

Richard EDGCOMBE



Born: 6th September 1890, Kingsbridge, Devon
Occupation: Serving seaman
Enlisted: Devonport: 19th January 1909
Unit: HMS Defence
Rank/number: Leading Stoker: No. K1768
Death: Killed in action, 31st May 1916
Detail: Richard died in one of the Battle of Jutland's most dramatic incidents. His ship *Defence*, the flagship of the 1st Cruiser Squadron, cut across the path of the British fleet as Rear-Admiral Sir Robert Arbuthnot charged into the attack. But at least four German battleships fired on it, setting it ablaze. Minutes later *Defence* exploded and sank with all 900 men.

Age at death: 26

Military info: In January 1909 Richard, a 19-year-old groom, joined the Royal Navy at Devonport as a Stoker 2nd Class. He was 5ft 7ins, with brown eyes and hair. He first posting was to Vivid 2, a shore-based establishment at Devonport Dockyards, where he remained until sent to *Diamond*, an old cruiser, on 26th May 1909. Stoker 2, equivalent to an army private, is the lowest rank in the engineering/mechanical branch, but comparatively well paid. Apart from keeping the engines well coaled, a stoker also dealt with mechanical and electrical problems on board. Richard stayed on *Diamond* for three months then returned to Vivid 2. On 7th September 1909 he joined *Cumberland*, an armoured cruiser. Richard was promoted to Stoker 1st class and on 5th September 1911 he returned to Vivid 2. Richard met his future wife, Fanny Chapman, at this time as she was working as a servant near Devonport. Richard left Vivid 2 on 16th February 1912 and spent a year on several ships. On 2nd September 1913 he joined *Defence*, flagship of Rear-Admiral Ernest Troubridge who led the Mediterranean Cruiser Squadron. This officer was blamed for failing to stop the German battlecruiser *Goeben* and lightcruiser *Breslau* reaching Turkey in August 1914, a blunder that led to the Gallipoli disaster. In May 1916 *Defence*, now under Rear-Admiral Sir Robert Arbuthnot, a hidebound martinet, blew up at Jutland killing Richard and all his shipmates.

Grave/memorial: Richard is commemorated on Plymouth Naval Memorial, at St. Petroc's Church, Padstow and on the Padstow War Memorial.

Family info: Father: Thomas Edgcombe, born Aveton Gifford, South Devon in 1849. Farm labourer. Mother: Irena Dare, born Churchstow, South Devon in 1851. They married in 1870 and had eight children. Wife: Fanny Chapman, born Padstow, Cornwall in 1891. She was a bride in May 1915, and a widow one year later.



This information was researched by Peter Smith, who is currently writing a book about Padstow's part in the Great War. Anyone wishing to correct errors or supply additional information can write to him at 24 Mallard Drive, Uckfield, East Sussex TN22 5PW. Also phone 01825 762226 or email smithpeter24@gmail.com

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