

1916

## HMS Mantua



January 1st to 22nd

**At Glasgow for docking**

January 1<sup>st</sup>

**‘Natal’ and ‘Persia’.** News received today of the mysterious explosion in the armoured cruiser ‘Natal’. The ship suddenly blew up and a very large number of lives are lost. It is said that a cinema film caught fire and caused the disaster, but the mystery will probably never be solved *[note – the ship sank off the coast of Invergordon, Cromarty Firth due to an internal explosion that caused the ship to sink within about 5 minutes with the loss of about 420 people]*. The P&O liner ‘Persia’ also sunk *[note – this was controversial as she was a passenger ship flying a neutral flag. She also sank in about 5 minutes off the coast of Crete with the loss of 343 of the 519 onboard]*. Rather sad opening to the new year.

January 3rd to 18th

**On leave at Portsmouth**

## January 9th

**Leave.** For the next few days of quiet time or awaiting a wire announcing the undocking of the ship [*note – the ‘Mantua’ had been in dock in Govan, Glasgow, since 20/12/1915 for repairs to the hull*]. This anxiety rather a mar to enjoyment as one cannot help feeling uneasy, especially as my leave is not approved by anyone. I received a telegram daily though and intend remaining on leave until there is a reason for my return as there is nothing for me to do onboard.

## January 22nd to February 8th

**At sea patrolling North Atlantic**

## February 3rd

**War news.** The war news on the whole rather distressing. We seem to make no progress towards the end. Blowing hard as usual and on the third, rather worse. The German Raider ‘Moeuve’ [*note – SMS Möwe*] appears to have created a good deal of havoc amongst our shipping and she has evaded capture so far we hear.

## February 8th to 11th

**At Shetland to coal**

## February 11th to 24th

**At sea patrolling North Atlantic**

## February 19th

**False alarm.** Sent in sailing yacht ‘Funjal’, which was ‘wanted on suspicion’. Whilst armed guard was being put on board a vessel came in sight, steaming full speed for us, and although we made the challenge, she fired a gun so I got ready for action, but she turned out to be the ‘Otway’. What she thought we were, I don't know, but many suspicious vessels said to enemy disguised merchant ships have been mentioned of late as having gone to sea as Raiders.

## February 24th to 27th

**At Shetland to Coal**

## February 27th to March 12th

**At sea patrolling North Atlantic**

February 29th

**War news.** Leap Year's Day which will be ever impressed on my memory. WT news was received that a German Raider was expected in certain position at 8:30. Our ships were ordered at full speed to the eastward to close the position, but it would have taken at least 24 hours for us to get there and in consequence of the subsequent events. these orders were cancelled. During the forenoon news received that the 'Andes' had sighted a suspicious steamer. This same ship was sighted by 'Alcantara' soon afterwards, and she apparently did not understand and the 'Andes's' signals warning her of the suspicious nature of the steamer, at any rate, she closed her and boarded at very short distance. Suddenly the seamer steamer opened fire on the bridge and fore part of 'Alcantara', creating much havoc and putting the communications out of action. The 'Alcantara' began to steam ahead but described circles through a jammed helm and at last opened fire on the ship, which turned out to be the German disguised raider 'Greif'. In the meantime, the 'Andes' had closed to 5000 yards and engaged the enemy, but not before she had badly holed the 'Alcantara', which sank with the loss of about 70 lives. The 'Andes' was successful in setting the 'Greif' on fire, and she was eventually sunk and many of her ship's company taken prisoner. The reports of this occurrence are very vague and will probably never be completely disclosed. The 'Alcantara' does not appear to have distinguished herself, although she received the credit, whereas 'Andes' got nothing. We had the WT reports, somewhat disjointed, of the progress of the action during the day and one could not help feeling anxious at times as to the result, but there was great satisfaction in hearing of the 'Greif's' end, although it cost us very fine ship and so many lives.

## March 9<sup>th</sup>

**Verdun.** The French news from Verdun rather disconcerting. The Germans making tremendous assaults on this place and the French defences perfectly magnificent. However confident one feels, one cannot help feeling anxious

## March 12th to 24th

**At Glasgow to Coal**

## March 13th to 21st

**On Leave at Southsea**

## March 14th

**Lawrence Bird.** My cousin, Lawrence Bird of the Berkshire Regiment came to dinner. He was wounded in the arm in trench fighting. It is still bad but improving and he can use it. He has been awarded the DSO.



