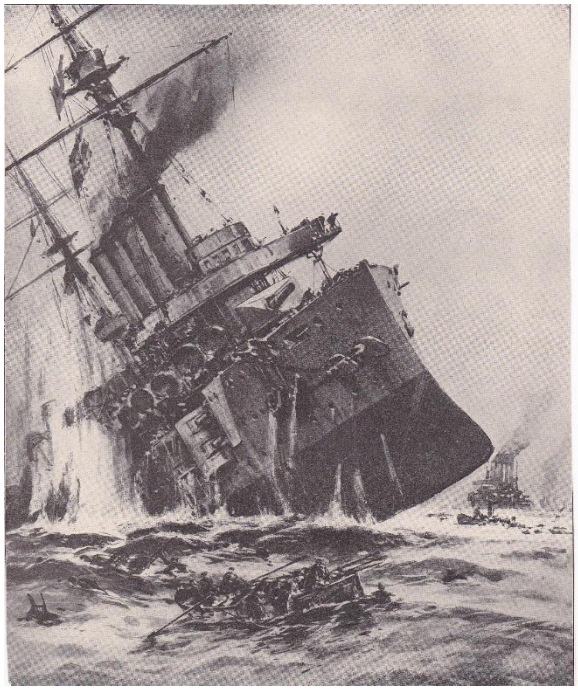
The Live Bait Squadron Bulletin



Bulletin-21 Christmas 2023

Poppy Decoration Christmas 1914-1918

Royal Navy National Museum

INTRODUCTION, BY YOUR VIRTUAL CHAIRMAN

Dear all,

First of all: my best wishes for next Christmas and the year 2024. If all our efforts succeed, we may meet again in September. 22nd September 2024 it will be ten years ago that about 1,000 Members gathered in Chatham, at the Dockyard for the Centennial, the one and till now the only Remembrance Ceremony to honour the men of the Three Cruisers. We are doing our utmost to organise a 'ten years after' event. More about it in my next Bulletin-22, due next Spring.

In this Bulletin a remarkable and heartbreaking contribution by Leslie Vingoe regarding the death of her grandfather Thomas Bellery.

Lately I read 'The Temporary Gentleman', a fine book by Sebastian Barry. His book opens with the struggle of his leading person at sea, after his ship has been torpedoed by a German submarine. It's World War 2, but what he experiences is not different what 'our men' met with. He survives. Believe me, this is a good read, see below. Permission has been requested.

Henk H.M. van der Linden

Chairman

PO 187039 THOMAS BELLERY,
COXSWAIN,
HMS HOGUE

What Happened Next?

Thomas Bellerby (my grandfather) was born in 1879, in Hull to William Bellerby a labourer and his wife Violet. He married Florence May Holt (my grandmother) and at the time of the sinking of his ship HMS HOGUE had one son, also Thomas, born on 22nd January, 1913. Florence was expecting their second child and the little family lived in Belmont Road, Gillingham. Two days after the disaster, on 24th September, my mother, Jessie Kathleen, was born. It is difficult to comprehend the suffering my grandmother must have gone through with a new baby, a toddler and the uncertainty of what had happened to her husband.

It was not until 3rd October, 1914 that she received the following official letter from the Admiralty:

> I regret to inform you that HMS HOGUE was sunk on 22nd ultimo and that the name of Thomas Bellerby rating Petty Officer official number 187039, who is believed to have been on board, does not appear on the list of survivors received in this department. In the circumstances it is feared that, in the absence of any evidence to the contrary, he must be regarded as having lost his life.'

To the point and of little comfort.

At some point my grandmother wrote to the Vice Consul at IJmuiden, Holland, in the vain hope that he might have some information of what had happened to her husband. He replied on 9th November, 1914, thanking her for her letter and stating:

> 'I am sorry that I must communicate you that your husband was not amongst those landed In this port. The only survivor yet in hospital here is Fleet Paymaster Edward H. Eldred'.

