Back to Articles Menu

1914 - The death of the 'live bait squadron' (from the book "Neath a Foreign Sky" by Paul Allen)

R.I.P.
- Leading Seaman Harry Wilson
- Petty Officer Alfred Eaman
- Leading Seaman Nicholas Odgers

Whilst the Army had conducted its operations on land, the Royal Navy had been as equally active upon the sea. Unlike 'Tommy Atkins', 'Jack Tar' had more or less mobilised for war on Wednesday the 29TH of July 1914, and just before the official outbreak of war, on the 8TH of August, the Royal Navy had undergone a 'practice' mobilisation during the weekend of Saturday and Sunday 25-26TH of July when the whole of the British Home Fleet had been assembled in Weymouth Bay, off the bustling seaside town Weymouth where hundreds of recalled Royal Naval and Royal Marines reservist had been savouring their last sips of peace time ale in the town's numerous watering holes before returning to their ship's which had sailed the next day, the same day that their counterparts in the German High Seas Fleet had been recalled from exercise in Norwegian waters, to their war stations at Rosyth and Scapa Flow, in the far north of Scotland, where the numerous warships had hastily refilled their coal bunkers and taken on stores and ammunition to enable the ships to sail at a moments notice should the need arise.

At the outbreak of war the general opinion had been that the German High Seas Fleet would break out into the North Sea, where the Royal Navy would thrash the Germans to a pulp much in the tradition of Nelson with the French fleet at Trafalgar. This momentous encounter had never happened, and much to the chagrin of the British public and indeed the men of the Home Fleet [later renamed the 'Grand Fleet'], who were to spend two years of their time 'swinging round the buoy' at Scapa, until the inconclusive Battle of Jutland at the end of May 1916.

Nevertheless, on the 28TH of August the morale of the British public and the Royal Navy had been uplifted by the antics of the light forces belonging to the Harwich Patrol. On that day, led by Commodore's Tyrwhitt, and Keyes, the Force's cruisers, Arethusa, and Fearless, along with the 1ST and 3RD Destroyer Flotillas, had daringly swept out into the North Sea in an attempt to draw out enemy naval forces based at Heligoland Bight into the sights of the big guns of Admiral Sir David Beatty's battle cruiser force. The ruse had worked, the German Navy losing three of its heavy cruisers [the Mainz, Koln, and Ariadne], along with a destroyer and over a thousand officers and men, at very little cost to the attacking force. Less than a month later, however, the tables had been turned when a single German submarine had sunk three British warships in a single day.

The three large British cruisers, steaming in line abreast through the lens of Unterseeboot Nine's periscope on that Tuesday morning of September the twenty second must have appeared in her commander's eyes as a culmination of all his wildest dreams. He may perhaps for a few moments believed that he was indeed dreaming after the many days of fruitless patrolling of an empty North Sea following the beginning of the war in August. He may also have scanned the horizon for the tell tale plumes of smoke which would have been belching from the funnels of escorting destroyers, to his amazement there were non, all he could see were a few innocent fishing trawlers going about their business. He may have thought how can the British Navy be so foolish, or arrogant? Three of their large cruisers taking no evasive action as would be expected in hostile waters, and unbelievably no escorts, sheer madness. Moments later he had ordered his crew to action stations and began plotting a course that would bring his 600 tons 'boat' into a position of interception.

The three ships were a trio of 12,000-ton cruisers of the Cressy Class, which had been built between 1901 and 1902. Armed with two 9 inch, and a battery of six inch guns, prior to the war the three

cruisers, Aboukir, Hogue, and Cressy had either been in reserve, or were being used as training ships, however upon the mobilisation of the fleet on August 4TH 1914 they had been hastily re-commissioned with crews of Naval and Royal Marine reservists stiffened with a sprinkling of regular Royal Naval ratings and formed by the Admiralty into Cruiser Force C, which had been dubbed by the rest of the fleet as 'the live bait squadron', and given the perilous task of patrolling the Southern North Sea off the coast of Holland.

The cruiser force had been at sea since the twentieth having never sighted a trace of the enemy. At 06 -00 on the fateful morning Cruiser Force C were steaming in a north north easterly direction with the flagship Aboukir under the command of Captain Drummond on the left or port side of the formation at a speed of around seven knots, in an perilous slice of the North Sea between the coast of Norfolk and the then neutral Holland known as 'The Broad Fourteens', an area of choppy shallows, minefields, the German U–Boats corridor to the Atlantic, and likely pace for meeting the fast hit and run cruisers of the Kaiser's navy, some 30 miles west by south of the Dutch port of Ymuiden.

