

# 1914

## HMS Ariadne

### January 1st

**Promotion.** The red letter day of my life. **Promoted to Captain.** I turned out and looked at the papers, but found to my surprise that the list was not in them. The Daily Express and Daily Mirror. I therefore concluded that it had not been published and, as I reckoned that had they been out, I should have had a wire or some communication if I had been included. I told Elsie, and we were quite resigned. Imagine our feelings when, soon after sitting down to breakfast, two telegrams were brought in together, one from my brother Oliver and the other from Engineer Commander Sisly of 'Argonaut', both congratulating me on my promotion! It seemed too good to be true, but I flew out and bought the Morning Post and there, sure enough, was my name heading the list. There were 20 selected and so I must have had a very tight squeeze. Next to me was Warleigh who also lives in Whitehall Rd and so we were able to mutually congratulate ourselves. Elsie was overjoyed, as was I but I think even more so as she felt my previous disappointments very much. Telegrams continued to pour in all day, letters and notes and wherever we went, congratulations. What a reaction it is to my feelings of the last six months, only those who have been through this trial can know. A great load seems to have been lifted from me and things assume an entirely different aspect. Onboard 'Spartiate' I found telegrams by the dozen and I received quite an ovation from the officers of the 'Argonaut' alongside. It was a great day! Elsie lunched with Grannie at Lee on the Solent and I took sidecar round and brought her back, having tea there. They were delighted with the news which they never expected. To bed tonight very much happier than for the last year or more! Resigned my membership of the United Service Club today, as I find it of little use, being so seldom in town.

### January 9th

**Appointment.** Just upon my stepping ashore, I opened the despatch box and to my intense astonishment found my appointment to HMS Indus, mechanical training establishment at Devonport. Although this means going away almost at once, it is a very pleasant surprise, as I have finally made-up my mind that I should be placed on half pay for six months or more, which is the usual procedure. The 'Indus' being a harbour ship, I shall be able to have the family with me, and I suppose the appointment is for two years. I tore off and informed Elsie who is in the dentists at the time and was naturally much astonished and pleased.

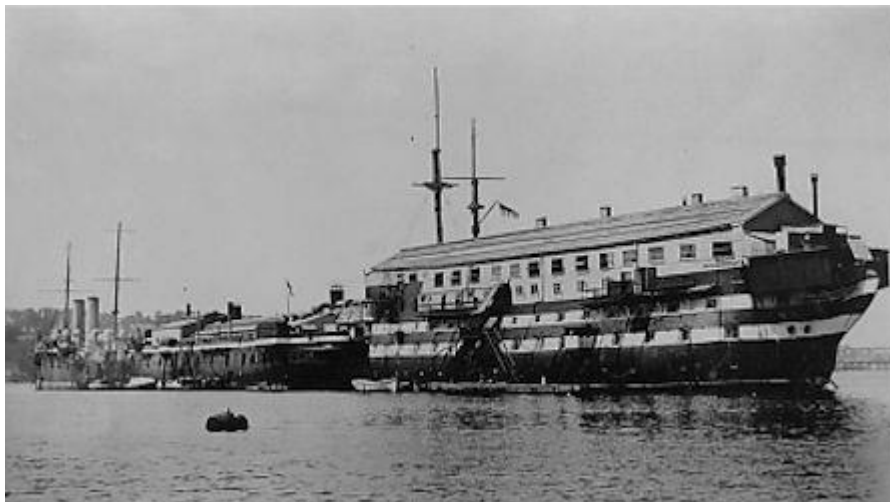
January 12

Left HMS Ariadne

## HMS Indus

January 14

Joined HMS Indus. The establishment consists of five ships converted into workshops, with the exception of the old wooden line of battle ship, formerly HMS Ganges, which is entirely set apart as living quarters for about 320 boy artificers under training [*In the Royal Navy in 1914, a "Boy Artificer" was a young sailor who was undergoing training to become a skilled mechanic or engineer, often in the engine room*]. The others are the old 'Temeraire' (ironclad), formerly rigged as a 'brig', and the forerunner of the barbette ship, the old 'Bellerophon', in which I served as Midshipman 1887 to 1890, the 'Triumph' and 'Defence' (ironclads). In addition to the boy artificers, there are a number of acting Leading Stoker's going through a course (about 150), supernumerary engine room and artisan ratings and ship's company, in all about 1000 men. The establishment has grown so much that it has been made a Captain's Command, and it is most a interesting as well as a very pleasant billet. My accommodation is in the 'Temeraire' and I have married quarters. Whether they will be used as such remains to be seen, but there is constant vibration from the powerful dynamos and other plant which is a serious drawback, as well as a flying bridge to the old 'Ganges' overhead which is in constant use by the boy artificers.



*Behind the "Indus II" came HMS "Indus III", formerly HMS "Bellerophon" and finally HMS "Indus V", formerly HMS "Tenedos III" and before that HMS "Ganges". From a postcard by Abrahams of Devonport.*

*(<http://www.olddevonport.uk/Royal%20Navy%20in%20Old%20Devonport-Training%20Ships-HMS%20Indus.htm>)*

## January 16th

**Loss of submarine A7.** When I returned to the ship I heard the terrible news of another submarine disaster (A7) in Whitsand Bay. She was carrying out manoeuvres this afternoon and failed to rise to the surface. She had two officers and nine men on board. Their death must have been too terrible to think about, for it is a question as to how long they could have remained alive after she sank. I was very much upset when I heard that Sub Lieutenant Morrison, who was a Midshipman with me in 'Foresight', was one of the victims. He was a good sportsman and a promising young officer.



