

## Revenge Class Land Ironclad

In 1911, Cummings made his second visit to the US Naval Shipyard in Norfolk, Virginia. Here he saw the progress the Americans were making on the Destroyer Class land ironclads. With the lend lease program in full steam, and Conqueror tanks newly landed & greeted with much enthusiasm by the American tankers, he became something of a celebrity and was able to learn many valuable concepts on landship design that had eluded him until this visit.

With his new found knowledge Cummings returned to Britain. With the readily available coal fields of South Wales at his disposal, and the mighty steel & iron works of Dowlais and Cyfartha solely producing for his factories, he had all the resources necessary and the technical capability to produce the mighty landships quickly and cost effectively. And they were sorely needed by HM forces to combat the monstrous Dominator and Overseer tripods that had started to emerge from the depths of the Martian controlled areas.

His design teams set to work, and the result was the Revenge Class Land Ironclad, named in honour of HMS Revenge, a Sovereign class battleship renowned from the first Martian invasion.

At the start of the conflict, the Royal Sovereign Class battleship HMS Revenge had been held in reserve at Portsmouth. Third Sea Lord, Admiral Sir John "Jackie" Fisher, formulated a plan to destroy the Martians in London, but it would require some ruthless tactics – firing on the capital of the British Empire! He assigned a new captain to Revenge, Lord Charles Beresford. This was a man that Fisher disliked, however he knew that he would be able to carry out the orders.

As the Thames traffic made its way downstream, HMS Revenge went the other way, eventually grounding herself near Greenwich. There she would become a floating fortress, shelling Martian targets in the city. Beresford had sent observers into the city, and from their vantage point at the top of St Paul's Cathedral, they could direct the fire.

One cylinder had recently landed in Hyde Park and had been under steady bombardment from the Revenge's four 13 ½ inch guns, with little visible effect. As other Martian tripods made their way to support the new arrival, HMS Revenge had more targets, and was able to damage two of the tripods, but none were destroyed.

Unfortunately, HMS Revenge could not lay her guns fast enough against such nimble targets. Soon the Martians had line of sight to the warship, and rapidly melted the bow off the ship. Subsequent explosions in her magazines silenced HMS Revenge forever. Shortly afterwards, the Royal Engineers attacked the cylinder at Blackheath, and in response, the Martians started blanketing the area with black smoke.

The wreck of HMS Revenge was targeted, and as was discovered later, killing the few remaining survivors from the crew including Beresford.

Cummings, confident of his new modular designs for landships, vigorously leveraged his many new political connections to gain access to the Admiralty, who listened intently to his proposal and looked closely at the schematics. They informed him that they would send an expert within the week to assess the project, but the Benedict Arnold Class would continue as they had already started work on these.

Four days later the Admiralty expert arrived at Conqueror's HQ in South Wales. Commodore Richard Hornblower, 4th Viscount of Smallbridge was probably best known as the great grandson of the legendary naval hero Horatio Hornblower, and like his illustrious ancestor, had made quite a name for himself in the Royal Navy.

During the first Martian invasion, Hornblower had been the captain of HMS Adventure, sister ship of HMS Thunderchild. On 13th August 1895, he witnessed HMS Thunderchild take on three Martian tripods to save a fleeing steamer full of civilians. His first officer, Lieutenant Harry Wells, said this in his report...

“Having been ordered to stand fast, all we could do was to watch as Thunderchild went after the Martians. On the bridge the Captain was very quiet, but you could tell from his face that he was just itching to get into action. We watched the Thunderchild speeding towards the Martians - she didn't fire, just kept going as the tripods fired their smoke weapons. They seemed to hesitate, not knowing what to make of the torpedo ram. Then all hell broke loose. The Martians opened up with their heat weapons as Thunderchild fired her guns. She hit one of the furthest tripods, and then almost immediately rammed the closest machine to her, sending it to the bottom. Then she turned towards the second machine. More heat rays hit her, and she must have been fatally hit at that moment, but Thunderchild's momentum took her into the second Martian.