*[Note – Lawrence Bird in 1918. In 1915 he commanded the 1st Battalion of the Berkshires in France, where he won the D.S.O. and was twice mentioned in despatches. Later he did sterling work in Ireland during 'the troubles', for which he received a military OBE. He was an avid climber and was a member of the 'Alpine Club' of London.]*

## March 19th

**Blackout.** We had a visit from the police this evening on account of the light showing from a skylight at the top of the house. I managed to appease the officer but heavy fines are being inflicted and rightly so on account of the air raids.

## March 23rd to April 6th

**At sea patrolling Denmark straight.**

## March 23rd

**Sailed.** Down the river at 2:00 PM and away from Greenock at 4:30. When we had got as far as the Cumbraes, we were suddenly ordered to return, but did not know why.

March 24th

**SS Englishman sunk.** Ordered to proceed again at 1:00 AM, and I wondered what was the meaning of this. I soon found out. We proceeded by the usual route inside Rathlin Island, and here a steamer called the 'Englishman' was abreast of us. We headed for Tory Island and she for Ornsay so that our courses diverged. A lovely day, she was well insight up to about 11:30 and we could see her smoke at noon. At this time she made an SOS by WT and announced that a submarine was attacking her. Shortly afterwards that she was hit and sinking. We could see a great deal of smoke distant about 25 miles. I was in a dilemma. My duty was not to go near her, but it seemed horrible to leave

people to their fate. The only comfort was that I knew we had many patrol vessels in the vicinity. To qualify my opinion, I asked Vilbert and White, one was for going to her, the other against. I therefore decided to stand on, but was very much worried about it. The reason for our recall last night was on account of the operations of this submarine and the chances were even as regards my ship or the 'Englishman'. I marvel, however, that we should have been allowed to depart without any information of her or an escort.

## April 2nd

**Blizzard.** A fearful day which I will never forget. A furious easterly blizzard and a heavy sea. The snow and ice particles so thick that it was impossible to see a yard ahead. We were ordered by WT to a position further South and so ran before the gale. Towards 10:00 PM the gale abated with a rapid rise in temperature causing a thaw which brought down from aloft huge chunks of frozen snow and icicles so as to keep one wary.

## April 6 to 8th

**At Shetland for Coal**

## April 8th to 23rd

**At sea patrolling North Atlantic**

## April 20<sup>th</sup>

**War News.** The war does not appear to be going very favourably for us this year, but it must only be a 'turn of the wheel'. The evacuation of Gallipoli (Jan 8<sup>th</sup>) was bitter, after so many valuable lives had been lost, and the fearful battle of Verdun begun on 21st of February, still rages. The heroism of the French is marvellous.

## April 21st

**Admiral's visit.** We met the 'Alsatian' at the appointed rendezvous and Admiral Tupper boarded us. He walked round the ship and had a good word to say about everything. The ship's company being assembled, he presented two Distinguished Service Medals, one to the Master at Arms and the other to Able Seaman RNR Woodrow of the boarding boat. These men have done nothing particularly heroic, but DSM have been given to various ratings in order to encourage the others in the same way as DSO's are given to officers. The whole question of the distribution of honours is farcical and is all a matter of how much 'push' the individual has. It is not by any means merit that gains these distinctions, except apparently by accident. However, I was gratified to see two of my men so distinguished, although we have not been well treated in comparison with other ships of the squadron as regards officers, for they have had nothing. The Admiral, in a speech to the ship's company, expressed his pleasure in finding the ship so clean,

happy and efficient and I was especially pleased as it is the first real attention we have had from the Admiral of the squadron.

## April 23rd to 26th

**At Shetland to coal**

## April 26th to May 11th

**At sea patrolling North Atlantic**

## April 25th

**Lowestoft.** News received of a dastardly bombardment of Lowestoft, a defenceless town, by the German fleet, which hurriedly retired when they sighted a few of our ships.

## April 26th

**Irish Rebellion.** News received of the outbreak of rebellion in Ireland, the result of weakness of the government in dealing with the Sinn Feiners [*note – the Easter Rising, started on 24<sup>th</sup> April and lasted 6 days*]. It is very distressing in these awful times and the unrest has probably been fostered by German agents.

## May 11th to 25th

**At Glasgow for docking**

## May 12 to 23rd

**On leave at Hayling Island**

## May 17th

**Happy day.** With the little fellows in garden, shopping, etc, in perfect weather and every moment lovely. Another delightful walk with Elsie in the evening along the beach and round the 'salterns' and all God old oyster beds.

