

50 pence



## LINGFIELD & DORMANSLAND SCOUTS & THE BATTLE OF JUTLAND

In the Surrey Mirror of the 18<sup>th</sup> December, 1914, six scouts are shown as having enlisted together in the Navy, all of them for the full 12 year term and not for 'Hostilities Only'. We have the service records for two which show that they were both at the Battle of Jutland.

**Nelson Cox** - He was on the HMS Canada which was a remarkably lucky ship. She sustained no damage and had no casualties. He was based at Chatham. He was born in 1900 in Chailey and in 1911 lived at 2 Little Bennets Cottages, Lingfield. His mother was a widow. His personal details are included in his service papers – 5 ft. 3 inches on enlisting, brown hair, grey eyes, fresh complexion. When measured at a later date he had grown 2 inches, his hair was brown to fair and his eyes were blue

He had passed an examination while at school which enabled him to go on to a Naval School for Boys. A decision had been taken at a conference in 1900, held at the offices of the Navy League, to consider the question of establishing a training ship for young boys for the merchant navy and deciding on the number of scholarships that should be made available.

**John Edwin Luckhurst** - He was not as lucky as Nelson. He was on HMS Warspite which was badly damaged and instructed to return to Rosyth. Having already been hit several times the Warspite turned sharply to aid another ship which was being targeted but in doing so her steering jammed and she completed two full circles round the other vessel before the problem was corrected. Apparently she saved the other ship for the Germans stopped firing. Perhaps they were worried this was some unknown ploy or they were fascinated by the strange manoeuvre.

Like Nelson, John was based at Chatham.

The 1911 census shows he was born at Crockham Hill in 1898 and the family lived in Blenheim Road, Lingfield. His father was a gardener, as was John at the time of enlistment.

He was promoted from Boy 2 to Boy 1 in 1915 by which time he was on HMS Defiant and was then transferred to the Warspite. He stayed with her when she was repaired, becoming an Able Bodied Seaman. However, he was invalided out in 1919.

He was 5 feet when he enlisted at 16, with brown hair, grey eyes and a fresh complexion.

Regarding the other four scouts, **Hugh Thomas Vincent** was a gunner on HMS Defiant, **William Dart** served on HMS Royal Oak but his real adventure was after the War and his story must wait for our Aftermath Exhibition. **Frederick William Baker** was on HMS Abercrombie and was at the Dardanelles. **Frederick Comber** served on the HMS Usk and on HMS Bulldog.

There are three other village men who may have been at Jutland but we cannot confirm they were on their respective ships at the right time.

**Arthur Nelson Bulmer** Born 1898 – a Market Gardener, 5 feet 5 inches in height, auburn hair and blue eyes. The problem is his service record dates from 1919 to 1921 when he was demobbed but it shows, without giving details, that he was in the Royal Navy or Royal Marines from 18<sup>th</sup> May, 1916. during which time he was on HMS Courageous. Obviously part of his record is missing or filed elsewhere.

The other two were on the Warspite but again we do not have their records to confirm the date. We do know they both joined the Merchant Navy after the war.

They were **Ebenezer Stanley Read** born in Catford, Kent but in 1911 living in Blenheim Road, Lingfield. His father was a groom. **Sidney Chantler** born in Lingfield and in 1911 lived in 8 Newchapel Road.

### **The Battle of Jutland**

This was the only major sea battle of the War, long anticipated and finally fought on the 30th/31<sup>st</sup> May 1916.

With the aim of being able to lift the Royal Navy's blockade the Kaiser had at last decided to risk his fleet in a major battle. The German plan was for Admiral Franz Hipper to take his battle cruiser fleet to Norway, there to lure out Admiral David Beatty's battle cruiser fleet from Rosyth and defeat him while he was without the support of Admiral Sir John Jellicoe and the Grand Fleet. Once this had been accomplished Hipper would be joined by Admiral Reinhard Scheer and the High Seas Fleet and the combined forces would then overcome the much weakened Jellicoe, all of this having submarines in support.

There was a snag to this – the Germans did not know that earlier in the War the Navy had acquired their code book and the decoders in Room 40 at the Admiralty were aware of the German plans. Initially this worked well. In the days previous to the battle the Fleet had been called to readiness. Jellicoe would sail from Scapa Flow and would meet the 2<sup>nd</sup> Battle cruiser Squadron commanded by Vice Admiral Martyn Jerram who was stationed at Cromarty. They would then rendezvous with Admiral David Beatty who in turn would have been joined by Sir Hugh Evan-Thomas and the 5<sup>th</sup> Battle Squadron. Then it descended into chaos.

The Germans had a problem or two – their submarines were at their limit and a long delay was affecting them. Also information regarding the position of the British fleet was wrong because the reading was taken while the ships were executing a zig-zag which they now did to confuse the U-boats.

So far as the Royal Navy was concerned mistake followed mistake. It started with Room 40 sending either a totally wrong signal or an ambiguous one which inferred that only Hipper was out and, contrary to earlier advice, Scheer was still in port. This led to an adjustment of plans as far as Jellicoe was concerned. Next, the Admiralty told Admiral Sir Reginald Tyrwhitt, Commander of the Harwich Force, to stay where he was for the time being, and then seems to have forgotten him completely. Later he contacted them and again was told to stay in port. To his frustration he played no part in the battle. He could have made a difference. He did not rise to the prominence of Jellicoe and Beatty and commanded the Harwich Force for the duration of the War. He was, though, regarded as one of the finest Naval commanders and could well have provided the steadfastness and commonsense to balance the cautious Jellicoe and the impetuous, undoubtedly brave but also unfortunately cocky, Beatty.

