

= HMS Brilliant (1757) =

HMS Brilliant was a 36 @-@ gun Venus @-@ class fifth @-@ rate frigate of the Royal Navy which saw active service during the Seven Years ' War with France .

Designed in 1756 and launched the following year , she was one of the first Royal Navy vessels to be built to a classic frigate design with a single gun deck and an emphasis on speed . Her principal focus was as a hunter of French privateers , capturing eight such vessels and sinking two more during her six years at sea . She also performed well against the regular French Navy in the 1760 Battle of Bishops Court and the 1761 Battle of Cape Finisterre , but was less capable when deployed for bombardment duty off enemy ports . Decommissioned in 1763 , she was sold thirteen years later to the East India Company but was wrecked in the Comoros Islands in 1782 .

One naval historian has described Brilliant as one of " the best British fighting cruisers " of her day . However she remained slightly inferior to her French equivalents in both speed and weight of ordinance , and was the last ship to be built to the Venus @-@ class design .

= = Construction = =

The Venus @-@ class of 36 @-@ gun frigates were designed by Thomas Slade , the Surveyor of the Navy and former Master Shipwright at Deptford Dockyard . Alongside their smaller cousin , the 32 @-@ gun Southampton class , the Venus @-@ class represented an experiment in ship design ; fast , medium @-@ sized and heavily @-@ armed , capable of overhauling smaller craft and singlehandedly engaging enemy cruisers or large privateers . As a further innovation , Slade borrowed from contemporary French ship design by removing the lower deck gun ports and locating the ship 's cannons solely on the upper deck . This permitted the carrying of heavier ordinance without a substantial increase in hull size which would have been required to keep the lower gun ports consistently above the waterline . The lower deck was instead used for additional stores , enabling Venus @-@ class frigates to remain at sea for longer periods without resupply .

Admiralty approved the Venus class design on 13 July 1756 and three ships were ordered . Brilliant was the last of these , and the only one to be constructed at Plymouth Dockyard . Construction was overseen by Thomas Bucknall , the Navy 's Master Shipwright at Plymouth , and commenced with the laying of the keel on 28 August 1756 . The vessel was formally named Brilliant on 17 March 1757 . A 1755 Admiralty review of Plymouth Dockyard had found it inefficient , poorly staffed and suffering from " notorious neglect , " but work on Brilliant proceeded apace and was completed by early October 1757 .

As built , Brilliant was 128 feet 4 inches (39 @.@ 12 m) long at the gundeck and 106 feet 2 @.@ 625 inches (32 @.@ 38 m) at the keel with a beam of 35 feet 8 inches (10 @.@ 87 m) . She was a full @-@ rigged ship and measured 38 ? 94 tons (bm) . She was equipped with three ship 's boats , a 23 ft (7 @.@ 0 m) longboat , a 30 ft (9 @.@ 1 m) pinnace and a 24 ft (7 @.@ 3 m) yawl . Her crew complement was 240 officers and men .

= = = Armament = = =

Brilliant 's principal armament was 26 iron @-@ cast twelve @-@ pound cannons , located along her upper deck . The guns were constructed with shorter barrels as traditional twelve @-@ pound cannons were too long to fit within the frigate 's narrow beam . Each cannon weighed 28 @.@ 5 long cwt (3 @.,@ 200 lb or 1 @.,@ 400 kg) with a gun barrel length of 7 feet 6 inches (2 @.@ 29 m) compared with their 8 feet 6 inches (2 @.@ 59 m) equivalent in larger Royal Navy vessels .

The twelve @-@ pound cannons were supported by ten six @-@ pounder guns , eight on the quarterdeck and two on the forecastle , each weighing 16 @.@ 5 long cwt (1 @.,@ 800 lb or 800 kg) with a barrel length of 6 feet (1 @.@ 8 m) . Taken together , the twelve @-@ pound and six @-@ pound cannons provided a broadside weight of 189 pounds (86 kg) . She was also equipped with twelve 1 ? 2 @-@ pound swivel guns for anti @-@ personnel use . These swivel guns were mounted in fixed positions on the quarterdeck and forecastle .

= = Royal Navy service = =

= = = Privateer hunter = = =

Brilliant was commissioned in October 1757 under the command of post @-@ captain Hyde Parker and entering Navy service during the early stages of the Seven Years ' War against France .