## May 25th to June 12th

**At sea patrolling North Atlantic**

## May 31st

**Action stations.** We were suddenly ordered to take up our station with the rest of the ships of the 10th Cruiser Squadron on the Eastern patrol, which is in the North Sea to the eastward of Orkney and Shetland. This was only to be done in the event of a general fleet engagement and everyone was therefore agog with excitement as to what was doing.

## June 1st

**News.** Proceeding at full speed to our station which is to the northward and eastward of the Faroes. A report of two German raiders being out, which kept everyone on the 'alert'.

## June 2<sup>nd</sup>

**Situation.** Into an arctic climate, a change after the lovely weather we have had of late. Steaming full speed in an equilateral triangle 60 mile sides. All the ships of the squadron now in position for intercepting enemy ships trying to get into the Atlantic. So far, no news as the meaning of these preparations.

## June 3rd

**Battle of Jutland.** The bombshell came. In a very garbled wireless message report we were told that a fleet action had been fought off Jutland on May 31st and that the 'Queen Mary', 'Invincible', 'Indomitable', 'Defence', 'Black Prince' and other ships had been sunk with great loss of life. The report did not say how the battle resulted. It merely recorded our losses - not even those to the Germans. I was greatly distressed. It looks as if everything had come against us and that we have had a nasty blow. Elsie's 33rd birthday. No more news of the raiders, which I conclude got away in the action as we were all spread in the NW SE line to intercept. *[note – the Battle of Jutland involved about 150 British and 100 German ships. There were significant losses on both sides but despite Britain losing more men and ship, it is generally considered to be a British victory.]*

## June 4th

**Anxious.** I myself, very sad and anxious for further news of the naval action but no wireless messages coming through. A very anxious time awaiting news with the greatest suspense for none readable by wireless.

## June 8th

**Loss of HMS 'Hampshire'.** Fine, cold and calm and some shocking news at last which only added to my anxiety. The report referred to the cruiser 'Hampshire' being sunk with great loss of life and also mentioned that Lord Kitchener was dead but did not mention how he was killed. *[note – the HMS Hampshire sunk after hitting a German mine on 5<sup>th</sup> June 1916 with the loss of 737 – only 12 survived. On board was Lord Kitchener who was on a diplomatic mission to Russia]*



*Kitchener in full dress uniform (July 1910)*

## June 9th

**News.** Met the 'Virginian' in the afternoon and at last we heard more news, which was bad enough, but reassuring. It was to the effect that Lord Kitchener had been lost in the 'Hampshire', sunk by mine or torpedo off the coast of Orkney. Also that the fleet action on the 31<sup>st</sup> although our losses were heavy, the German losses were as great or greater and said to be two battleships, two battlecruisers, two cruisers, two light cruises, nine destroyers and other small craft. They were also driven back to their harbour and it was an intense relief to know this, the agony of suspense of the last 10 days have been terrible. No further news of the raiders.

## June 12th to 14th

**Shetland to Coal**

## June 14th to 30th

**At sea patrolling North Atlantic**

## July 1st to 3rd

**At Shetland to coal**

## July 3rd to 18th

**At sea patrolling North Atlantic.** *[Note by editor (CST) - time at sea very clearly very dull with little to break the monotony. The entries for periods at sea are short and are of limited detail. The entry for the whole of this period is included as an example.]* Weighed



and proceeded to sea again at 10:30 PM and proceeded to C patrol on arriving on Wednesday and transferred 'Victorious' armed guard. No incidents of note to record for the next few days. The question of admitting the mercantile engineers into the wardroom, causing much bickering amongst the RNR officers. It is against principles of the merchant service but will have to be done under admiralty order. On Sunday 9<sup>th</sup> sent in Norwegian sailing barque 'Augerona' and US 'Polarine'. On Monday 10<sup>th</sup> sent in SS 'Vindagan' and 'Christian Michelson'. On Tuesday 11<sup>th</sup> a report was received of a German raider being at sea. Vice Admiral Tupper is to return from Glasgow in the 'Columbella', leaving the flagship 'Alsatian' at Liverpool. Our departure for Glasgow postponed much to everyone's disappointment and we were ordered to D patrol, the southernmost. Thick weather lately. Anxious about Elsie, as she expects me about 13<sup>th</sup>. No incidents and no more news of the raider. One gets rather sceptical about these reports, the cry of 'wolf' is so often raised. Sent SS 'Fiona' sent in. On Monday we at last received orders for Glasgow and reached Tory Island at 4:00 PM and the Maidens at 10:30 PM. Anchored Greenoch 4:00 AM and up the river with the tide and were safely secured in the afternoon. A very monotonous and weary 7 weeks.