Despite these dangers there had apparently been no cause for concern on the British part, the commander of the squadron having ordered the low on fuel escorting force of escorting destroyers back to their base at Harwich, another was to have taken their place later in the day. Each ship had a complement of almost 2000 officers and men, in addition, each vessel had been carrying twelve teenage naval cadets under training.

The nearest British warship had by this time come within range of the submarine's torpedoes, the angle of attack perfect. The bow doors of the two forward tubes were opened, and the eyes of the crew in the crafts cramped control room were all on their captain in the few moments before he had given his order to fire, the wait seemingly eternal. At last he had given the order to release their projectile. With a hiss of compressed air the first torpedo had left its tube, the boat shuddering in its wake as it had sped loaded with 616 pounds of high explosive at nearly forty miles per hour towards its intended target.

Whether anyone in the cruisers had seen the wake of the torpedo as it had sped towards the Aboukir, is not know, in the event no avoiding action had been taken and she had been hit by a single torpedo on her port [left] side, the resultant explosion lifting the ships bow out of the water following this the crew had been piped onto the upper deck and an attempt had been made in getting the ships boats away, but only one had been launched. Thinking his ship had struck a mine, the Captain of the stricken ship had signalled the other two Cruisers to close and assist, but he had soon realised that it was a torpedo attack and ordered the other ships away, but too late. The Aboukir had lingered for perhaps twenty-five minutes until the ship had eventually rolled over and floated bottom up until she had slid beneath the water some minutes later.

Having seen his first victim off, the commander of the German submarine had then turned his sights on his next target, H.M.S. Hogue. Stopped dead in the water barely three hundred yards distant, the Hogue had arrived at the scene at 06-45, her captain [Captain Nicholson] had ordered his vessel to stop and lower the ships boats to pick up survivors from her stricken sister. Shortly afterwards she too had been hit, this time by two torpedoes which had detonated amidships near to one of the ships ammunition magazines which had caused a huge explosion which had torn the ship in two, the mortally wounded ship sinking in barely ten minutes.

A survivor from the Hogue had later stated that there had been little panic or excitement amongst the crew when their ship had been hit, and how many of them had casually gone below to fetch their hammocks, which if tightly lashed, were a good substitute for the lifejackets, which had not been readily available.

The firing of the two torpedoes had upset the trim of the U Boat, and a short while afterwards her conning tower had broken surface momentarily, an opportunity no to be missed by the gunners onboard the mortally wounded Hogue who had managed somehow to fire on their attacker, unfortunately without effect.

U9 had then headed for the Cressy. She too had stopped and lowered boats but had got underway again when she had spotted the submarines periscope. At about 07-15 the submarine had fired two torpedoes at the Cressy [Captain Johnson], one had just missed her but the other had hit her on her starboard side, at this time the cruiser had fired on the periscope of U9, but again with no visible

effect. This hit to the cruiser had not been fatal.

Fifteen minutes later, with all his forward torpedoes used up the commander of the submarine had ordered his vessel turned round so that her stern was facing the enemy and had fired his last projectile from one of the two stern tubes, this hit had exploded the Cressy's ammunition, which had sent her to the bottom of the North Sea within fifteen minutes, leaving nothing but a mass of debris and the bobbing heads of countless floundering men hoping to stay alive, the time was 8am.

Most of the survivors had eventually been picked up by two Dutch Trawler's, the 'Flora' and 'Tritan' which had taken them into the nearby port of Yuimden in neutral Holland, more had been picked up by two British sailing trawlers and later transferred to Royal Naval Destroyers had taken the men into Harwich. In due course the Admiralty had revealed the extent of the tragedy and a list of the men who had survived the sinking had appeared in 'The Times' of Friday October 9TH 1914. Of the nearly two thousand men who had been serving in the three warships at the time of their loss, sixty officers and one thousand four hundred seamen had been lost, and only seven hundred and seventy five men had been saved, [352 men from the Hogue, Aboukir had 235 survivors, and Cressy had only 188 saved], less than the complement of a single ship. Amongst those missing; 233319 Leading Seaman Harry Wilson.