Her first engagement was on 19 December 1757 when , in company with the 24 @-@ gun HMS Coventry , she encountered the French privateer Diamond . A contemporary report described the Quebec @-@ built Diamond as " a very fine vessel " of 200 tons burthen , carrying 14 carriage guns and a cargo of furs . Diamond opened fire on Brilliant as she approached , but before the British could retaliate the French vessel exploded and sank . The detonation was assumed to have been caused by sparks flying back from the privateer 's guns and igniting her powder magazine . Only 24 of Diamond 's 70 crew survived the explosion . These men were hauled aboard Brilliant and Coventry as prisoners of war .

On 24 December Brilliant and Coventry encountered their second privateer , the 24 @-@ gun Le Dragon . There was a brief exchange of fire in which four French sailors were killed and up to 12 wounded , against six wounded men aboard Coventry . The vastly outgunned French vessel was then surrendered and her remaining 280 crew taken prisoner . On the following day a third French ship was spotted , a snow @-@ rigged 14 @-@ gun privateer named Intrepid . After a short chase she was brought within range of Brilliant 's guns . The French fired first , wounding one British sailor . The responding broadside from Brilliant capsized Intrepid and killed ten men among her crew of 120 . The survivors were taken prisoner aboard Brilliant and handed over to British authorities at Plymouth .

In March 1758 Brilliant captured two more French vessels , the 20 @-@ gun privateer Le Nymphe and the 12 @-@ gun Le Vengeur . On 8 April these two captured vessels were sailed to Plymouth .

= = = Coastal raids = = =

In late 1758 Brilliant joined a Royal Navy squadron supporting amphibious raids along the French coastline . In company with other frigates she protected fleet transports and bomb vessels and assisted with shore bombardment in the Battle of Saint Cast on 11 September 1758 . The future founder of the Royal Geographic Society , James Rennell , was a midshipman aboard Brilliant during this period and produced his first coastal map while the frigate was stationed off Saint Cast . Overall , Brilliant played an undistinguished role in this engagement as her draught was too deep for her to approach the shore . By the afternoon of the battle she was close enough to the beach for her crew to witness the surrounding and defeat of the British Grenadier Guards , but was too distant to range her guns onto their French assailants .

Brilliant resumed her privateer hunting in the spring of 1759 . On 17 April she encountered and forced the surrender of the 22 @-@ gun French vessel Basque around 700 miles (1 @,@ 100 km) west of Cape Clear . As with previous privateer captures , the captured French ship and her crew were taken to Plymouth and handed over to Navy authorities .

Captain Parker left Brilliant in 1759 , having been promoted to the captaincy of the 74 @-@ gun HMS Norfolk . Command of Brilliant temporarily transferred to Captain John Lendrick , with the frigate assigned to a squadron under Admiral George Rodney for a coastal raid on Le Havre . The raid took place on 3 July with Brilliant acting to protect the squadron 's bomb vessels and transport ships from some distance offshore . Lendrick was subsequently replaced by James Logie , who remained with Brilliant until she was decommissioned in 1763 .

= = = Battle of Bishops Court = = =

The Battle of Bishops Court was a shift in Brilliant 's focus from capturing French privateers to direct

engagement with an enemy naval squadron . Between 21 and 26 February 1760 a force of three French vessels , the 44 @-@ gun Maréchal de Belle @-@ Isle , the 36 @-@ gun Blonde and the 30 @-@ gun Terpsichore , arrived off the coast of Ireland . Under the command of privateer François Thurot , they landed 600 French troops and captured the town of Carrickfergus . Thurot held the town for five days .

Brilliant and her sister ship HMS Pallas were in port at Kinsale in southern Ireland , and were sent north to intercept Thurot 's force . While at sea they were joined by HMS Aeolus whose captain , John Elliott , assumed overall command of the squadron . The three Royal Navy frigates reached Dublin on the morning of 26 February but bad weather prevented them from entering Belfast Lough . On the same day , Thurot re @-@ embarked his troops and put to sea , evading the British vessels and seeking to return south to France .