## July 18th to 24th

At Glasgow to Coal

## July 19th to 23rd

**On leave at Hayling Island**

## July 24th to 10th August

**At sea patrolling North Atlantic**

## August 10th to 12th

**At shipment coal**

## August 12th to 27th

**At sea patrolling to north and east of Faroe Islands**

## August 12th

**Patrol.** To east and north of Faroes 'A' Patrol to look out for the German commercial submarine 'Deutschland', which is to perform great wonders in bringing more merchandise and valuables from the US.

## August 19th

**War News.** Wireless news reported the 'Deutschland' had been seen off the coast of Newfoundland. The submarine warfare appears to be getting intense and a large number of ships are being sunk. Zeppelin Raiders also becoming more frequent.

## August 20th

**Anniversary.** 2nd anniversary of the 'Mantua' leaving Tilbury.

## August 22nd

**War news.** News received by WT of the loss of the light cruisers 'Nottingham' and 'Falmouth' in the North Sea. They were both torpedoed. Presumably the fleet was out and the cruiser screen was attacked by German submarines. The loss of life was fortunately not great.

## August 25<sup>th</sup>

**Loss of 'Duke of Albany'.** Yesterday we received news of the sinking of the armed boarding steamer 'Duke of Albany' by submarine. Considerable loss of life was caused by a boat load of survivors being blown up by the ship's own depth charge. The safety pin was apparently 'out' and when the sinking stern reached the required depth (40 feet) the charge exploded.

## August 27th

**Arrival at Shetland - relief.** Admiral Faulkner had heard that my relief was coming but is not quite certain. I sincerely hope it is.

*[Note - There follows an article from the Daily Mail, July 26, 1916. About songs presumably referring to 'The mantua'.]*

## August 28th

**Relief.** After dinner the 'R Scot' came in and I learned that my relief Acting Captain Guy M Marston was onboard of her and so I rushed down to complete my packing, hoping to get away in her tomorrow, but when he arrived on board, I decided that it was impossible as there was so much for him to learn and take over. I was intensely delighted with his arrival as I have long felt anxiety and strain on the work and badly want a rest.

## August 30th

**Left HMS 'Mantua'.** The officers of the ship invited me to a farewell dinner, a great surprise. Unfortunately, Commander Vibert was unable to be present as he was seedy. They toasted my future in champagne and when I left the ship, I found the cutter manned by the officers waiting for me. As soon as we shoved off the officers of the

ship's company who had all been assembled gave me a hearty cheer, and I wished them 'God speed' from the boat. It was most gratifying to find that after all my efforts, I have not been misunderstood. I could not say, though, that I felt any pangs of regret at leaving her. It has been one uphill grind all through and a most difficult and tedious task to produce a well ordered and disciplined ship out of the material I had to contend with. This I felt I had accomplished, however, and with great satisfaction turned her over to Marston with a happy ship's company. The trip ashore in the cutter I shall never forget in the waning light the late summer, and the old ship in which I have spent so many turbulent and so few happy days gradually receding in the distance. Having made a short speech to the officers in the cutter on landing, I went to Bunta House [*note – possibly Busta House, a Hotel on Shetland*] shortly afterwards saw the lights of the ship as she returned to sea. The intense relief I experienced was something quite new.

## September 1st to 3rd

### Journey to Hayling Island

## September 2nd

**Zeppelins.** When we got to Dunfermline we had news of an expected Zeppelin raid tonight, a large number having been reported to have left Germany. The alarm did not cause me any inconvenience, although I was fearful for Elsie in London.

## September 3rd

Zeppelins - Arrival in London - Visit to Admiralty - Arrival home. In the early morning the attendant brought news that the Zeppelins had raided London at the one of them had been brought down. Although I was rather sceptical, as one hears so many yarns nowadays the news was confirmed later, much to the joy and satisfaction of all. We were considerably delayed in our arrival at Kings Cross no doubt owing to the raid and were two hours late. I found here, to my delight, my darling waiting for me at the barrier and we had a joyful meeting and I, very thankful that she had come by no hurt. She had had a poor time, having been kept awake by the electric trams, and just as she fell asleep the banging of guns all around, which naturally gave her great fright. This was about 2:00 AM, so she ran out into the corridor, hearing people stirring, and found everyone in excitement over the Zeppelins. Then there was some cheering which was taken up elsewhere, and she heard that some of the people in the Great Northern Hotel had seen it come down in flames. She was sorry and so as I that she had missed this remarkable sight, the first ever seen in the in this world in that plight. It appears that a 'Zep' came down at Chuffley, about 12 miles distant and was a mess of wreckage. She

was brought down by an aeroplane, a magnificent feat. Let us hope there will be many more. These inhuman devils deserve all they get for their hellish crimes. [note - Lieutenant William Leefe Robinson became the first pilot to shoot down a Zeppelin raider (a Schutte-Lanz airship SL-11) over Britain using new incendiary bullets. He was immediately acclaimed as a hero and awarded the Victoria Cross. The burning Zeppelin crashed in Hertfordshire but was seen for miles around]