*HMS A7*

## January 23rd

**Quarters.** Preparing the quarters for the family as Elsie intends to try living on board to see whether it is possible.

## February 7th

**Family onboard.** Having completed all the arrangements, we left the house for Devonport. The party consisted of Elsie and myself, Terrence and Nigel, Lily Hillier (nurse), and Francine Le Penne (maid). We travelled by the 10.05 AM train from Fratton. Terrence was very much interested in the journey and Nigel cut his first tooth when we were nearing Exeter. I was very glad when we were all safely onboard and comfortably settled. It seems as if the quarters will be satisfactory.

## February 26th

**First hint of war.** To the War College too attend a depressing lecture on the probabilities etc of war with Germany and our policy.

## March 24th

**The children.** As on Monday with my little Terrence to help me occasionally. He is such a sweet child and his disposition is extraordinary and he seems to attract especial notice of all. So far the life on board seems to suit Terence and baby very well and they are much better than at Southsea. Elsie also likes her new mode of life.

## April 29th

**The children.** Took little Terrence to North Road Station to meet Elsie. Both he and I were bitterly disappointed when she did not arrive, but to our surprise she turned up at Devonport station and the little fellow was delighted to see her again. Nigel continues to grow into a sweet child and 'Indus' seems to agree with him.

## May 12th

**German menace.** Captain Robert Benson, Inspecting Captain Mechanical of Training Establishments, came on his monthly visit and had lunch with us and was most interesting about the future of this country. He was very pessimistic, especially as regards the German menace, but I did not quite agree.

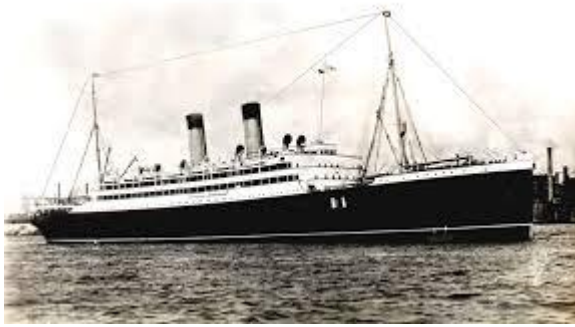
## May 26

**Nigel's birthday.** Nigel's first birthday - a dear bonny little boy - troubled now with his teeth. He had a cake with one candle to celebrate the event.

## May 29th

**Disaster.** News received of a terrible disaster in the Gulf of Saint Lawrence. The SS Empress of Ireland lost with many lives. It is almost as bad as the Titanic.

*[note - the Empress of Ireland was a British-built ocean liner that tragically sank in the Saint Lawrence River, Canada, in 1914 after colliding with the Norwegian collier SS Storstad in thick fog. The ship sank in about 14 minutes and resulted in a devastating loss of life, claiming 1,012 out of the 1,477 people on board.]*



*SS Empress of Ireland.*

## June 7th

**Terrence.** Little Terrence came to church today. He behaved so well and took a mighty interest in the proceedings. This child becomes more lovable every day. In fact, everyone seems of the opinion that he is the sweetest child they have ever seen.

## June 13th

**Driving.** When returning from Tavistock, I was for the first time stopped by a policeman who demanded my licence. To my astonishment and chagrin, I found that my driver's licence had expired on the 14th of April and that I was driving 'without a licence'. The policeman duly took my name and address and I expect to hear more.

## July 1st

**Fine.** As a result of my driving my motor bicycle without a licence, I was fined 1 shilling and sixpence and eight shillings and sixpence costs (10 shillings in all) [*note – approximately £30 now*]. The offence was considered purely technical. A solicitor of the AA conducted my defence.

## July 11th to 29th

**On leave**

## July 27th

**War cloud.** A heavy cloud appearing over the affairs of Europe. Much friction between Austria and Serbia, a matter of great concern to all European countries in case of their coming to blows. Considerable apprehension seems rife in diplomatic circles.

## July 28th

**Ominous news.** I feel felt very uneasy about the news and wanted to get a paper. The latest this morning is anything but reassuring. Russia is getting uneasy at Austria's attitude and Germany is apparently backing up Austria. Sir Edward Grey [*note – Grey was Foreign Secretary at the start of the war and convinced the Government of its*

*obligation to defend France]* tried hard by diplomacy to prevent a rupture and a certain amount of hope expressed that he will succeed, but I never remember things looking blacker.

## July 29th

**Austria at war with Serbia.** When we got back, I was informed of the startling news that Austria had declared war on Serbia. The consequences of this act is, everyone feels, bound to be terrible. My mind is made-up that it will set ablaze all Europe. We could not help feeling very depressed at this state of affairs – although, according to the papers there is a ray of hope.