For Florence the future must indeed have looked bleak. At the time of her husband's death she was in receipt of an allotment of £4 per month from his wages. On 12th October, 1914 the Admiralty informed her that she would receive a pension of 7s.6d per week with 4s.0d allowance for the two children and a money order for 16s.1d, the amount due to 26th December, would be sent to her. On 4th December, 1914 she received £3 from the Admiralty, 'in respect of good conduct award to your late husband.' Things changed for the better when in December, 1918 she learnt that her application for an alternative pension had been successful and she would receive 29s.2d. a week with effect from 14th April, 1918.

Tom Bellerby had died intestate and a document dated 15th June, 1915 and received from the Inspector of Seamen's Wills, gives a breakdown of monies Florence could expect to receive from his estate:

Compensation for loss of effects	£5 5s. 0d.

Further compensation for loss of effects	£2 15s. 2d.
Residue of wages	£4 2s. 3d.
Prize Bounty Heligoland Bight Action 28.8.14	8s. 6d.
War gratuity	£8 0s. 0d.
Naval Prize Fund (2 instalments)	£50 0s. 0d.

So what happened after that? Tom Bellerby had been a Free Mason and that organisation paid for both children to attend the local grammar schools. My mother became a Secretary and Tom joined the Air Force in WW2. He and his wife Edna had one daughter, Carol. My mother married my father, Richard Ernest John Johnson, in 1945 and I was born on 21st October, 1947 and my sister, Judith on 24th July, 1950. My grandmother, Florence, died in 1951 never having remarried.

Amongst the family papers there is a newspaper cutting with a picture of HMS HOGUE, written after the sinking. The article states:

> 'Cost of each vessel about £800,000. There is no cause for depression. Great Britain has a greater preponderance of cruisers over Germany and we are bound to lose a certain number of ships.'

I can only imagine how my grandmother and the relatives of the other crew members of the HOGUE, CRESSY and ABOUKIR must have felt when they read this heartless article.

Lesley Vingoe (nee Johnson)
9th January, 2022

From:

The Temporary Gentleman. A novel

Sebastian Barry

(Faber & Faber, London, 2014, pages 2-8, permission requested)

I had been in an excellent mood for days, having picked the winner of the Middle Park Stakes at Nottingham. Every so often, I stuck a hand in my right pocket and jingled part of my winnings in the shape of a few half crowns. The erst of it was inserted into an inside pocket of my uniform - a fold of lovely crisp white banknotes. I'd got up to Nottingham on a brief furlough, having been given a length of time not quite long enough to justify the long trek across England and Ireland to Sligo.

France had fallen to Hitler, and suddenly, bizarrely, colonies like the Gold Coast were surrounded by the new enemy, the forces of the Vichy French. No one knew what was going to happen, but we were being shunted down quickly to be in place to blow bridges, burst canals, and break up roads, if the need arose. We had heard the colonial regiments were being swelled by new recruits, thousands of Gold Coast men rushing to defend the Empire. I suppose this was when Tom Quaye, though of course I didn't know him then, joined up.

So I was standing there, flush with my winnings, not much thinking of much, as always somewhat intoxicated by being at sea, somewhat in love with an unknown coastline, and the intriguing country lying in behind. I had also about a bottle of Scotch whisky in me, though I stood rooted as an tree for all that. It was a moment of simple exhilaration. My red hair, the selfsame red hair that had first brought me to the attention of Mai, for it was not I who had said hello to her first, but she, with her playful question in the simple neat quadrangle of the university, 'I suppose you put a colour in that?'- my red hair was brushed flat back from my forehead, my second lieutenant's cap holding it down like a pot lid, my cheeks had been shaved by my batman Percy Welsh, my underclothes were starched, my trousers were creased, my shoes were signalling back brightly to the moon – when suddenly the whole port side of the ship seemed to go up, right in front of my eyes, an enormous gush and geyser of water, a shuddering explosion, an ear-numbing rip of metallic noise, and a vast red cornet of flames the size of the torch on the Statue of Liberty. The young second lieutenant from Donegal was suddenly as dead as one of those porpoises you will see washed up on the beach at Enniscrone after a storm, on the deck beside me, felled by a jagged missile of stray metal. Men came tearing up from below, the doorways oozing them out as if so much boiling molasses, there were cries and questions even as the gigantic fountain of displaced water collapsed and found the deck, and hammered us flat there as if we were blobs of dough. Two of my sappers were trying to peel me back up from the deck, itself splintered and cratered from the force, and now other stray bits of the ship rained down, clattering and banging and boasting and killing.