For a few moments we couldn't make out what was happening through the steam and black smoke. As it cleared, the steamer came alongside us, and past into the safety of the Channel. But we couldn't see anything of the Martians or Thunderchild. Later we learned that two tripods had been destroyed in the action, but HMS Thunderchild had gone with all hands. Captain Hornblower had remained quiet throughout the action, and afterwards he held a short service to remember the crew of the Thunderchild. For several days after that he talked to the crew about what they saw, and made notes in his journal. And the way he talked after this event made me realise that the Martians were going to have a hard job fighting this man.”

Now Hornblower was one of the three senior advisors to the Benedict Arnold class landship project, and in an excellent position to assess the Revenge class. After two weeks of intense scrutiny he left for London to report to The Admiralty.

Although he had indicated to Cummings that he was impressed by the designs, the more senior officers of the navy might take a little more convincing. A week went by with no news, and then Hornblower arrived back in South Wales with good news. The Admiralty had liked it enough to commission a trial on Salisbury plain and placed an order for the first Revenge class landship – and they wanted it named HMLS Primrose Hill. Conqueror Landships Limited started work on their first ironclad.

The Revenge class was designed to be modular in construction. This would mean ease of transport overseas where the landships would see most action, as well as rapid replacement of damaged armour and equipment. Upon completion, HMLS Primrose Hill was taken by rail in several sections from South Wales to Salisbury Plain, where she was assembled and put through proving trials. Here, even the assembly of the landship impressed the admiralty, and ensured a good start to the trials. After several weeks encompassing a multitude of tests, HMLS Primrose Hill was officially declared a success.

Orders were quick to arrive from the Admiralty, HMLS Primrose Hill was immediately confirmed “Landworthy” and after a short official naming ceremony was handed over to the Royal Navy. And much to everyone's surprise Commodore Richard Hornblower was given command as the Admiralty deemed him the most experienced officer available to command such an asset of the Royal Navy.

Over the next few weeks, Hornblower ran numerous drills to get the crew into shape.

Meanwhile the Navy moved the Revenge Class Project forward at a furious pace, cancelling the Benedict Arnold Class production run with only four landships having been completed. They commissioned a further seven Revenge Class vessels bringing the total to eight – all to be named after historic sites from the first Martian invasion:

- HMLS Primrose Hill
- HMLS Horsell Common
- HMLS Weybridge
- HMLS Shepperton
- HMLS Woking
- HMLS Chertsey
- HMLS Greenwich
- HMLS Blackheath

But even Conqueror Landships Ltd with its ability to call on vast amounts of local resources was sorely pressed to build these landships in the admiralty's timescale so were forced to enlist the aid of several smaller manufacturers for the more common components.

During this frenetic activity, Hornblower received his orders from the Admiralty: he was to take Primrose Hill to Gaza, where she would help the beleaguered British and Colonial forces from the Egypt campaign. The landship was to be floated, and towed into the Atlantic then south, through the straits of Gibraltar and across the Mediterranean to land at Gaza.

There she would meet up with the rest of the British and Colonial forces. With the western banks of the Suez Canal patrolled by the Martians, Hornblower's job was to help keep the Martians on that side of the waterway. The journey into the Mediterranean and towards Gaza was uneventful, apart from the inevitable bouts of sea sickness amongst the crew. However, a navigational error meant the convoy made landfall at Arish, closer to the Martian lines than previously planned.

Hornblower was furious, as it now left his landship vulnerable to attack.

It would normally take a regular dock crew anywhere up to seven days to secure an ironclad for land operation after being towed. The crew of Primrose Hill, working round the clock with the crews of the towing flotilla, managed it in two, thanks in part to a revolutionary system of barrage balloons attached to the sides of the vessel. This allowed the ironclad to effectively "steam up the beach" where the crew could then set about their duties.

Whilst this was happening, the crews of the flotilla busied themselves with the vast amount of stores and ammunition, unloading to the beach and loading Primrose Hill as the various sections were declared land worthy.

Thankfully, the Martians did not appear, and once complete Hornblower wasted no further time. He gave the order for best speed towards the British lines some 46 miles to the North East, at least 11 hours away.

