

JOSEPH SKIDMORE, born 1891 in West Bromwich, Staffordshire, died 31 May 1916 in the Battle of Jutland

Joseph Skidmore was born on 22 May 1891 in West Bromwich, Staffordshire. He was the second child of John Skidmore (1863-1920), a coal miner of 36 Chapman Street, West Bromwich, and his wife Alice Timmins (1867-1930). An iron worker, Joseph joined the Royal Navy In World War I as a stoker and served from February to July 1915 aboard HMS *Victory* I before being transferred to the light cruiser HMS *Calliope*.

The Gateshead Chronicle in September 2015 issued an appeal to trace families of HMS *Calliope* seamen who died in the Battle of Jutland, in readiness for the centenary of its involvement in the battle of Jutland. As the flagship of the 4th Light Cruiser Squadron, *Calliope* was heavily engaged throughout the battle, but it was not until the evening that she started to take her first casualties, the result of a duel with two Kaiser class battleships and one of the Heligoland class. It was in this battle that Joseph Skidmore was killed, just a week or so after his 25th birthday.

HMS Calliope

British Light Cruiser

Builder ; Chatham. Laid down ; January 1914. Completed ; June 1915.

Displacement 3750 tons, Complement 324.

Guns: 4 at 6 inch (Dir Con), 2 at 3 inch A.A., 1 MG. Torpedo tubes : 2 at 21 inch, submerged.



The Battle of Jutland - the greatest naval battle and the only full-scale clash of battleships in the First World War - was fought between the German and British navies at Jutland, Denmark, from May 31 to June 1, 1916. During the battle the Royal Navy's Grand Fleet, under Admiral Sir John Jellicoe, and the Imperial German Navy's High Seas Fleet, under Vice-Admiral Reinhard Scheer, clashed in the North Sea.

The High Seas Fleet's intention was to lure out, trap and destroy a portion of the Grand Fleet, as the German naval force was insufficient to openly engage the entire British fleet. This formed part of a larger strategy to break the British blockade of Germany and to allow German mercantile shipping to operate. Meanwhile, the Royal Navy pursued a strategy to engage and destroy the High Seas Fleet, or keep the German force contained and away from Britain's own shipping lanes.

More than 6,000 British sailors lost their lives in the clash, while the number of German losses reached over 3,000. 14 British and 11 German ships were sunk - including Royal Navy battle cruisers Indefatigable, Queen Mary and Invincible. However both sides claimed victory after the fighting. The British lost more ships and twice as many sailors, and the British press criticised the Grand Fleet's failure to force a decisive outcome, but Scheer's plan of destroying a substantial portion of the British fleet also failed.

During the battle, HMS Calliope received a number of hits from the German fleet and 10 of her crew were killed in action.

Now a collection of photos of some of the sailors and Royal Marines who lost their lives have been donated to the Royal Naval Reserve Unit. They were mysteriously left at HMS Calliope's gatehouse in Gateshead by an unknown person. There is no clue as to where they came from.

Among the seven men who were named alongside their photos in the collection was William Collins, who died during the battle.

There is a verse printed next to his picture, which reads: "Afar he sleeps - the ocean's roar, disturbs his calm repose no more, what though no voice of home was near, to soothe with love his dying ear, the cloud is passed from that clear brow, it glows in heaven's own brightness now."

Under the name of another fallen sailor, Thomas Trish, it says: "Died of wounds received in the Great Naval Battle of Jutland, June 1, 1916."

The other portraits were of William Frank Rowlingson, Thomas Joseph Hogan, Frederick Thomas Horsfall and Thomas Edward Sutcliffe. Here are some of *Calliope's* (unnamed) crew members.



In addition, a Roll of Honour gives details of all Calliope's "casualties sustained in action". It shows that four other men lost their lives - Joseph Skidmore, Walter Fairweather, Archer William Balcombe and Sidney Thomas Ellis.

Ten killed or died of wounds:

Balcombe, Archer William, Sgt., R.M.L.I.

Collins, William Alfred, Pte., R.M.L.I.

Ellis, S. T., A.B. (03/06/16)

Fairweather, Walter William, A.B.

Hogan, Thomas Joseph, Off. Std. 2.
Horsfall, Frederick Thomas, Pte. R.M.L.I.
Rowlingson, William Frank, A.B.
Skidmore, Joseph Sto. 1,
Sutcliffe, Thomas Edward, Sto. R.N.R.
Trish, Thomas, A.B.



Joseph was presumably buried at sea. His name appears on the Naval Memorial in Portsmouth, Hampshire.

He was survived by an older sister Edith Lilla, and younger siblings Harold, Alice Mabel, Florence May, Lucy and Frank.

The following is taken from the diary of James Orton, who was awarded the Distinguished Service Medal. (James Orton was born in Durham in April 1892, joined the Royal Naval Reserve at West Hartlepool in December 1914 and the ship's company of the cruiser H.M.S. Calliope in January 1915).

'... only our speed and zigzagging saved us from annihilation. As it was, we seemed to be in the middle of splashes, and the noise of the bursting shell and flying fragments was absolutely deafening. We were hit five times in all, three of which did serious damage to personnel. One shell, bursting against the breech of the port after 4-inch gun, smashed the fittings and gun shield and killed practically all the gun's crew, the notable exception being the sight-setter, a Corporal of Marines, who had the gun between him and the burst and only suffered a slight scalp wound. The second hit on us burst near No. 3 4-inch gun under the bridge, disabled the gun, killing and wounding some of the crew, and fragments of this shell penetrated the deck of the lower bridge and wounded a signalman and a bugler.

The third shell penetrated the upper deck, and burst in the boys' mess deck, almost in the middle of the after dressing station, killing some and wounding many others, including the Staff Surgeon. For the last five minutes that we were under fire we were in sight of our own ships, although the two battle fleets were invisible to each other, and we were told afterwards that at times we were hidden in spray from the splashes. Altogether, we had 10 killed and 23 wounded, some seriously. We were ordered to take station on the port beam of the battle fleet for the night, and in the morning resumed our cruising station ahead during the search for disabled enemy ships.

On reaching Scapa afterwards, we were ordered in first, instead of waiting for the battle fleet to enter, to land our wounded. Our dead we buried at sea the morning after the action, the Commodore leaving the bridge for a few minutes to read the burial service, the one time he was ever known to leave the bridge at sea.'

Among those landed at Scapa, having received multiple wounds ('shell wound both feet and right forearm'), Orton was invalided from the Service at the R.N. Hospital, Chatham.

In 1951, the original HMS Calliope was replaced by HMS Falmouth that was renamed Calliope. This new ship kept the same moorings at Elswick. However the unit moved ashore in 1968 to its current location at the riverside in Gateshead, retaining the name HMS Calliope.