## July 30th

**Back to 'Indus' / preparations for war.** Ordered to return to 'Indus' at once! This looked like business and only served to confirm my fears. Dear Elsie agreed to come with me and I had a sad heart as I said goodbye, especially to my little Terrence, who was happily oblivious of my farewell. Nigel also, for he was fast asleep. I feel that it may be years before I see my little ones again, for I am certain that the war we have been expecting for so long is now upon us. Elsie and I had a very tedious and depressing journey to Devonport, the train full of soldiers and sailors recalled. The depression onboard 'Indus' baffles any description of mine. Some of the officers have already taken up War Appointments and the greater part of the ship's company have been sent for draft. Pipey and I very sad for here our quarters, freshly painted, new carpets, etc. and I feel certain that it's only a matter of hours before the 'Indus', at any rate where we have such brief but happy days, will finish.

## July 31st

**General suspense.** Russia, Germany and France mobilising their armies and navies. The suspense as to what our part will be in this terrible affair is terrific. Officers and men continued to leave 'Indus' and ships in Devonport are being filled up and sent off as quickly as possible. The extraordinary thing is that our fleet was not demobilised after the recent exercises and so they are more ready than has been the case for years, in fact, we have never had such a tremendous array of force afloat at such a critical time. We started to pack up today, a very big business with all our household goods. In the afternoon, in spite of the rain, Elsie and I plodded up to the field, which looked as melancholy as the ship. My garden gave me the cruellest pang of all. There were potatoes, marrows of huge size, and all the fruits of the earth in profusion, and all my labour in vain. The anxiety and awful feelings amongst everyone as to what is to happen is terrible to see.

## August 1st

**Mobilise.** Packing hard. In the afternoon, what I expected happened – the order to ‘mobilise’. This means that the ‘Indus’ shuts down as soon as possible. The reserves are all called out. Another day of appalling depression. Even now there are people who say that war will be averted at the last minute, but Germany now seems determined, which seems to settle it.

## August 2nd

**News.** Rumours current that Germany and France are already at war. Everyone was morally certain that war cannot be avoided. The Germans reported to have invaded Luxembourg and marching on Belgium.

## August 3rd

**Fleet ready.** Finished packing and getting things ashore. Nearly all the officers gone and only a few men left and they are being rapidly relieved by pensioners. The mobilisation of the Navy has been carried out in a wonderfully quiet manner and the fleet is already in its war station. Everyone anxiously awaiting news as to what this country is going to do. France and Russia already showing signs of impatience as to whether we are going to support our principle ‘the entente’. ‘Indus’ depression itself. Really, it seems as if one cannot live through these fearful days of suspense.

## August 4th

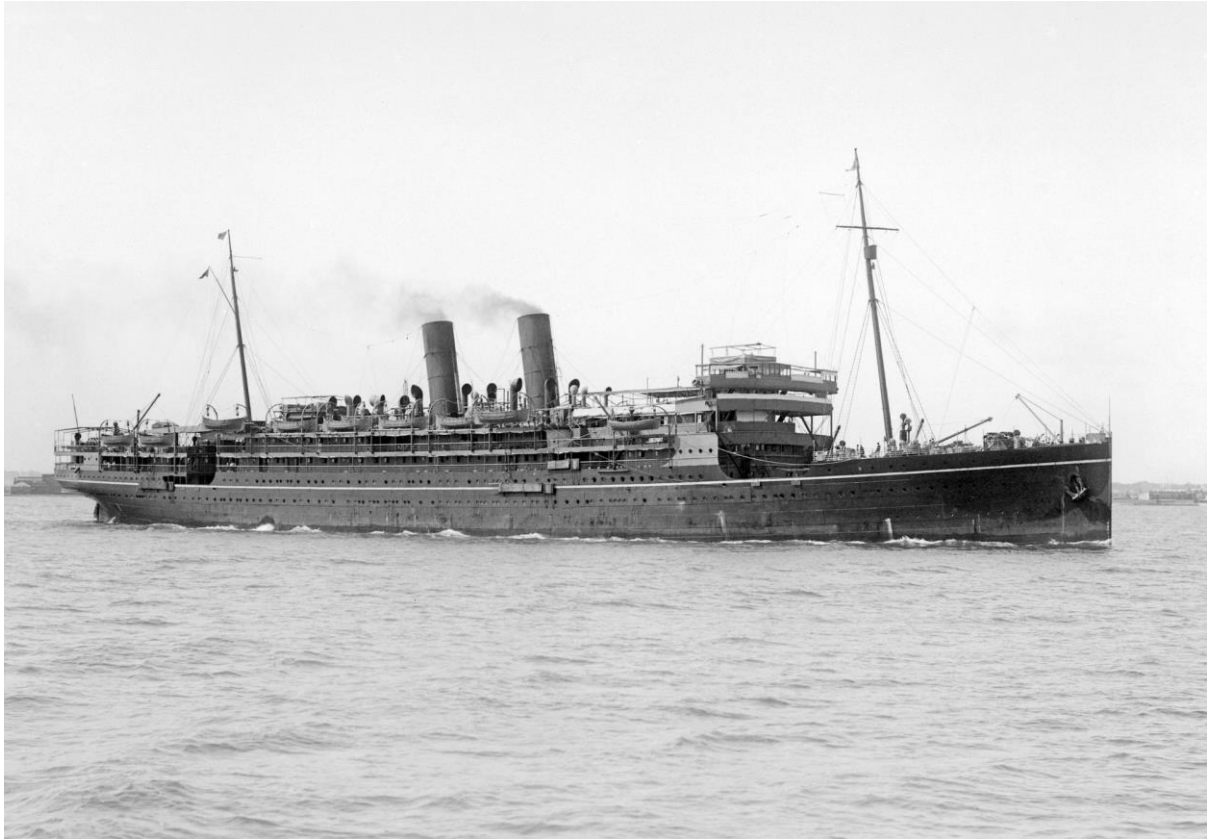
**Left HMS Indus.** The boy artificers left at 6:00 this morning for the Fisguard at Portsmouth. By noon the old ‘Indus’ was practically finished with, and I reported closed down to the Commander-in-chief. Ships continued to be taken out the dockyard and off to sea. The harbour has for some nights, been under war defence and the talk is of nothing but war. Pipey and I to the Regal Hotel, Plymouth where I have told them I would be in case of news for me, for I am now in suspense as to what my war appointment is to be. I had not long to wait, for I found a telegram there directing me to take command of the P&O SS Mantua at Tilbury, which is to be converted into an armed merchant cruiser. I am considerably relieved in many ways at receiving this intelligence as I now know my fate, and I was glad to be taking an active part in the operations. Elsie and I returned to the ‘Indus’ and finished off the remainder of my packing. The old ship was too dreadfully depressing for words, only the Fleet Paymaster left, and no men in her. We went to the Royal at Devonport for the night and left the old ‘Indus’ with many a pang. Germany has now violated the neutrality of Belgium, which this country guarantees. It is therefore only a matter of hours before we declare war.

