

"IMPLACABLE" TO THE END

"Implacable" - the Navy's oldest ship - earns a final battle honour. In striking distance of the man-of-war at anchor in Spithead and within range of the new "Implacable" - "old wooden walls" goes to her last engagement. Formerly a French gun ship in Napoleon's Navy, she was captured by Nelson's fleet at Trafalgar and, with the "Victory," is the last survivor of that battle. Now - off Selsey Bill - "Implacable," flying the ensigns of Britain and France, leaves the service, her end brought about by rotting woodwork.

To the Navy - the sinking of one of the last links with the past is just another job. But as no ceremonial exists for the honourable scuttling of a ship, "Implacable" is accorded honours in keeping with her tradition. Among the V.I.Ps are five veterans who trained in the ship as boys. Today, they see her relive her glorious past. For "Implacable," though charged with high explosive, remains defiant in death.

Her hull blown away, she fights to the last. Her decks awash, she refuses to be beaten. To a long list of battle honours, the 150-year-old man-of-war now adds another - "Operation Mainsail." The Navy took three hours to sink her.

Sixteen miles off the English coast - a grand old ship says goodbye - Implacable to the end.