Born in Scarborough on the 14TH of March 1889, at No 40 Candler Street, Harry had been the second of two sons of Ellen Addrinah, and Joseph Wilson, a 'Checker' with the North Eastern Railway Company [Harry's Parents, Joseph Wilson and Ellen A. Burnett had married at St Mary's on September 27TH 1884]. A pupil of Gladstone Road Infant and Junior School from the age of five, Harry had eventually won a scholarship to the Municipal School [the equivalent of today's secondary modern school], which had been

Located in Westwood [now an annex of Yorkshire Coast College], beginning his studies there at the age of twelve in 1901, nevertheless, he had remained at the 'Muni' only until the following year. [1]

Harry had joined the Royal Navy on the sixteenth of January 1905, at the age of sixteen years. At the time he had stood just over five feet tall, with a 'fresh complexion', blue eyes and brown hair, his previous occupation being recorded as 'Schoolboy'. Delegated to the Chatham Division in Kent, Harry had initially been drafted to the divisions training ship, H.M.S. Emerald, an old armoured Frigate of 9,210 tons, with the rating of Boy Second Class and a wage of sixpence a day. On August 17th he had been promoted to a Boy first class and had remained in the Emerald until January 27TH 1906, when he had been drafted to a training ship at Devonport [Plymouth], H.M.S. Impregnable where he had remained until May 23RD 1906.

The following day he had joined his first sea going warship, ironically one of the ships that had been lost at the end of his naval career, H.M.S. Hogue. At the time the vessel had been acting as a boys training vessel with the 4TH Cruiser Squadron in home waters, Harry had remained in this ship until September 9TH 1906.

By the summer of 1914 a veteran of over nine years service in the Royal Navy, and with the clouds of war looming on the horizon Leading Seaman Harry Wilson had joined his final warship, H.M.S. Aboukir, at Chatham. At this time the twelve-year-old cruiser had recently been brought out of the Reserve Fleet and the ship was being made ready to take her place in the Home Fleet, and eventually 'the live bait squadron'.

Whether Harry Wilson had gone down with his ship or had perished in the sea after the disaster is not known. Many bodies of British seamen had been found washed up onto the Dutch coast for weeks afterwards, but as far as I am aware Harry was not amongst them. Like so many of the officers and men who had lost their lives on the twenty second of September nineteen fourteen and in the years to follow whose only known grave is the sea the name of Leading Seaman Harry Wilson, killed in action at the age of twenty five years, is commemorated with 8,499 other casualties of the 'Great War' [along with10, 000 from the Second World War] on Panel 1of the Chatham Naval Memorial in Kent.

Wilson's name can also be found engraved into a broken and fallen headstone in Manor Road Cemetery [Section K, Border, A, Grave 11] which also commemorates his Father who had died after 'a long and painful illness' at the family home at No 104 Moorland Road on Thursday July 6TH

1916 at the age of sixty four years, and his Mother who had passed away on Sunday November 29TH 1936, at the age of seventy eight years at No 65 Moorland Road, where she had been living with her youngest daughter Elsie [born 1890], and her Husband, Frank Gordon Yeoman.

Also commemorated on the stone is another of Harry's younger sisters, Ada, the Wife of Percy Tindall who had died on March 16TH 1919 at the age of twenty-six years.

Harry's name is also to be found inscribed on a 'Roll of Honour' dedicated to the 152 fallen parishioners of St Mary's Parish Church in Castle Road, where he had been baptised on the 21ST of April 1889. The memorial had been erected after the war, and had been unveiled before a packed congregation on Sunday the fourth of December 1921 by Colonel the Honourable John Dawnay, and dedicated by the then Vicar of Scarborough, Canon C.H.H. Cooper, it is located on the North Wall of the Church. His name can also be found on a memorial in St Columba's Church, located on the corner of Dean Road and Columbus Ravine.

Of the three warships the Cressy had suffered the highest loss of life. Out of a complement of almost two thousand men, only 188 had been saved. Amongst those lost; 192106 1STClass Petty Officer and Gunnery Instructor Alfred Eaman.

