ABSTRACT

Functional and linguistic uniqueness of proper names justifies the allocation of special onomastic problems from the total number of linguistic problems. Great Britain as the greatest sea power possessed and still possesses a tremendous amount of ships. My paper deals with the linguistic analysis of their names.

As with many other things, the procedures and practices involved in Royal Navy ship naming are products of evolution and tradition. As we have seen, the names for new ships are personally decided by the Admiralty. It can rely on many sources to help reach decisions. Ship name source records at the Historical Center reflect the wide variety of name sources that have been used in the past, particularly since World War I. Ship name recommendations are conditioned by such factors as the name categories for ship types now being built, the distribution of geographic names of ships of the Fleet; names borne by previous ships which distinguished themselves in service; names recommended by individuals and groups; and names of naval leaders, national figures, and deceased members of the Royal Navy who have been honored for heroism in war or for extraordinary achievement in peace.

Ship names in the Royal Navy came from a variety of sources. Ships were named in honor of kings or famous pirates, some ships honored patriots and heroes, others commemorated the nation's ideals and institutions. Many ship names honored English places. Small warships bore a variety of names. Some were named for positive character traits. Others had classical names or names of small creatures with a potent sting (Hornet, Wasp).

The Navy is not only made up of combatant ships. Throughout its history it has depended on its auxiliary ships, a generic term used in referring to the many different types of ships used to support the Fleet. Auxiliary ship types are numerous and varied, and display many different name sources.

The Royal Navy uses prefixes with its ships' names. Perhaps the best known is "HMS" (His or Her Majesty's Ship), long used by the Royal Navy. In earlier times this was also seen as "HBMS," for "His Britannic Majesty's Ship." British Commonwealth navies used their own versions of this, inserting their own nationalities, such as HMCS for Canada, HMNZS for New Zealand.