Then to the Admiralty as I wanted to find out if I was to be employed at once. I saw the Naval Secretary to the First Lord, who told me that I could rest assured of some half pay. Apparently there is no dearth of Captains now. This news pleased us greatly, for I am badly in need of a rest. On arrival at Havant Station there was no train to Hayling, so we hired a taxi and on pulling up at Heath Cottage my little men, Terence and Nigel, came out to greet me and my heart overflowing with joy and the relief of being home again without the haunting telegrams to call me back. T and N very well and the children seemed more lusty I thought and had grown, so Hayling air agrees with them.

## On leave on half pay

### September 12th

**News of 'Mantua'.** I have news that the 'Mantua' is to pay off and have a thorough refit. This is necessary owing to the parlous condition of her bottom, through bumping the rock in April last year. Apparently the constructive officials were horrified that she had been suffered to go to sea all last winter in such a state! I am thankful I was in ignorance

of the extent of this defect, although I used to feel uneasy at her shakings and tremblings in heavy weather.

## September 17<sup>th</sup>

**Terrence's birthday.** My dear little boy's 6<sup>th</sup> birthday and he had many toys and books. For tea he had his birthday cake with 6 candles on it which caused great amusement.

## September 25<sup>th</sup>

**Zeppelins.** We had just gone to bed about 11:15 PM tonight when a terrific gunfire began. On jumping out of bed, I was startled to observe a Zeppelin in the sky over Portsmouth, splendidly held by searchlights and the guns blazing away furiously. Elsie and I both watched it horribly fascinated. Shells were bursting, pyrotechnical lights burning and searchlights, a wonderful sight and very exciting. Unhappily, none of the shells appeared anywhere near it, but we did not hear any detonations such as bombs would occasion. It looked like golden pencil in starlit sky and must have been quite 10,000 feet high. It was in view for, I should think, quite quarter of an hour, and then gradually faded away as it got out of range of the search lights and went off in the direction of Guildford. Fortunately, the children slept peacefully through it. I was very unhappy that these murderous machines should have found their way here. I was hoping that this was immune being so far away. This visit is, I imagine, a test to see what the defences are like, whether an attack on Portsmouth is feasible.

## September 26<sup>th</sup>

**Zeppelin.** The talk everywhere this morning about the Zeppelin. I could hear of no damage at Portsmouth, and no bombs seem to have been dropped which is a comfort. Two of them were brought down in Essex on Sunday night, one intact, a great satisfaction.

## October 2<sup>nd</sup>

**Zeppelin.** We heard the news that another Zeppelin had been brought down in London last night. This is the fourth lately, which is good and shows that our air defences have improved.

## October 25<sup>th</sup>

**Romania.** Startling and depressing news about Romania. The Germans have broken through their lines and it seems only a matter of time before that hapless country is invaded and despoiled like Belgium and Serbia have been. *[note – this refers to the Second Battle of Cobadin, in which the Central Powers led by the Bulgarian Army defeated the Romanians, allowing them to attack Bucharest on 23/11/1916]*



## October 27th

**More news.** The war news very disappointing. Many ships sunk by submarines, which is becoming a serious matter. Romania's fate, more less sealed. All rather depressing.

## November 3rd

**Appointment.** Just after I had had tea and was reading to the children, and all as happy as could be, came the 'bolt from the blue', which I had been daily expecting. A telegram from the Admiralty to report myself forthwith for appointment to a ship. Our happiness was turned to consternation, which was enhanced by poor little Terrence crying at the prospect of my going away. As I had no idea what the appointments to be, I was in rather a state of mind and Elsie too. I had visions of having to go abroad and my anxiety was great.