Alfred had been born at Scarborough on the 14TH of July 1881 and had been the second of three sons of Sarah and Joseph Eaman. His service record, which is held in the Public Records office at Kew [Reference ADM188/329], shows he had enlisted at the age of sixteen into the Royal Navy on the 6TH of January 1897 for a period of twelve years [prior to this his occupation is listed as being a 'shop boy']. Beginning with the rating of Boy Second Class, he had subsequently been rated Ordinary Seaman on the fourth of July 1899, Able Seaman on the 24TH of February 1901, Leading Seaman on the 5TH of February 1905 and passed educationally as Petty Officer on the 3RD of March 1908. At the time of the disaster Alfred's address, quoted in the Scarborough Mercury had been No 45 Hoxton Road but I have been unable to find anyone of that name living at that address in the Scarborough Street Directory for 1914. There was however a Herbert Eaman, a Joiner by profession, living at No 30A Hoxton Road, whom I believe was Alfred's younger Brother. Aged thirty-two years at the time of his death Alfred Eaman's body was also never recovered, and he too is commemorated on the Chatham Naval Memorial, [Panel 1].

Also lost; 179652 Leading Seaman Nicholas Odgers.

'Nick' Odgers had been born at St Mawes in Cornwall on the 21ST of December 1878 and according to his service record [PRO Ref ADM 188/298] had begun his service with the Royal Navy at the age of sixteen years on the 15th of May 1894, [prior to this date he had been employed as a labourer]. Another Boy rating, he had subsequently been rated to Ordinary Seaman on the 21ST of December 1896 and to Able Seaman on the first of July in the following year, on the 21st of August 1906 he had been rated to Leading Seaman. Prior to the war Nicholas Odgers had served from the 17TH of November 1913 to the 31ST of July 1914 with the Scarborough Battalion of the Coast Guard and had lived at the coastguard cottages.

Obviously, not a native of Scarborough, Leading Seaman Odgers is, nonetheless, commemorated on the war memorial atop Olivers Mount, his name can also be found on one of the smaller 'Roll's of Honour' located on the North interior wall of St Mary's Church, which I believe had once belonged to St Thomas's Church in East Sandgate. He is also commemorated in his 'Home port' of Devonport on the Naval Memorial [Panel 1] standing on Plymouth Hoe, which commemorates more than 7,000, officers and men of the Great War, and almost 16,000 from the Second World War who have no known graves except the sea.

The British Newspapers had of course had a field day in the wake of the triple sinking; The 'Scarborough Mercury' had been no exception. In the edition for Friday September 25TH 1914 the newspaper had included photographs of the three missing seamen and in addition an extensive article containing much exaggerated information, which had allegedly come from the mouths of survivors;

'A British Naval Reverse - Three Cruisers sunk - Though not officially announced in England survivors assert that as the Cressy was sinking she succeeded in accounting for two German submarines. Though the Press Bureau states that only one submarine was concerned other reports state that five were engaged [Opinions differ as to their number]. Some place it as low as five. Other

Seamen were positive there were a dozen. The white wakes of the periscopes frothed into view on a wide front. The Germans came along with the courage of full speed. Two or three of them were out of the water enough to have their conning towers awash. With real British cheers the gunners fell to their work on their guns. 'There's one', 'there's another', were the grunts as the submarines were spotted. Guns were worked with calm and deadly haste, but alas the submarines were too many. They were all around us at once said a survivor'…

Shortly after the sinkings came the recriminations, and a search for a likely scapegoat for the loss of three of His Majesty's warships. Answers to embarrassing questions, such as 'why were the three large and too old warships there in the first place? had been asked for from the First Sea Lord, Winston Churchill who had blustered in his usual way but he had not come up with a reasonable explanation. Subsequently the Admiralty had stated that they had maintained the patrol on the grounds that destroyers were not able to maintain the patrol in the frequent bad weather and that there were insufficient modern light cruisers available.

A court of enquiry had eventually been set up and had found that while some blame was attributable to all of the senior officers involved, Captain Drummond, [in the Aboukir] for not zigzagging and for not calling for Destroyers. Rear Admiral Campbell, who should have been in command of the squadron in the Cruiser H.M.S. Bacchantes, for being absent on the day, and for a very poor performance at the enquiry at which he had stated that he did not know what the purpose of his command was. Blame had also been placed on the shoulders of Rear Admiral Christian, who, in the Cruiser H.M.S. Euryalus, had taken temporary command of the force in Campbell's absence. He had elected to return to port due to a lack of coal and weather damage to his ships wireless and had not made it clear to Drummond that he could summon destroyers if he had needed them. The bulk of the blame however had been directed at the Admiralty for persisting with a patrol that was dangerous and of limited value against the advice of senior sea going officers. One of whom, a submariner himself had written;