As Primrose Hill pushed on towards the British lines, Hornblower was keenly aware that he lacked any scouting ability and made a mental note to bring this up with Cummings and the Admiralty on his next communication. The ironclad would need its own on board scouting contingent. He ordered his wireless operator to make contact with Gaza as soon as he could, for them to despatch some armoured cars and Mono Tanks to rendezvous with them and provide a scouting ability.

For several hours Primrose Hill steamed on, encountering neither friend or foe. Then their luck ran out. From behind the ship came a howl, followed by a second, a third and more. Lookouts high above the command tower identified at least two full scout pods closing fast from astern.

### **BATTLE STATIONS! BATTLE STATIONS! BATTLE STATIONS!**

This was Primrose Hill's first enemy engagement and the new crew performed magnificently – a constant stream of HMG fire was directed at several of the scout tripods, which took damage from the deadly storm of munitions. This was augmented by the 4" swivel guns. HMLS Primrose Hill took some superficial heat ray damage and lost a couple of HMG, along with several Royal Marines who bravely manned the guns till the end, but when the huge 18" gun fired and decapitated a tripod the remaining Martians made a hasty withdrawal... only one tripod destroyed but several badly damaged and HMLS Primrose Hill needing only a new lick of paint in places.

Hornblower would say in his journal afterwards how pleased he was with the performance of his command.

HMLS Primrose Hill having made the British Base in Gaza, had four days to settle in and get used to the new environment, but Hornblower knew it would not be long before she would see action again.

And it didn't take long. Two days later a report came back from a forward observation team that tripods had been seen making their way down the coast. The "wheelers" had put on all speed and radioed the message as

soon as they were in range. A Rapid Reaction Force (RRF) force was immediately deployed, with HMLS Primrose Hill taking command and following up the RRF.

Evening was drawing in as they closed with the enemy, and Hornblower sent the Mono Tanks and armoured cars ahead to harass. Then battle was joined. A typical Martian force of three mixed pods including some of the heavier assault machines as well as a number of scouts. The fighting was fierce. Time and again the Martians ignored the smaller wheelers and armoured cars, making the ironclad their preferred target. Hornblower rightly guessed from the earlier encounter two days ago that the Martians were concerned with the power of the ironclad, and this force was now here to test the mettle of this new human war machine.

Hornblower accepted that “Primrose”, as he had taken to calling his landship, could take a good number of hits with some impunity. This meant the wheelers and armoured cars were not being targeted and were free to wreak havoc unmolested. Additionally, Primrose was not sitting by idly taking damage, dealing out ferocious amounts of damage on the Martians. She had already disabled one assault and two scout tripods and was about to fire the Swan Electric Cannon for the first time. Meanwhile, the brave lads in their mono tanks gave the Martians hell.

Joseph Swan was a British inventor, best known for his work on the incandescent light bulb, which he patented in the UK in 1878. In the early 1880's he established the Swan United Electric Light Company to market the bulb. In 1882, Thomas Edison, and the British Edison Company tried to sue Swan, claiming infringement of copyright, however they soon realised Swan could demonstrate prior research and publication. Instead, they negotiated a merger, and so the Edison & Swan Electric Light Company Ltd was formed.

At the beginning of the Martian War, President Roosevelt instigated the formation of The Martian War Council – a body of politicians, military leaders, industrialists and scientists – to direct the course of hostilities. Many household names took part in this council, including Thomas Edison and Nikola Tesla. In attendance on many occasions was the British Ambassador to the US, Sir Cecil Spring-Rice.

It was during one of the early meetings that Edison and Tesla passed a message to Spring-Rice, proposing a meeting. When they met, Edison handed the ambassador an envelope. In it, he explained, were design notes for new weapon they were working on for the American forces. Edison, worried that the US military would not take their research seriously, wanted the ambassador to take the notes to Joseph Swan, and the researchers at the Edison & Swan Electric Light Company Ltd. The hope was that if their weapon didn't work, or the US military didn't make good use of it, then maybe the British would.

Swan and his researchers made great use of the information, and started development of their own version of the Tesla Gun as it would become known. The Swan Electric Cannon was soon being tested, and would eventually see use on the new Revenge Class ironclads.