Beatty was making some mistakes of his own. He did not brief Ewan-Thomas who in turn did not know of Beatty's course changes because the distance and developing mist made it impossible to read the flags. Beatty also had the reputation of sending ambiguous signals. The consequence of this was that Ewan-Thomas lost Beatty. At this point there is the feeling that all the various fleets, British and German, are sailing around the North Sea totally lost – and, of course, at this point both sides think the other side has only got its battle cruiser fleets out. At one time Beatty and Hipper are sailing parallel courses about 20 miles apart, each oblivious of the other .

When Beatty and Hipper finally meet, or converge, or happen upon each other, Beatty is in trouble without Ewan-Thomas and he compounds his problems by holding off his gunfire for 10 minutes and delays battle formations so that his ships are taking up positions as the battle commences. He was actually facing annihilation and was only saved by the arrival of Ewan-Thomas.

When Beatty spotted Scheer's Fleet he turned his own ships to lead the German's toward Jellicoe but the signal he sent to Ewan-Thomas was "turn in succession" which should have been "turn together". He was also not giving Jellicoe the information he needed. Eventually the Grand Fleet and the High Seas Fleet discovered to their mutual amazement that each was at sea.

It was during the night that Scheer took his fleet round to the north and escaped back home, helped by the Admiralty not passing on seven messages received from Naval Intelligence which made it clear what the German Admiral was doing, yet that same Admiralty was going to censure Jellicoe because he decided to ignore a signal to stop the Germans, thinking the Admiralty was wrong again, and also fearing he was being led into an area of mines or U-boats.

And what was the conclusion to all this confusion? Inconclusive. The Germans had wanted to prove they were now the best. We wanted to prove that we still were. We lost 14 ships against the German 11 and had three times as many casualties. This, the Germans said, proved they had won. Because they fled in the night rather than meet the Grand Fleet we said that proved we had won, because we still had the freedom of the oceans, subject to the U-boats, and they did not. Perhaps as the centenary of the battle approaches we should be honest and say their ships, gunnery and weapons were superior to ours – and this was tacitly acknowledged in the various enquiries that followed. Jellicoe had been arguing for a long time that weaponry on ships should be improved.

However, the over-riding feeling left by the confrontation is that it did indeed prove nothing. If those in control on both sides had turned over and gone back to sleep on May 30<sup>th</sup> the position would have been the same – except, of course, that over 6000 British and 2000 Germans sailors would still have been alive. How did the returning crews feel? At least the Germans welcomed their Navy back with cheers and parades in the aid of propaganda. Ours returned to a hostile press and disillusioned public. To this was added the insult of the behaviour within the Admiralty and among senior officers as everyone tried to clear themselves.

The ‘Greatest Scandal to hit the Royal Navy’ which followed the inevitable Enquiry was caused by Beatty’s insidious cleansing of his own record to the detriment of others. Jellicoe was the main victim. He was given the desk job of First Sea Lord and Beatty took over the Grand Fleet. In 1917 Lloyd George dismissed Jellicoe and made Beatty First Sea Lord. Even as late as the 1920s Beatty was still using his position to try to get the Official Report changed in his favour.

Here is a letter he sent to Jellicoe on the 9<sup>th</sup> June 1916.

Is it snide? It seems ingratiating. Despite what he writes here Beatty in particular was going to voice condemnation of Jellicoe, saying he had missed an opportunity of “another Trafalgar”. Perhaps that was the real problem – another Trafalgar needed another Nelson.

My Dear Commander-in-Chief,

My letter by Forbes was very hurried, he was here such a short time, and there were forty thousand things going on I had little time to write you but the scantiest information. First, I want to offer you my deepest sympathy in being baulked of your great victory, which I felt was assured when you hove in sight.

I can well understand your feeling, and that of the Battle Fleet, to be so near, and miss, is worse than anything. The cursed weather defeats us every time. It must have been tantalising in the extreme. I’ve no doubt that my smoke spoilt your view to some extent, but I could not get ahead of you faster. I was going top speed and hotly engaged. Poor Robert Arbuthnot put me out of my stride for a moment, but not to matter very greatly. Every time the weather conditions beat us: 16<sup>th</sup> December, 24<sup>th</sup> January (too clear) and now, this time. It is heart breaking for the fine fellows to have waited so patiently, so cheerfully, for so

long. And indeed I can well understand your feelings. It was unfortunate that my position did not tally sufficiently accurately, but that was a small matter if the weather had remained clear.

Your sweep South was splendid, and I made certain that we should have them at daylight. I cannot believe now that they got in to the NE of you and feel they must have tried the SW. It was perhaps unfortunate that those who sighted the enemy to the Northward did not make reports. Perhaps they did, but I did not get them, but then our wireless was not very good. It was shot away three times.

I had already started committees on the subject of learning all we can from the action when I got your wire. It ought to be very productive. I have learned a great deal. I do hope you are able to come here in Iron Duke soon. It would do us from top to bottom a great honour to know that we have earned your approbation.

We were sick to death when we returned and found that we had been defeated, as per Press. We are all rather sore so if you can see your way to coming here it would do us all no end of good and would be greatly appreciated. We are part of the Grand Fleet and would like to see our Commander-in-Chief.

It seems hard, terribly hard, that after all this weary wait, after losing so many of our best friends, after a veritable nightmare of an afternoon, we have been baulked. My heart aches with thinking about it and that our magnificent Battle Fleet should have been deprived at the eleventh hour of their reward. So please come and see us and tell us that we retain your confidence.

Yours ever,

David Beatty

M. Priestley. ©2014

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