'That was a fucking torpedo,' said my sergeant, with perfect redundancy, a little man called Ned Johns from Cornwall, the most knowledgeable man for a fuse I ever worked with. He

probably knew the make and poundage of the torpedo, but if he did he didn't say. The next second the huge ship started to pitch to port, and before I could grab him, Ned Johns went off sliding down the new slope and smashing into the rail, gathered himself, stood up, looked back at me, en then was wrenched across the rail and out of view. I knew we were holed deep under the waterline, I could more or less feel it in my body, something vital torn out of the ship echoed in the pit of my stomach, some mischief done, deep, deep in some engine room of cargo hold.

My other helper, Johnny 'Fats' Talbott, a man so lean you could have used him for spare wire, as poor as Ned Johns once said, in truth was using me now as a kind of bollard, but that was no good, because the ship seemed to make a delayed reaction to its wound, and shuddered upward, the ship's rail rearing up ten feet in a bizarre and impossible movement, catching poor Jimmy completely off guard, since he had been bracing himself against a force from the other direction, and off he went behind me, pulling the trouser leg off my uniform as he did so, sending my precious half-crowns firing in every direction.

So for a moment of odd calm I stood there, one leg bare to the world, my cap still in place inexplicably, myself drenched so thoroughly I felt one hundred per cent seawater. An iron ladder full of men, from God knows where, maybe even from inside the ship, or from the side of the command deck more likely, with about a dozen calling and screaming persons clinging to it like forest monkeys, moved past me as if it were a trolley being wheeled by the demon of this attack, and crossed the ravaged deck, and pitched down into the moiling, dark se behind. Everything roared for that moment, the high night sky of blankening stars, the great and immaculate silver serving dish of the sea itself, the rended ship, the offended and ruined men – and then, precipitatively, a silence reigned, the shortest reign of any silence in the empires of silence, the whole vista, the far-off coast, the deck, the sea, was as still for a moment as a painting, as if someone had just painted it all in his studio, and was gazing at it, contemplating it, reaching out to put a finishing touch on it, of smoke, of fire, of blood, of water, and then I felt the whole ship leave me, sink under my boots so suddenly that there was for that second a gap between me and it, so that wasn't I like an angel, a winged man suspended. Then gravity broke the spell, gravity ruined the bloody illusion, and I went miserably and roaringly downward with the ship, the deck broke into the waters, it smashed through the sacred waters like a child breaks an ice puddle in a Sligo winter, it made a noise like that, of something solid, something icy breaking, glass really, but not glass, infinitely soft and receiving water, the deeps, the dreaded deeps, the reason why fishermen never learn to swim, let the waters take us quickly, let there be no thrashing and hoping and swimming, no, let yours limbs go, be calm, put your trust in God, pray quick to your Redeemer, and I did, just like an Aran fisherman, and gave up my soul to God, and sent my last signal of love flying back from Europe to Mai, Mai, and my children, up the night-filthied coast of Africa, across the Canaries, across old boot of England and the ancient baby-shape of Ireland, I sent her my last word of love, I love thee, I love thee, Mai, I am sorry, I am sorry.