'Those three old cruisers which were sunk yesterday had been expected to be sunk everyday for weeks by us and our commodore had repeatedly warned the Admiralty that it was madness to allow ships to patrol up and down the North Sea practically on the on the same course and at the same speed. The North Sea is no place for big ships. I only hope the person responsible for putting them there gets hung'…

For the German Navy, however, Tuesday 22ND of September 1914 had been a day of resounding victory. The U9 had returned to her base at Heligoland and had been greeted by a heroes welcome. Her Captain, Kapitan-Leutnant Otto Weddigen had eventually received from the Kaiser the Pour Le Merit Order, the German equivalent of the Victoria Cross. On his next foray into the North Sea, Weddigen, once again in U-9, had sunk another unit of the Royal Navy on the 15TH of October 1914. The vessel had been the 7,350 ton cruiser H.M.S. Hawke, which had reportedly sank very quickly, taking most of her crew of almost a thousand officers and men with her [only two officers and twenty men had survived the sinking]. The submarine had also attacked another cruiser, H.M.S. Theseus, albeit without results. Otto Weddigen had eventually been transferred to U-29 in which he had captured off the French coast the British cargo vessel S.S. Adenwen on the 11TH of March 1915. His luck, however, had eventually ran out shortly after noon on the 18TH of March, when U-29 had been rammed and sunk by the British battleship H.M.S. Dreadnought, following an attempted attack, in the North Sea, on the 1ST Battle Squadron, there had been no survivors from the submarine.

U-9 on the other hand, had survived the war, the only one of her class to do so. Following the departure of Weddigen she had served for the remainder of the conflict in the Baltic, and had been surrendered there on the first of November 1918, she had subsequently been broken up in 1919, a very ignoble end for a very gallant vessel.

[1] Residing in Scarborough at No.26 Trafalgar Street West at the time of the 1901 Census the Wilson family had consisted of Joseph aged 46 years, Ellen 42 years, Herbert 13 years, Harry 12 years, Elsie 10 years and Ada aged 8 years. All had been born at Scarborough.

OUR FIRST NAVAL DISASTER - The Aboukir, Hogue & Cressy

by

Commander H Hook

The following is an account of the sinking of His Majesty's ships Aboukir, Hogue and Cressy, belonging to the 7th Cruiser Squadron, then engaged on the "Broad Fourteens" Patrol, off the coast of Holland, covering the cross-Channel passage of our Expeditionary Force.

Some of the information contained herein may not be strictly accurate. However, these are my general impressions and to the best of my belief they are true.

I had had the Middle Watch on the night of 21st-22nd September (1914), and due to the fact that the Officer of the Watch (Morning) was in a slightly bad humour, as all officers of the watch are perfectly entitled to be when they first come up, some small fault had been found with an entry in the Ship's Deck Log and I had had to stand on Monkey's Island for about half an hour, so consequently I did not turn in until about 4.45 a.m. At about 6.20 I was rudely awakened by a violent shaking of my hammock, and at last was forced to open one eye, but on seeing that the shaker was the snottie of the Morning Watch (Willis), I immediately shut it again, and refused to show any signs of life, thinking that the reason for waking me was something to do with the occurrence at four o'clock. However, when he had passed on to the next hammock, and I overheard him telling its occupant that the Aboukir was sinking, I suddenly became very wide awake, and it did not take me very long to bundle into a great coat and sea boots and dash up to the After Bridge.

At this point it would be as well to give a general account of how things stood. At dawn on the morning of September 22nd 1914, the Patrol Force, consisting of three cruisers, Aboukir, Hogue and Cressy, all of the same class, was in a position 52 deg. 18' N., 3 deg. 41' E., and about 40 miles WNW from Ymuiden in Holland. They had been together during the dark hours, and at 6.20 a.m. the speed had just been reduced to eight knots in order to open out to patrolling distance for the day. In those early days of the war, I do not think that anyone realised that a submarine could do any damage, and the "Broad Fourteen's" Patrol extended to within quite a short distance of the Borkum Flats. The Hun submarines could have "bagged" us at any time they chose, as they must have known our exact movements, and we used to go at absurd speeds, frequently stopping to lie off a merchant ship while a cutter went away to search her.