## November 4<sup>th</sup>

**Admiralty.** Elsie and me to London, both of us full of hopes and fears. On my arrival at the Admiralty I was informed that they had been trying to find me since the 25th of October to take up an appointment to the battleship 'Albion'. Through some muddle in the office they had lost my address and had been telegraphing to the US Club, which I resigned nearly three years ago! There was no excuse as they had my address and they acknowledged the faults as their's. My feeling of relief was intense when I heard that I had not got to go abroad and that the 'Albion' was stationed in the Humber. I hastened to tell Elsie of this, she had been anxiously awaiting news at the entrance porch, and was as much relieved as I was. I have to join her as soon as possible though I decided to go on Monday (6<sup>th</sup>).

## HMS Albion

## November 6<sup>th</sup>

**Captain Powlett.** Arrived at Grimsby at 7:30 PM. I was met at the station by Captain FA Powlett whom I am relieving, and he goes as the flag Captain to Admiral Stuart Nicholson at Immingham. *[note – Frederick Armand Powlett is the grandfather of Hugh Powlett, who married Jane Ainger (nee Tibbits) the granddaughter of the author]*

## November 7th

**Joined HMS Albion - Terrence to school.** The 'Albion' was in the Dardanelles operation and bears many scars. She is now here for the protection of the Humber and incidentally to repel Zeppelins. Terrence went to school today for the first time. He will only go for an hour or so daily and learns the lightest of things as he seemed so advanced in knowledge that he must be kept back a little.

## November 8<sup>th</sup>

**Depressing times.** Ashore in the afternoon for shopping and to make inquiries about furnished houses in the event of E and the children being able to come here. There is a great deal against it though, Zeppelin raids, difficulty getting ashore, shifting house, travelling being so difficult these days and Grimsby is such a very gloom place even in the summer whilst now owing to the severe lighting restrictions it is depressing in the extreme. My spirits were not of the highest order this evening with the prospect of a winter here and everything was most dismal. Newspaper boys too, shouting for the loss of another large P&O ship through a German submarine made me feel very sad.



*[note – this refers to the sinking of RMS Arabia on 6/11/1916 in the Mediterranean]*

## November 22nd

**War news.** News from Romania very bad, the Germans advancing so that it would appear as if the whole of the country will soon be in their hands. We also had the depressing news that the 'Britannic', a large hospital ship, had been sunk by mine or torpedo in Mediterranean.

*[note – the Britannic was the sister ship of the Titanic and was the largest to be sunk in WW1. On board was a nurse, Violet Jessop who had also survived the sinking of Titanic 4 years earlier!]*



## November 27th

**Zeppelin raid.** In the evening a Zeppelin alarm. Prepared for their reception. There were about five of them reported. A very cold night with the stars shining. None came near us, but I saw one for about 10 minutes or so in the searchlights and we heard



detonations, whether from guns or from bombs I do not know. But I saw shells bursting near her and she then sheared off.

## November 28th

**Two Zeppelins destroyed.** In the morning we heard to our great satisfaction that two Zeppelins have been brought down and lost with their entire crews. Both fell into the sea, a mass of flames and I have no doubt that the peculiar sight I saw last night was one falling off the Durham coast. The damage they did in this raid was said to be small. *[note - Zeppelin L34, a German airship, was shot down by British fighter pilot Second Lieutenant Ian Pyott off the coast of Hartlepool]*

## December 1st

**War news.** Germans only 15 miles from Bucharest and the situation generally bad.

## December 3rd

**War news.** Everyone very depressed - the government in a state of chaos, a serious crisis. Greece and Romania doomed to say nothing of stagnation on our fronts and the submarine depredations. I believe one of the chief causes of our failures to have been the fatal optimism which took hold upon the people and was preached by ministers and others ever since the war began. It does not seem as if anyone has yet grasped the seriousness of it all, or realise that we can only 'win' victory. The government has done hardly anything until it has been pushed along by public opinion. Now a feeling of relief exists with the prospect of general change.

## December 5<sup>th</sup>

**The Government.** Everyone discussing the state of the government of this country. At last Asquith has gone, driven out by public opinion, and he ought to have done so long ago.

## December 7th

**Lloyd George.** Lloyd George made Premier and confident somewhat restored and people more hopeful that things will improve under new guidance.

## December 8<sup>th</sup>

**Cleethorpes.** Elsie and I to Cleethorpes to see if any possibilities regarding houses there, but we both agreed that it was a most depressing place. In the summer it is full of trippers and the switchbacks etc have a particularly forlorn appearance at this season at the best of times. Now the war has reached its third year, the scene is pathetic. We saw the remains of a Chapel on the front where a bomb dropped and blew the place to

atoms. There was great loss of life as a number of soldiers had unfortunately been quartered there that night. We decided that Cleethorpes would be the very last place to live in.