## August 5th

**Declaration of war.** War declared midnight between Great Britain and Germany. The situation is now Russia, France and Great Britain against Germany and Russia also against Austria. It seems only a matter of time before Belgium goes with the Triple Entente and the Triple Entente goes against Austria also. So at last the fearful upheaval which so many of us have been expecting is now an accomplished fact. Curiously enough, one has a feeling of intense relief to know the worst at last. The foregoing few days have been the most awful black days I remember. Expectations seem worse than reality, and there are many redeeming points. We are not taking on Germany single handed and contrary to their expectations and ours, they were not able to choose their own time to strike. Our Navy was never more ready and they are surrounded by enemies. We have absolutely absolute right on our side and are fighting to free Europe from the intolerable burden Germany has been for years. All looks hopeful for us and we have to go through with it to the last or Germany will predominate Europe and destroy all ideals of freedom. Pipey and I travelled to London by Riviera Express. On the journey we saw the White Horse on the Downs where only a short week ago we had our delightful picnic and there under it are my two little darling boys, happily ignorant of this frightful crisis. They remain at Alton Barnes until I can see what the developments will be. We arrived at Tilbury at 7:30 and my feelings were very much relieved when I heard that the 'Mantua' would not be ready for a week or more, so I shall have my Elsie with me for a few days yet.



## HMS Mantua



### August 6th to 7th

**Joined HMS Mantua.** Onboard 'Mantua' in the forenoon. She is a fine ship a P&O mail ship and will carry eight 4.7 inch guns. Very busy during the remainder of the week with incessant telegrams, orders, officers joining etc. We have a reserve crew of seamen and marines and I have to enter my own engine room complement. There is one lieutenant commander allowed (Peaty) and a gunner (T), the other officers are RNR, and the Master of the Ship, Captain Vibert, also remains.

### August 9th to 15th

**Preparations.** The remainder of the week to the ship all day. Although everyone is fearfully busy there [*note - at the Admiralty*] they seem very calm. So far events have not developed much except in favour of the Allies. Belgium has made a marvellous resistance around Liege and holds the German advance in check. The huge German and French armies are massed on the frontier - small success on the French side - whilst Russia is steadily massing on the Eastern front. At sea the 'Amphion' has been lost through striking a mine with 130 lives. The minelayer was sunk. A German submarine has been sunk by the 'Birmingham', enemy merchant vessels in large numbers have been captured, in fact, German commerce has disappeared from the seas. The German fleet remains in harbour watched by the full strength of ours and

their newest ship, the 'Groben' and the cruiser 'Breslau' have taken refuge in the Dardanelles. Although things look favourable enough at present, one cannot forecast developments of the future and it would seem that the war has hardly begun. There must be appalling losses on both sides before long, and we can only trust in God to defend the right. There is no doubt that for the marvellously heroic defence of Belgium things would already have assumed a different aspect, for the German programme is already 12 days late and they are working against time, for the Russian advanced must begin soon. A very happy week with my dear Elsie, who, like all women in times of stress, is as brave as can be, and we are buoyed up with the hope that this terrible catastrophe, which has been the burden of my mind for years, will soon be decisively settled.

### August 16th

**HMS Mantua commissioned.** I expect to leave on Tuesday next. A quiet day with Elsie in my cabin writing up this book etc. No further news today, but a huge conflict of the prodigious armies expected at any moment.

### August 17th to 19th

**At Tilbury.** To 'Mantua' most of the day. Our last evening at the Tilbury Hotel where we have had a very happy time. Elsie leaves tomorrow for Alton Barnes and the children and I for the sea, destination a secret. We look forward to joyous meeting before long! Things seem to be going favourably for us against barbarous, Germany.

God save us all and defend our righteous cause and give us a lasting peace.