Then the Electric Cannon fired and many on the battlefield were taken aback. The fading light became brighter than daylight as the deadly ribbon of energy arced directly towards one of the assault tripods and almost disintegrated it. The battle turned in that moment and the Martians disengaged, moving off towards their own lines. Hornblower noted the devastating effect of the Swan Cannon in his log, along with a side note about how it lit up the battlefield. Maybe if ironclads were fitted with searchlights...

By this time HMLS Primrose Hill had taken quite a beating, having been almost the sole focus of all the tripods' fire and she limped back to the British lines for some much needed repairs. She was also fitted, on Hornblower's order, with high power searchlights.

Most of Primrose Hill's subsequent actions came about as a result of the regular patrols along the front. However, her most unusual action was more of a recovery mission.

Reports came in of a lone tripod acting rather oddly. HMLS Primrose Hill went out with a reconnaissance squadron of armoured cars and wheelers to investigate, and found the tripod unmoving and seemingly dead.

The crew were quick to rig the enemy machine for towing, and soon after they set off for Gaza. The Martians though were quick to respond and an attack force was sent to engage the British. The ensuing fight was a messy one, finally decided by Hornblower with a rather unusual ruse. Whilst retreating towards friendly lines the cables attached to the captured tripod "somehow became detached". Primrose and her scouts continued their retreat leaving their prize in the open.

Observers on Primrose reported that the Martian forces converged on their downed comrade, ignoring the fleeing humans and were in the process of lifting it when there was an almighty explosion. The desert lit up as the fireball from the original machine engulfed the rest. On the bridge Hornblower was overheard thanking the armoury team for their efforts, and giving the order to replenish the explosives store on their return to Gaza.

HMLS Primrose Hill spent a further six months in the desert. Her final action of the tour was almost her last.

Whilst on a patrol close to the east bank of the Suez Canal she was diverted to investigate some unusual reports of Martian activity. She quickly found the cause of the confusion. The Martian pod they encountered included a rare sight. standing tall over the regular assault machines was the menacing figure of a Dominator – a recently discovered new class of tripod coming out of the depths of Martian controlled territories. The battle was intense, Primrose and Dominator trading blows time and again both visibly hurt from the enormous damage each was causing the other. Around them the rest of the combatants weaved a dance of death. The British forces were slowly being whittled away and Primrose was taking more and more damage. But as it looked like the end for the ironclad her salvation arrived.

Massive explosions threw up tons of earth around the Dominator, as steaming hard from the direction of the coast came HMLS Shepperton, commanded by Captain Archibald Kennedy. Straight into the middle of the fray she came all guns blazing. What a sight it was as tripods exploded left and right of her, and finally she took out the Dominator in a withering hail of fire from her dual 16" guns. The battle over, the remaining British units regrouped. HMLS Primrose Hill, having taken a huge amount of damage could barely make half speed, so HMLS Shepperton rigged to tow and the sister ships made steam for friendly lines, escorted by the remnants of the British forces from the battle.

Back at Gaza, Primrose Hill was set about by the repair crews, in order to make her seaworthy for the journey back to Britain. Shepperton was brand new off the production lines, and had been sent as her relief. It was time to go home. After three weeks of work Primrose was floated and started the sea journey.

On arrival in Britain HMLS Primrose Hill went into dock for a complete refit. Hornblower relayed his reports on Primrose's strengths and weaknesses to the Conqueror Landships team. Amendments were made and design changes effected on various parts of the landship. One major change was to incorporate two Mono Tanks (positioned at the rear) with the landship that would act as scouts and spotters.

Also during the refit Commodore Hornblower was summoned to the Admiralty to give his report to his superiors. And there he was given his new assignment. He would take HMLS Primrose Hill across the Atlantic, and after making landfall in the United States he was to take a contingent of the BEF already there to rendezvous with a US Army Captain Patton, who was putting together a new mobile fighting unit to take on the Martians on the US front...

You can read more of Hornblowers and HMLS Primrose Hill on Pauls blog <http://cplbrody.co.uk>