The ocean closed over my head with its iron will, and the fantastical suck of the sinking ship drew me down as if a hundred demons were yanking on my legs, down down we went, our handsome troopship made in Belfast, the loose bodies of the already drowned, the myriad

papers and plans for war, the tins of sardines we had taken in in Algiers, the fabulous materiel, the brand new trucks, the stocks of tyres, the fifty-three horses, the wooden stakes, the planks, the boxes of carefully stored explosives, all down to Neptune we went, extinguished in a moment without either glory or cowardice, an action of the gods, of queer physics, that huge metal mass sucker-punched, beaten, ruined, wrecked, fucked to all hell as Ned Johns would say, and I felt the water all around as if I were in the body of a physical creature, as if this were his blood, and the scientifically explainable forces at work were his sinews and muscles. And it stopped my mouth and found the secret worm-whorls of my ears, and it wanted entry into me, but I had grabbed, stolen, fetched out with an instinctive exuberance, a last great gulp of breath, and I washing this down with me, in my chest, around my heart, as my singing response, my ears were now thundering with the thunders of the sea, I thought I could hear the ship itself cry out in a crazy vocabulary of pain, as if a man could learn this lingo somewhere, the tearing death-cries of a vessel. All the while as if still standing on the deck, but that was not possible, and then I thought the ship was turning sidewards, like a giant in its bed, and I had no choice but to go with it, I was like a salmon looking for the seam of a waterfall, where it could grip its way to the gravel-beds on grips of mere water, and now I thought I washing over the side, away from the deck, accelerated bij some unknown force faster than the ship itself and I was scraping along metal, I felt long sea-grass and barnacles, surely I could not have, but I thought I did, and just as the ship went right over, or so I imagined it, how could I know, in the deepest dark, the darkest deepest dark that ever was, an instance of utter blankness, suddenly I felt the very keel of the troopship, something wide and round and good, the sacred keel, the foundation of the sailor's hope, the guarantor of his sleep between watches, but all up the wrong way, in the wrong place, violently torn from its proper place, and just in that moment, with a great groan, a weird and menacing sighting, a sort of silence as the worst noise in creation, the keel halted and went back the other way, like the spirit of a whale, as if the ship were now fish, and because I was holding onto the keel, riding it, like a fly on a saddle, it sort of threw me back the other way, catapulted me slowly, Mr Cannonball himself in the tuppenny circus of old at Enniscrone, my childhood flaring in my head, my whole life flaring, and then I seemed to be in the shrouds of the little forward mast, and I squeezed my body into a tight ball, again pure instinct, not a thought in my mind, and as the killed ship rolled slowly over, seeking its doom at least in a balletic and beautiful curve, the furled sails rolled me over and over, giving me strange speed, volition unknown, and I unfolded myself, like a lover rising victorious from the marriage bed, and I spread my arms, and I thrashed them into the ocean, and swam, and swam, looking for the surface, praying for it, gone a mile beyond breathlessness, ready to grow gills to survive this, and then it was there, the utterly simple sky, God's bare lights, in the serene harbours of the constellations, and I grabbed like a greedy child onto something, a shard of something, a ruined and precious fragment, and there I floated, gripping on, half-mad, for a minute without memory, oh Mai, Mai, for a minute all absence and presence, a creature blanked out and destroyed, a creature bizarrely renewed.

By the grace of God we were travelling in convoy that night. And by the grace of God, for some reason only known to its captain and its crouching sailors, the submarine melted off

into the deeps, not that any of us saw it. A corvette bristling with machine guns manoeuvered up near me, I heard the confident voices with wild gratitude, arms reached down into the darkness for me, pulled me from the chaos, and I slumped, suddenly lumpish and exhausted, at the boots of my rescuers, falling down to lie with other survivors, some with dark-blooded wounds, a few entirely naked, the clothes sucked off them.

I lay there, ticking with life, triumphant, terrified. I noticed myself checking my inside pocket for the roll of banknotes, as if watching someone else, as if I were two people, and I laughed at my other self for his foolishness.

We steamed into Accra the following morning.