Signed            C Tibbits            19th August 1914            HMS Mantua at Tilbury Docks

Note - Since the foregoing was written over two years has elapsed (September 26th, 1916) and many terrible things have happened. But personally, I have reason to be thankful for I have served two years from one month in the 'Mantua' through many vicissitudes and have been so far spared and am now awaiting another appointment on half pay having left 'Mantua' on being relieved on 30th of August last. Diaries being prohibited, this book has been left in abeyance but I hope to write it up from notes made during my half pay time (Heath Cottage, South Hayling Island) September 26th, 1916.

### August 20th

**HMS Mantua - to sea.** After farewells to my dear Elsie, whom I saw away in the train for Alton Barnes, to the ship by 9:00 AM. At 9:30 she was taken out of dock amidst tragic scenes from the men's relations on the dockside. The 'Mantua' prior to being 'taken up' by the Admiralty had been employed in Norway on yacht cruises. Some of the officers, including the Master (Commander FW Vibert CB RNR) remain in the ship. The rest are

RNR officers drawn from different steamship lines. Besides myself, there are only two other RN officers, the first lieutenant, Claude C Peaty (retired some years ago) and a gunner. The ship formerly had a lascar crew and the difficulties in the engine room with entirely new staff of 'firemen' of the most nondescript kind and utterly unused to discipline will be very great. The ship's company too consists of fishermen, fleet reserve men, volunteers and other weird ratings, as well as many ex P&O men and so I can see that I have plenty of worries and troubles before me, especially as this type of ship is totally unsuited for a man of war. The men are presently occupying the passengers' cabins and there is nothing laid down as regards pay, messing etc. All very confusing but it will shape itself as time goes on. On going down the channel we met one of our battle squadrons, otherwise, no indication of war.

## August 20th to 24th

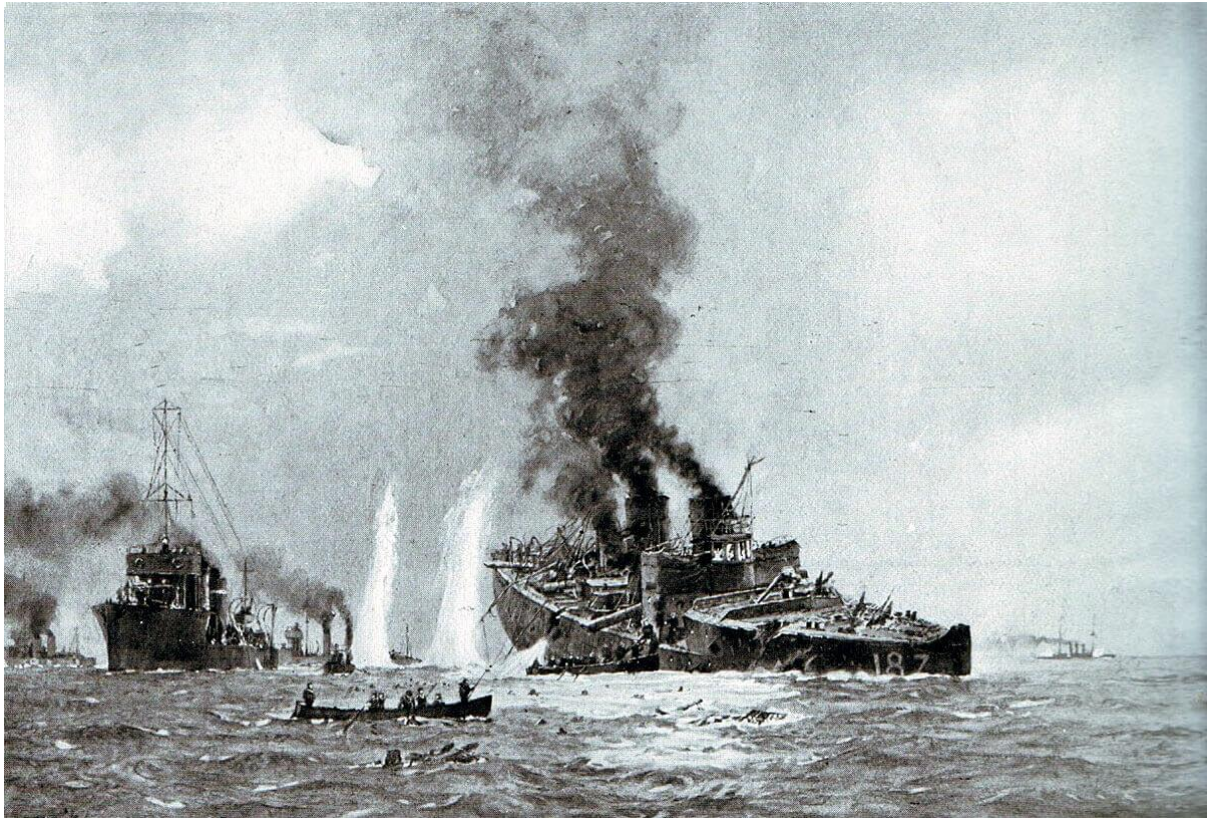
### **Passage to Scapa Flow and Lerwick**

## August 25th to September 9th

### **At sea patrolling Fair Isle Channel**

## August 28th

**Heligoland Bight action.** In the afternoon we intercepted messages pointing to an action in the North Sea. One of them was "well done" and "splendid", which was very comforting. This turned out to have been the Heligoland Bight action, in which the Germans lost some light cruisers and destroyers, and our ships have acquitted themselves excellently. *[note – this was the first action involving German and British naval forces of WWI.]*



*German destroyer V187 sinking during the Battle of Heligoland Bight on 28th August 1914 in the First World War*

## September 3rd

**Bad war news.** The WT Press news was particularly depressing. The Germans have overrun Belgium and have been committing unheard of atrocities and ravaging the country and they are now advancing on Paris. *[note – in August 1914, German troops executed thousands of civilians and burned down hundreds of villages in Belgium and France. The atrocities were widely publicised in Britain and used as a propaganda tool.]* The French and our expeditionary force are retreating before the terrific onslaught and nothing, apparently, can stop them. Paris preparing for a siege. Everything looks gloomy in the extreme.