*[note – the Baptist Chapel in Cleethorpes was hit by a bomb dropped by a Zeppelin on 1/4/1916 killing 32 soldiers of the Manchester Regiment]*

## December 12th

**Peace proposals.** Talk of peace proposals being initiated but it does not look as if anything will come of them and it is to be hoped not.

## December 15<sup>th</sup>

**Appointment to HMS ‘Cyclops’.** I received a shock this morning. The Chief Yeoman of Signals read a message to say that I was to join ‘Cyclops’ forthwith as soon as relieved. Captain the Honourable Stanhope Hawk is appointed in my stead. I was very much upset in receiving this appointment which is not what I wanted, however it cannot be helped. All our ideas of taking a house here cast to the wind. I wired to Elsie to ask her to come if possible this weekend and she said she would and seemed pleased with the appointment which heartened me a little.

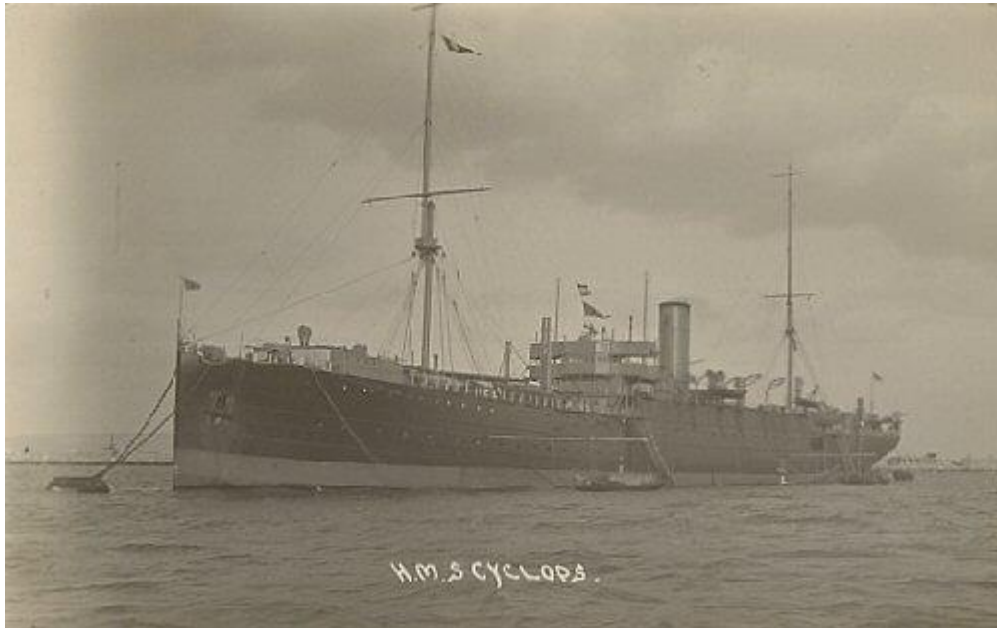
## December 16th

**left HMS Albion.** Hawke arrived by 2:00 PM train and I met him at the station and on getting on board we turned over confidential books etc and I packed up my things. I left her with not many regrets for I have had a dull time in her.

