

BREAKING UP ON H.M.S. DUKE OF YORK

Eighteen years, almost to the day, after the Queen Mother launched her, a great fighting ship ends her life in the breaker's yard - the 35,000-ton battleship Duke of York. Once, she was one of the proudest vessels in the Royal Navy; now she must go for scrap.

In her heyday, Duke of York took part in some of the toughest operations of World War Two. Many times she escorted the grim convoys to Russia, and crossed swords with the Tirpitz; she covered the North African landings; she was in Tokyo Bay for the surrender of Japan. After the war, she became the flagship first of the Home Fleet, and later of the Reserve Fleet.

Now her ten 14-inch guns must be broken by the acetylene cutter - guns which once made her one of the deadliest warships afloat. Hungarian refugees are among the workers at this breaker's yard, the biggest in the British Commonwealth. The high-grade steel may go to make other ships; ships more fitted to the age of nuclear weapons and guided missiles; but the Navy men who served in her will be sad at the passing of a vessel which, for years, was their fighting headquarters and their only home.