## September 8th

**News.** The news continues to be most distressing. We have retreated almost into Paris and have had terrific rearguard actions with the enemy. Our army has suffered fearfully but put up a splendid fight at Mons but the cost has been terrible.

*[The Battle of Mons, fought on August 22-23, 1914, saw the British Expeditionary Force (BEF) initially repulse a German attack near Mons, Belgium, but ultimately be forced into a retreat. This was followed by a significant British retreat, known as the Great Retreat, which lasted from late August to early September and involved the BEF moving*

*from Mons to the River Marne in France. The Battle of the Marne in early September 1914 stopped the German advance.]*

## September 9th to 15<sup>th</sup>

**At Liverpool to coal**

## September 10th

**Elsie.** In the evening, to Lime Street Station to meet my darling Elsie who arrived looking tired after her tedious journey from Alton Barnes but otherwise well and bringing good tidings to the children. We were overjoyed at meeting again so soon and so unexpectedly. I had quite made up my mind when we parted at Tilbury only three weeks ago that it might be years before we meet again.

## September 14th

**Western Front.** News received today that the Germans are in full retreat after their tremendous advance on Paris and everyone jubilant. No one seems to understand this extraordinary sudden change, but it is very evident that something has gone wrong with their calculations. The fearful suspense of the past two weeks is now much relieved. *[note – The Battle of Marne (5-12/9/1914) or The Miracle of Marne, as it is known in France, stopped the German advance 40 miles from Paris. The Germans were pushed back about 75 miles with the loss of 250,000 French and 300,000 German lives.]*



*German soldiers (wearing distinctive pickelhaube helmets with cloth covers) on the front line at the First Battle of the Marne.*