## December 18th to 20th

**Travel to Scapa, Orkney.**

## HMS Cyclops



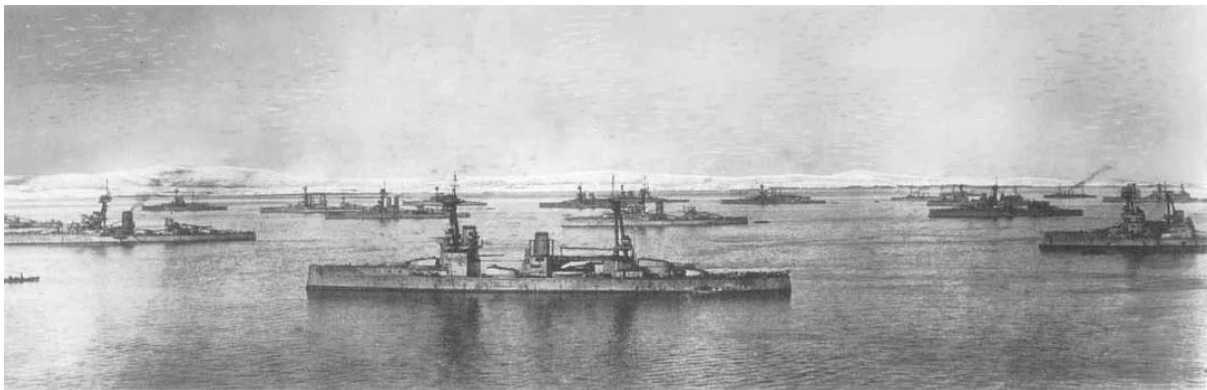
### December 20th

**Joined HMS Cyclops.** When I awoke this morning, we were entering Longhope, St Ninian having left Scrabster about 6:15. On arrival alongside the hulk 'Imperious' (late 'Fishguard' at Portsmouth) I found a boat to take me to 'Cyclops' which is moored quite close. I was less impressed with my prospects in the 'Cyclops' than ever when I got onboard. I found that Rear Admiral Prendergast, who is accommodated onboard and who has the immediate control of dockyard work carried out by the 'Victorious' (dockyard ship) had taken over from Farrington, my cabin under the bridge. He is at present on leave, but I am to mess with him and his secretary and am relegated a small cabin below, which is alongside a noisy passage, has machines underneath and people walk up and down all day overhead. The 'Cyclops' is nominally a repair ship, but has since become a general emporium for everything in connection with the Grand Fleet and base. My work I can see is to be very onerous as well as thankless. The control of about 85 Drifters, motor vessels and other small craft comes upon me, as well as the general work of the base, to say nothing of the repair work of the fleet and numberless other craft appertaining there such as colliers, oilers, tugs, puffers, lighters, etc. Longhope is crammed with ships, the 'Cyclops' (the centre of all things), 'Imperious' (depot hulk), 'Victorious' (dockyard ship), 'Zaria' (depot ship for trawlers employed on minesweeping), 'Ruthenca' (store ship) and 'Assistance' (repair ship) are the principal. Then there are ammunition ships, battle practise targets, hospital ships and myriad of small craft. The Grand Fleet is at present in the Flow with its attending minesweeping flotilla. Gunther Sound full of destroyers and the western side of the Flow full of oilers and colliers. Such an accumulation of vessels has, I'm sure, never been brought together before. The 'Cyclops' is the centre of intelligence and all important WT passing

through us for the fleet, in addition to which the landward telegraph is installed onboard with Post Office Men and all telegrams, both on public service and private are transmitted. They amount to tens of thousands every month. The press messages are received 3 or 4 times daily and all important news sent through direct from Admiralty and so we have the advantage (if it is an advantage) to all the latest news first hand and frequently a few minutes after its happening.

## December 22nd

**Cyclops.** I had a walk round the ship and found her very dirty, but this is not to be wondered at considering the traffic and the smoke, oil and grime from the machine shops, foundry, etc, for she is nothing more than a factory and is very ill ventilated and ill lighted one too.



*The Grand Fleet at Scapa Flow, Orkney. About 1916. In the foreground is Neptune, with (left to right) Thunderer, Royal Sovereign, Canada, Erin, Royal Oak, Iron Duke, Orion, Marlborough, Australia, Monarch, St Vincent and New Zealand.*

## December 24th

**Church.** Church in the Smithery, a cold and somewhat dismal place for such purpose, with its incongruous surroundings, appearances of Vulcan. I was not edified.

## December 25<sup>th</sup>

**Christmas Day.** I cannot say I felt very cheerful, although not unhappy, and I'm getting into the swing of work. We had carols and service in the Smithery in the forenoon, but a very dull affair. The chaplain seemed to pick out the most obscured carols, which nobody knew so as to be able to sing them to us. It was very cold too, and wet, and there was a lack of heartiness, perhaps our thoughts wondered home, mine most certainly did and the completion of this terrible war, and this is its third Christmas, hangs over us. One wonders how many more we shall see before it is over.

## December 26<sup>th</sup>

**Peace.** Germany putting out feelers for peace, all propositions, of course, to be to her advantage. A certain amount of irritation caused by President Wilson issuing a 'note' upon the subject.



*[note - in December 1916, President Wilson, seeking to end World War I, sent a note to all warring nations asking them to state their war objectives. He also offered to mediate the conflict. The Allies responded with what he considered overly ambitious aims whilst Germany and the Central Powers rejected his proposal.]*

## December 31<sup>st</sup>

**New Year's Eve.** The year 1916 has not brought us any nearer the end of the war, but one lives in hope that 1917 will bring better things. The home affairs seem to be the worst feature. The late government was too bad for words and it remains to be seen how much better the coalition will prove to be. There are many misgivings, but one feels that we must pull through if only we stick to our purpose.