After two days of searching , the three Royal Navy frigates encountered Thurot 's forces at 4 a.m. on 28 February between the Mull of Galloway and the Isle of Man . A general chase ensued with Brilliant overhauling the 36 @-@ gun Blonde and engaging her in battle at around 9 a.m. , off shore from Bishopscourt , Isle of Man . Blonde quickly surrendered , as did Terpsichore which had been fired upon by Pallas . Thurot 's flagship Maréchal de Belle @-@ Isle fought on alone against all three Royal Navy vessels , with her crew making repeated attempts to board and seize Aeolus . After ninety minutes of close combat Thurot was killed by a shot through the neck , and Maréchal de Belle @-@ Isle was so battered from cannon fire that she began to sink . Her surviving crew surrendered and were taken prisoner . Brilliant , Pallas and Aeolus then anchored off the Isle of Man to repair damage to their rigging and masts before sailing for Portsmouth with their prizes .

The French had suffered 300 casualties in the battle . A further 1000 men were taken prisoner , including both soldiers and crew . British casualties were small with Aeolus suffering four killed and 15 wounded ; Pallas one killed and five wounded and Brilliant escaping with no deaths and 11 men wounded .

= = = Battle of Cape Finisterre = = =

On 14 August 1761 , Brilliant was accompanying the 74 @-@ gun HMS Bellona from Lisbon to England when they encountered Courageux , a 74 @-@ gun French ship of the line , and two frigates , Malicieuse and Hermione . After some maneuvering the British and French squadrons finally engaged with each other at 6 @-@ 00 a.m. on the morning of 14 August off shore from Cape Finisterre .

Bellona opened fire on Corageux while Brilliant engaged Maliceuse and Hermione . Through skillful sailing , Logie was able to keep both French frigates at bay and unable to assist Courageux , which surrendered to Bellona after ninety minutes of fighting . At 7 @-@ 30 a.m. Maliceuse and Hermione made sail and retreated , with Brilliant too damaged to give chase . British losses in the battle numbered six killed and 28 wounded on Bellona and five killed and 16 wounded on Brilliant , while losses on Courageux alone were 240 killed and 110 wounded . Historian William Laird Clowes considered that this discrepancy was probably the result of differences in British and French tactical doctrine , the French trained to fire at the masts and rigging of an enemy ship in order to disable them , while British doctrine trained crews to fire into the hull of enemy ships to kill the crew .

= = = Later service = = =

There were several small victories for Brilliant throughout 1761 , with the capture of the 6 @-@ gun privateers Le Malouin and Le Curieux from St. Malo , and the 8 @-@ gun La Mignonne from Bayonne . After a period spent refitting at Portsmouth , in January 1763 Brilliant was sailed to Dublin to assist in clearing stores and transporting crew from the 66 @-@ gun HMS Devonshire , which was in port after being damaged at sea . Later that year she had her final victory at sea , overhauling and forcing the surrender of the small 8 @-@ gun privateer L 'Esperance .

War with France was by now drawing to a close , and in March 1763 Logie brought Brilliant to Deptford Dockyard where she was decommissioned and her crew paid off to join other vessels .

= = East India Company = =

Brilliant remained at Deptford until 1776 when she was offered for sale as surplus to Navy requirements . She was purchased by Sir William James on 1 November 1776 , for the sum of ? 800 . The vessel 's name was retained and she was converted into an East India Merchantman in 1781 . Under Captain Charles Mears , Brilliant set sail on her first merchant voyage in 1782 , but her career in private hands was short @-@ lived . She narrowly avoided disaster on 26 January 1782 when she struck and heavily damaged HMS Albemarle which was anchored off the Kentish coast under the command of Captain Horatio Nelson . Seven months later , on 28 August , while transporting troops to India , she struck a rock off Johanna in the Comoro Islands and was lost . The majority of the crew survived the wreck but more than 100 soldiers from the 15th Hanoverian Regiment were drowned , including three officers .

= = Legacy = =

William Clowes describes Brilliant as one of " the best British fighting cruisers of the days before the accession of George III . " However , throughout her Navy career she remained slightly inferior to her French equivalents in both speed and weight of ordinance and was the last ship to be built in the Venus class . Subsequent generations of Royal Navy frigate preserved Brilliant 's design but with an extended hull to allow for additional gun ports and the carrying of heavier guns including the 18 @-@ pounder cannon .