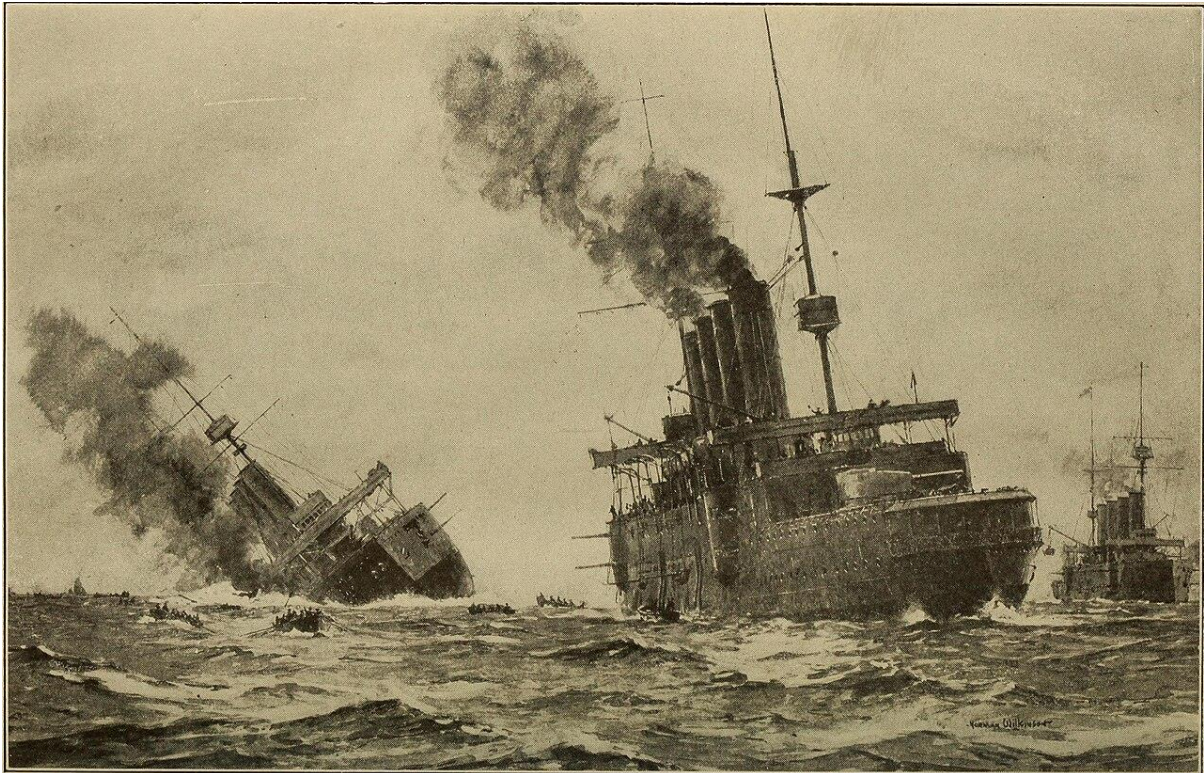
## September 14th to October 1st

### **At sea on patrol in the North Sea**

## September 25th

**Loss of HMS Aboukir, HMS Cressy and HMS Hogue.** A fearful shock to hear the awful news of the loss of our three cruisers, 'Aboukir', 'Cressy' and 'Hogue', all torpedoed by the same submarine [note – this was the first successful attack by German submarines (U9) on British ships sinking all three in just under 1.5 hours and with the loss of about 1500 sailors]. Each ship in going to the assistance of the other, was sunk with terrible loss of life. The result is that in future all but small craft are to keep clear of ships attacked by submarine which seems very hard, but it is necessary. It is a wonder to me that many more of our ships have not been sunk, including ourselves. Nobody seems to realise the great risks that are being run by ships in keeping constant patrol lines at slow

speeds except those concerned and no attention has been paid to protest. When we lose a few more ships, we shall, I suppose, learn the lesson.



*Artist's illustration of the sinking of HMS Aboukir*

## September 29th

**Western Front.** The Allies seemed to have made little progress lately, but there is now a deadlock and the Germans for the present are taking up a defensive attitude on the Western Front.

## October 1st to 6th

**At Liverpool to coal**

## October 6th to 14th

**At sea on patrol**

## October 14th

**Orders.** We are to go to Archangel and bring back some specie [*note - specie is money in the form of coins rather than notes*] (gold) under the 'Drake's' protection.

## October 14th to 18th

**Passage to Archangel**

## October 18th to 20th

**At Archangel.** Went onboard the 'Drake' and met various Russian officials who are arranging about the specie, which is the enormous sum of 8 million in English sovereigns chiefly! It was decided that each ship should carry half.

## October 19th

**Gold.** Busy all day getting the gold on board. Russian officials came on board to superintend and had to seal up nearly 1000 boxes containing the money. It was all safely stowed away in the Bullion Room before dark.

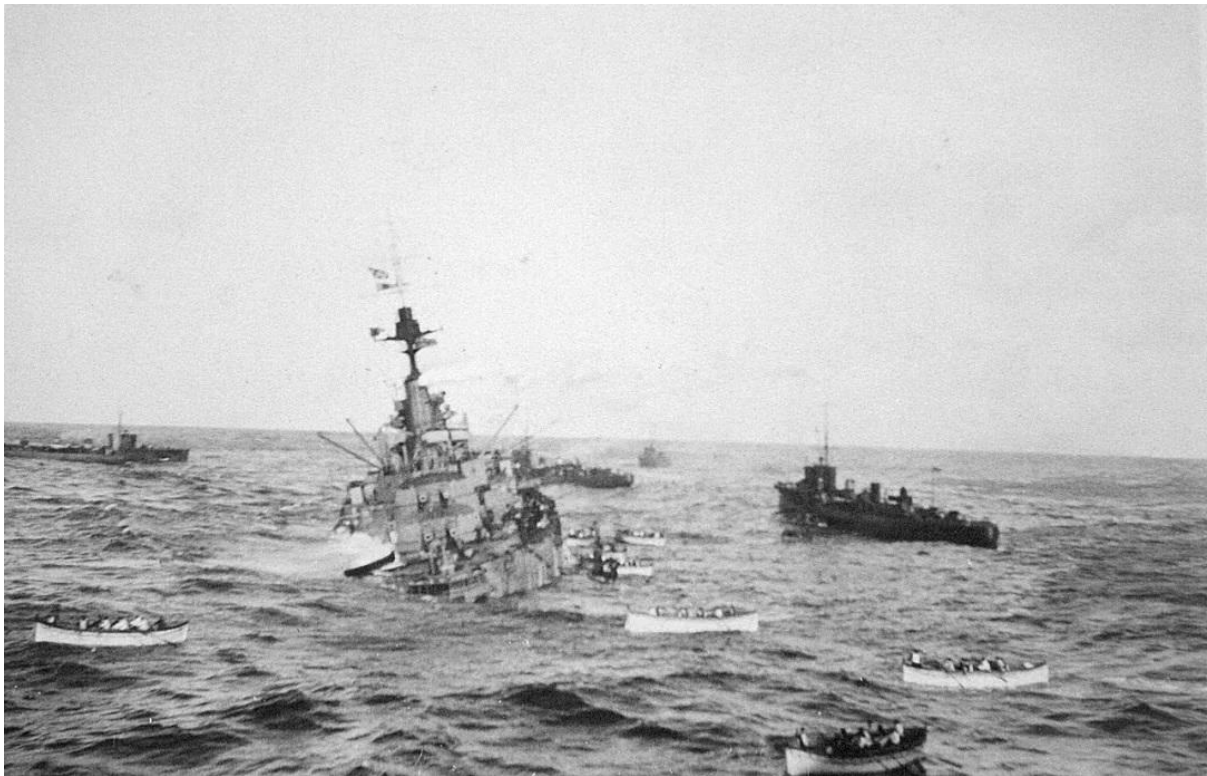
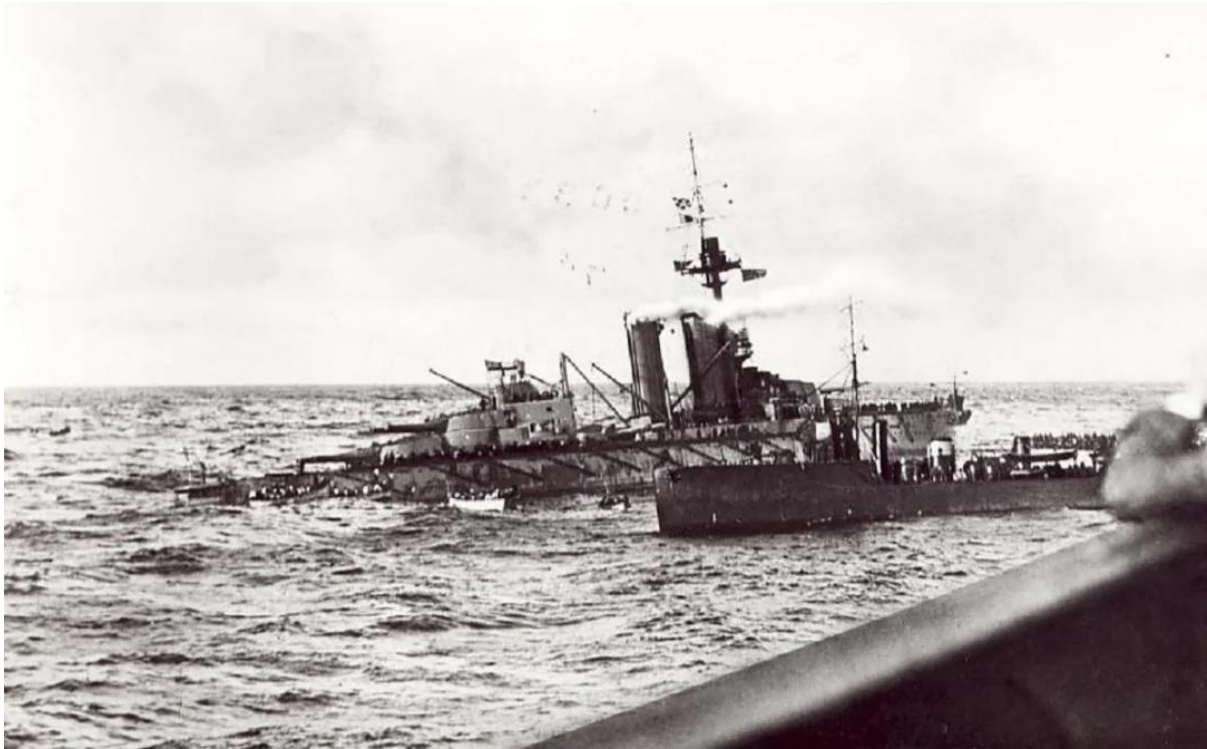
## October 20th to 28th