Luckily for us, the weather which had been extraordinarily rough for some days past (the Equinoctial Gales had been too severe for the two destroyers that sometimes escorted us and they had to leave us, and our Flagship H.M.S. Bacchante was in coaling ship), had considerably abated and although there was still a slight swell running and the wind was somewhat chilly at that early hour of the morning, the sun was shining with comparative warmth for the time of year. The only vessel in sight from the upper deck was a small fishing smack, flying the Dutch flag, and probably manned by Germans. The German submarine Captain, Von Weddigen in the U.9., must have been using this smack to mask his whereabouts and hide his periscope wash, and as soon as the first torpedo was discharged she made off at top speed.

The Aboukir was struck on the port side forward, and her Captain signalled to us that he had hit a mine and thought that he could see some more floating mines astern of his ship. No doubt the submarine captain intended him to think just this, and the torpedo was fired to hit exactly the spot where a mine would strike. Our Captain (Captain, later Rear-Admiral, Wilmot S Nicholson, R.N.), then did what appeared to be the right thing under those circumstances, and went full speed astern, stopping the ship about a quarter of a mile on the starboard beam of the Aboukir, with our head in the opposite direction. In about ten minutes the Aboukir had taken on a heavy list to port (i.e. away from us as we looked at her), and in about fifteen her condition was hopeless. I can remember that scene as well as if it

happened only yesterday, as it was my first sight of men struggling for their lives. The bilge keel and part of the ship's bottom were exposed to view, with hundreds of men's heads bobbing about in the water close by, while a continuous stream of very scantily-clad men appeared from the upper deck and started tobogganning down the ship's side, stopping suddenly when they came to the bilge keel, climbing over it, and continuing their slide until they reached the water with a splash. I remember wondering whether they hurt themselves when they started travelling over the barnicles below the water line.

Meanwhile, we had been doing all we could to save the crew of the sinking ship. The two sea-boats were lowered and sent away, and the steam main derrick was got under weigh in record time, being ready in about a quarter of an hour when it generally took over half an hour. The first boat to go out was the launch which was placed under the charge of an R.N.R. Lieutenant, and sent away with a volunteer crew. A large number of hands were told off to throw anything that was made of wood over the side, for survivors to cling on to; and mess-tables and stools, spit-kids, chests of drawers, chairs, etc. all went by the board. The Cressy, which had also been lying off, started to hoist out every available boat, to assist in picking up survivors.

At about 6.45, the Hogue herself was struck nearly amidships on the starboard side by two torpedoes, the second explosion occurring within about a second of the first. The whole ship seemed to jump at least six inches out of the water, and an enormous column of water was sent up, some of which descended with considerable force upon my back and shoulders. The second torpedo must have passed through the hole made in the ship's side by the first, thereby nearly cutting the ship in halves, as No. 3 funnel suddenly collapsed like a house of cards.

The ship's company was made up almost entirely of Royal Fleet Reservists, and two - or three - badge Active Service men, real seamen every one of them, practically the pick of the Navy, and I would never have believed it possible that there could be so little panic or excitement amongst them. I do not think that I saw a single man running on the upper deck. In spite of the fact that the ship was sinking rapidly, several men went down on to the mess decks to fetch their hammocks, a tightly lashed hammock being supposed to be a good substitute for a life jacket as in those days we had no other form of life-saving appliance issued to us, as was done soon afterwards. From where I was, on the after bridge, our First Lieutenant, Lt-Comdr. Woolly (who, by the way, had been the Officer of the Morning Watch and was called back from the Retired List), was quite close by as he was directing the operation of the steam derrick, and as the torpedoes struck he turned to Lt-Comdr. Ivor Chichester, who was assisting in getting out our boats, and said to him "If this ship sinks, I can't swim a stroke", and then calmly carried on giving his orders. He was never picked up. About three or four minutes after the explosions our upper deck was awash, and when I went out on to the quarter deck clad in pyjamas and my cap, having previously shed my great coat and sea boots on the boat deck, I was met by large waves breaking knee high over the deck. Having climbed up on to the guard-rails I looked about for something to hold on to, and seeing a fog-buoy about fifty yards away I plucked up the courage which is always necessary in order to get into a cold bath in the mornings, and swam to it. As I was shoving off from the ship I noticed that there were very few people abreast of the after part of the ship, and as it happened this was a very good thing, as far as I was concerned, as I was spared a great many of those awful sights which always attend the sinking of a ship. It was not until afterwards that I was told that the after-part ought always to be avoided, as if the engines were to be in motion, the propellors would create a very dangerous suction. Shortly after I left the ship she turned slowly over on her side, having been on a perfectly even keel up to then, and within about six or seven minutes after the torpedoes struck, she was quite out of sight. Personally I did not feel the slightest bit of suction as the ship went down, but there were large fountains of water coming out of the scuttles, forced up, I suppose by the air being compressed within a compartment below. Luckily our picket boat and steam pinnace floated off the booms as the ship disappeared, and although the pinnace had a large hole in her hull, she saved a good number of lives. Lieutenant-Commander Chichester (actually I believe that in those days the rank had

