

1. Able Seaman Ernest Charles Chandler, age 20

The Royal Navy was steeped in legend and expectation since the days of Nelson.

Though the sailors' role was much less immediately significant than that of the army in World War One, every detail of the activities of the Royal Navy excited the British Public. Max Hastings writes,

“The English channel on 30th July 2014 presented a strange spectacle, following the night passage of the grand fleet towards its war station at Scapa Flow. Tables, armchairs, even pianos bobbed in its wake. Crews had hurled overboard every kind of inflammable furniture and fitting, in anticipation of an imminent collision with the enemy”.

In fact, the navy would fight only one large scale engagement, the battle of Jutland in 1916. But its power in keeping the German navy in port and enforcing the economic blockade, especially in the latter part of the War, was crucial in securing eventual victory.

Ernest Chandler was the son of Charles and Ellen Chandler and lived in Wellers Town, where his father worked as a bricklayer. Ernest is shown in the 1911 Census as Boy, First Class on the HMS Impregnable in Devonport. His family are related to the late Mr Medhurst, village cobbler in Penshurst. In 1914 Ernest was an able seaman on HMS Monmouth, an old armoured cruiser launched in 1901. The Monmouth and The Good Hope formed part of the West Atlantic Squadron, commanded by Rear Admiral Sir Christopher Craddock. This squadron met and engaged German opposition off the Chilean coast at Coronel.

Reports of the battle state - “The West Atlantic Squadron left that station at the outbreak of war and steamed into the Pacific. Its main mission was to search for Admiral Von Spee and his powerful squadron of marauding cruisers, which ships collectively, considerably outgunned and over matched in armour, the inferior squadron under Craddock

On the afternoon of 1st November, the enemy ships were sighted by Craddock. It was blowing a gale, with high seas running, causing the ships to roll heavily. The unequal battle commenced about 7 pm, with the powerful guns of the enemy cruisers firing salvos at some 12,000 yards, which soon found the range of the Good Hope and the Monmouth, whose weaker guns at once replied with ineffective result on the enemy. Within an hour the Good Hope was set on fire and sunk, thus leaving the Monmouth to fight alone the two big German cruisers. Now (nearly 8pm) darkness gave a brief respite for the doomed Monmouth, battered and bleeding beyond hope and slowly sinking. Her fate was sealed when the Nurnberg came upon the scene and sank her at point blank range. The Admiral and the entire crews of both ships were lost.”

Harmsworth, in his Encyclopaedia of 1922 states, “Craddock, who was lost with his flagship, must be honoured for his determination to fight, but the action was strategically and tactically unhappy. Strategically it was unwise, because he was on the eve of obtaining reinforcements. Tactically, the weather conditions gave the German ships, with their heavier batteries, mounted higher above the water, a distinct advantage, and they had so great a superiority in force that there was no chance of a British victory.”