

Information sheet no 017

Richard Onslow

Richard Onslow was born 15 April 1904 at Garmston in Shropshire. He joined the navy as a Cadet in 1918 and was educated at the Royal Naval Colleges of Osborne and Dartmouth.

After two years as Midshipman in the battleship HMS *Warspite*, he attained the rank of Lieutenant having achieved first class certificates in all subjects. He declined to specialise in a technical branch and made his career in destroyers. Having received his first command at an early age, he demonstrated good leadership and ship handling skills and was promoted Commander in 1938 commanding HMS *Gypsy*. He then served in the Plans Division of the naval staff for two years. He briefly saw active service in 1940 when he spent a short time on an unsuccessful mission to Bordeaux to try and rescue the Belgian government and its gold reserves.

In May 1941, he took command of HMS *Ashanti*, and escorted Arctic and Malta convoys. In 1942, on convoy duty in the Arctic, he was awarded the Distinguished Service Order along with the Soviet Order of the Red Banner. His most famous exploit was his attempt to tow a badly damaged sister ship 700 miles to safety through stormy Arctic waters. His service in the Mediterranean included Operation Pedestal, a desperately fought convoy to the besieged island of Malta and earned him a bar to his DSO. He earned a second bar to his DSO for the Arctic convoy PQ18.

Onslow was promoted Captain (Destroyers) in 1944. He was given a destroyer flotilla command with the Eastern Fleet as the offensive war against Japan increased. Operation Crimson, an attack on Sabang in Sumatra, took place on 25 July 1944 and Onslow received a third bar for his DSO for his part in the action. The flotilla joined the newly formed British Pacific Fleet and continued to play a distinguished part in the operations during the final stage of war in the East.

In the post war period, after a course at the Imperial Defence College, Onslow was appointed as Naval Officer in Charge, Londonderry and Director of the Joint Anti-Submarine School and later, Director of the Tactics and Staff Duties Division. In 1951, he returned to a sea command with the cadet training cruiser HMS *Devonshire*. In July 1952, he attained Flag Rank with a promotion to Rear-Admiral and was appointed as Naval Secretary to the First Lord of the Admiralty. In 1955, he was appointed as Flag Officer (Flotillas) and Home Fleet second-in-command. During this time, he was also promoted to Vice-Admiral and in 1956 commanded the Reserve Fleet at Rosyth. With promotion to Admiral in 1958, he was appointed as Commander-in-Chief, Plymouth and Knight Commander of the Bath having been created Companion of the Bath in 1954. The rigours of wartime service had affected his health and he retired in 1960. In his retirement, he was appointed Lieutenant of Shropshire. Onslow died on the 16 December 1975 at Dorrington, Shropshire.