not originated and the proper appellation was merely a Lieutenant of over 8 years seniority), with a few hands to assist him had launched a whaler and the captain's gig, so I think that all our boats were afloat. Our Captain, after giving the order "Abandon Ship" and shouting out "Every man for himself", walked over the side of the bridge as the ship heeled over, down the ship's side and climbed up on to the bilge-keel, where a cutter came alongside and took him off, almost dry-shod. After I had held on to my fog-buoy alone for about a quarter of an hour, our own launch, which had turned round to help us as soon as we were struck instead of going on to the Aboukir, came close by, and I struck out for her and was hauled aboard her. When I first came to sea I had formed the impression that a Service launch was too big and cumbersome a boat to be of much use, but I have since altered my ideas on the subject as this particular one saved at least 150 lives that day. It was rather chilly out of the water, so I started to double-bank on one of the oars, as indeed did everyone in order to try to keep themselves warm. We pulled around searching all the pieces of wreckage for survivors who may have been clinging to them. Passing close beside a full-sized mess table we spoke to its occupant spread-eagled accross it, who I recognised as a 2nd-class Petty Officer Reservist, and who told us that he was quite alright where he was and we ought to go on picking up others who needed more assistance than he did. After about another quarter of an hour's search, our boat being rather full, it was decided to pull over to the Cressy to disembark some of us before continuing the search. During all this time the Cressy, which had sent away every available boat, was lying hove-to about half a mile away, engaged in taking on board survivors from the boats, and thus a considerable number were actually torpedoed twice, although none were ever on board all the three ships in turn, as no one was picked up by the Hogue herself. Our launch was just approaching her from astern, intending to go alongside the port quarter, when the Cressy must have seen the torpedo coming at her and suddenly went full speed ahead, washing us well astern with her propellor wash, and shortly afterwards the torpedo struck her on the star-board side. She listed over slowly to an angle of about 20 degrees where she checked herself and everyone thought that she would remain afloat. Apparently the German Captain thought so too, as he then fired another torpedo which exploded her after 9.2 magazine and she sank soon afterwards. This occurred at some time before 8 a.m. and we pulled round amongst the wreckage until about 9 a.m. without, however, picking up any more survivors.

Although, as I have said, at six o'clock there was not a single friendly vessel in sight, by nine o'clock there were three on the scene of the disaster. Two of these were Dutch merchant ships bound for Ymuiden, and the third was a small Lowestoft fishing smack, whose skipper had cut adrift from his nets on feeling the percussion from the repeated explosions and made over to see whether he might be of any assistance. It was towards this latter vessel that we finally pulled, thinking that with the smaller and shallower draughted ship we would be the more immune from further attack by torpedo. Here we were joined by a cutter loaded with men, and after once more passing over the estimated position of the cruisers to make quite sure that there was no one else in want of help, a course was set for Lowestoft Harbour distant about eighty miles, the skipper steering apparently by instinct only, without the aid, so far as we could make out, of even a magnetic compass. As there was only one small cabin down aft, it was used for the wounded men, of which there were three very badly injured, and the rest of us, about 180 in all, sat up on deck, clad in a great many cases in nothing more than Nature's clothes. The kind-hearted fishermen used up the whole of their meagre stocks of tea, of which we all had a few sips to try and warm us up. After drinking mine I was promptly sick, in consequence of too large a dose of sea-water swallowed previously.

