polytechnics won 15 of the 27 awards presented by Alan Howarth, the higher education minister.

The Partnership Awards scheme is the only one of its type to recognise teaching merit in higher education. It is supported by 30 large companies, offering £4,500 to academics in areas of special interest. Polytechnics have

taken an increasing share of the prizes in the three years of the scheme. Wolverhampton Polytechnic, with 11 awards, was the most successful institution this year, followed by Thames and Essex polytechnics, which each won two.

Oxford University won an award for the teaching management to engineers undergraduates, while a bridge was recognised for manufacturing engineering trips. Salford University, which won the prize for communication skills, has been successful in every year of competition.

West London Polytechnic was the newest of the 33 in

## Jailed man 'denied'

THE owner of the Knightsbridge safe deposit centre, scene of Britain's biggest armed robbery in 1987, was unfairly denied access to a solicitor during two crucial interviews with police soon after his arrest, his QC claimed in the Court of Appeal yesterday.

Parvez Latif, aged 34, jailed for 18 years on robbery and firearms charges after his trial at the Central Criminal Court in 1989, had been arrested in the waiting room of his lawyer's office as he waited to see him, Mr John Mathew, QC, said.

Police had deliberately intercepted him after learning that he was going to see his solicitor before surrendering himself. Subsequent inter-

views at which no solicitor attended were the main part of the prosecution's case against him.

The court is hearing appeals by Latif and two other men against conviction or involvement in the raid, which gold, silver, paint and cash worth an estimated £20 million were stolen.

Latif, of Willesden, north west London, was sentenced by Judge Lymbery in January 1989. Peter O'Donoghue, aged 37, of St John's Wood, north west London, received an 11-year sentence for robbery.

David Anthony Poole, 41, of Wandsworth, south west London, was jailed for 16 years for robbery and firearms possession. A fourth

## Scientists get to

BY KERRY GILL

THE other great mystery surrounding Loch Ness could be solved this week after centuries of scientific debate. Every souvenir seller and breakfast proprietor the banks of Britain's loch will offer incontrovertible proof that a monster lurks beneath the grey water: the more prosaic question of the depth of its habitat remains a source of argument.

Although the *Guinness Book of Records* states that Loch Ness has the greatest mean depth, 427ft, in Britain, today's maps are based



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