### Passage to Liverpool

## October 27th

**Loss of HMS Audacious.** A wireless message was intercepted to the effect that 'Audacious', one of our new battleships, had been struck by a mine or torpedo. As we were only a short distance away, perhaps 25 miles the situation was rather alarming in view of our very valuable consignment of gold. During the day we had messages varying as to the success in saving the ship, and we were hopeful that this was the case, but she eventually sank after all onboard had been saved. It transpired that the enemy had laid an extensive minefield to the north of Ireland. It is a very lamentable disaster and I could not help thinking that we had had a very narrow escape.





October 28th to November 5th

**At Liverpool**

November 5th to 30th

**At sea on patrol off Faroe Islands and St. Kilda**

## November 19th

**Bad naval disaster.** We received the depressing news of the loss of HM Ships 'Good Hope' and 'Monmouth' sunk off the coast of Coronel [*note – off the coast of Chile*] on November the 1st by a German squadron, the 'Scharnhorst' flagship. Admiral Craddock, Captain Brandt and all officers and men of both ships were lost - not a single survivor. The 'Good Hope' and 'Monmouth' were in no sense a match for the Germans and there is a considerable amount of criticism as to why they were sent to meet them. The 'Glasgow' and 'Oranto' were lucky in escaping. Admiral Craddock seems to have had the disadvantage of bad light too. It is a melancholy business and made me very depressed.

## November 30th to December 11th

### At Liverpool to Coal

## December 9th

**Naval victory of Falkland Islands.** Splendid news was received today of the destruction of the German ships 'Scharnhorst', 'Gneisnau' and 'Leipzig', sunk off the Falkland Islands by squadron of battlecruisers under the command of Admiral Sturdee. The 'Indomitable' and the 'Invincible' were amongst them. The whole affair was kept very secret as to how these ships went out there, and the Germans had no idea of their presence and were going to seize the islands. Vengeance has been very swift for the sinking of the 'Good Hope' and 'Monmouth'. Two other light cruises managed to get away but they will doubtless share the same fate. The news from the Western Front is better now, both sides have entrenched themselves and the war is going to be a long and bitter struggle.

## December 11th to January 7th

### At sea on patrol between Faroe Island and Iceland

## December 25th

**Christmas Day.** I went the customary rounds in the forenoon, headed by a terrible din caused by an extempore band of tin pots, etc. The men had a splendid Christmas dinner and seemed contented enough. There was also a concert in the afternoon and evening which I attended, but it was a most painful entertainment. We had our Christmas dinner at 7:00 PM and did our best to keep up some jollity, but it was difficult and I was thankful when the day was ended.