At soon after eleven o'clock in the forenoon, H.M.S. Lowestoft with a flotilla of the Harwich destroyers came up at full speed and a destroyer was detailed off to pick us up. Great difficulty was experienced in getting together enough volunteers to man the launch to effect a transfer from our fishing boat, in spite of the wonderful picture of blazing stoves and hot boiler rooms which was naturally conjured up in one's mind, since a great many of the men seemed to regard our attempt to get on board the Cressy as being an object lesson in this respect. However, the launch which had been towing astern was at last manned and brought alongside the "Larne", but, even then, only one man had time to jump on board her, as the Lowestoft thought

that she had sighted a submarine and hoisted the signal for full speed. After an interval of about fifteen minutes the Larne came back towards us in an attempt to pick us up, and we were just going alongside her port side, when the Lowestoft (Commodore Reginald Tyrwhitt), who was coming up on her starboard side and so could not see us, ordered her to get out of the way, which she very quickly did, thus leaving us full in the path of the coming Lowestoft. We were finally taken on board the Lowestoft herself, where everyone was extremely kind to us, lending us their clothing and giving us hot soup, etc. The Commodore called the eight or nine officers up on to the bridge to question us about what had taken place, and upon finding that there were a few of us from the Hogue (I think there was one other Midshipman besides myself in our party), he said that he was only too glad to have been able to be of service now, as we were the ship that had towed him out of the Battle of Heligoland when the Arethusa lay there disabled with a shell through her feed-water tanks. Four other lads of my term at Dartmouth happened to be serving on board the Lowestoft at the time, including Archibald Day, later to be a Hydrographer of the Navy (1954). A number of the men did actually go back all the way to Lowestoft in the fishing smack, and arrived there the next day. The S.S. Flora (one of the Dutch merchant ships) took a great many of the survivors with her to Holland, where they were given a very good time in an Internment Camp and finally sent back to England after a great deal of legal argument as to whether they ought to be treated as Shipwrecked Mariners or as Belligerent Combatants.

I spent the rest of the day asleep on the Paymaster's bunk, and when I awoke at nine in the evening we were just entering the harbour at Harwich. There we went alongside the Parkstone Quay and transferred to the Great Eastern Hotel which had been turned into a Military Hospital, and we were issued with hospital-blue garments. Next day, of course, Messrs Gieve's were on the scene betimes and we lacked for nothing in the way of proper uniforms once more.

The total casualties, I believe, were about fifteen hundred drowned out of about twenty-four hundred all told in the three ships. The Cressy had the biggest percentage of casualties, as when she went down all her boats were away picking up men from the other two ships. The Captain of the Cressy was drowned, and as he was the senior officer, in the absence of the Admiral, we will never know what were the humanitarian motives which impelled him to stay on the scene to save life for long after the time when ~~it~~ was beyond all doubt that there must have been a submarine around there. In fact the Gunner of the Cressy actually says that he saw a periscope at which he fired a couple of rounds with a six-pounder gun, just before the vessel went down (but I think after she was first hit, though). A great number of the losses may certainly be attributed to the undoubted fact that the real old-time seamen just simply scorned to learn how to swim, a principle which is, even to this day, followed to a considerable extent amongst the off-shore fishermen on our coasts. Only three of us Snotties in the old Hogue were drowned, and of our ship's company we had the biggest percentage of saved, due to the fact that with boats and floating jetsam near at hand, we were in the most favourable position when our turn came to go overboard. The Cressy's Midshipmen were former Exmouth term cadets from Dartmouth three terms senior to us Blakes, who were only first-termers on August the 2nd 1914 when we left to mobilise the Reserve Fleet. But the Aboukir midshipmen were also members of our term and they fared much worse than we did. I heard afterwards that two of the best all round swimmers in our whole term (of about 80 at Dartmouth), namely Geoffrey Gore-Browne and Stubbs, who were fast friends, came accross one another in the water holding on to an oar or piece of driftwood that would not support the two of them, so they went away together to find a larger piece, and must have both gone down in the attempt.

Some 6 months later (18 March 1915) while I was in H.M.S. Orion with the 2nd Battle Squadron of the Grand Fleet, we were told by Captain Fred.C. Dreyer that the Captain of our German submarine, "U.9" Ober-Lieutenant Von Weddigen, then in command of "U.29", had been sunk in the middle of the Grand Fleet by H.M.S. Dreadnought of the 4th B.S., who turned out of the line and rammed her amidships, almost hoisting her out of the water as she slid up the ram of the battleship before the submarine broke in halves and disappeared, with all hands. He had certainly possessed many of the sportsmanlike qualities which were conspicuously lacking in most of the other Hun

submarine captains in that he habitually forebore to practice any of the acts of German "frightfulness" upon his survivors, and which, as in our case, he could so easily have done had he been inclined that way.

HEREWARD HOOK.

(From an article first printed in the Cambridge "Granta" in 1919, & written as a set essay for the Naval Instructional Course there, but with one or two extra bits inserted by me now in Nov. 1954).

H.H.