



# LIVES OF THE FIRST WORLD WAR

PRESS RELEASE

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## The Battle of Jutland, “a magnificent spectacle, one never to be forgotten”

To mark the centenary of the Battle of Jutland, Imperial War Museums (IWM) is asking members of the public to discover, remember and share the stories of the men who bravely lived, fought and died, on the permanent digital memorial, *Lives of the First World War*.

On the afternoon of the 31 May 1916, off the coast of Jutland in Denmark, the largest naval battle of the First World War took place, lasting just over 36 hours.

Both sides claimed victory. However while the Germans lost 11 ships in comparison to the 14 ships lost by the British fleet, after the battle Britain managed to put as many as 24 dreadnoughts to sea, whereas the Germans only had ten ships fit to fight. Consequently the German surface fleet failed to significantly challenge the British again during the war.

The Battle cost the lives of over 8,000 men and their stories, as well as those of all of the other people who served are recorded on *Lives of the First World War*. These stories include:

- **Chief Baker Petty Officer Walter Joseph Henry Greenaway\*** was serving on HMS *Vanguard* during the Battle of Jutland. Walter was proving 360lb of dough when the fighting broke out. During the battle he witnessed several attacks on the British fleet by German torpedoes and his account of the battle details the battle and its aftermath. Walter survived Jutland but was killed in an internal explosion on HMS *Vanguard* in July 1917.  
<https://livesofthefirstworldwar.org/lifestory/6215460>
- **Signalman Reuben Poole\*** served on HMS *Warrior* during the Battle of Jutland. After the ship was heavily shelled by German battle cruisers *Warrior* started to sink, Reuben was ordered to signal to another British ship *Engadine* 'Come alongside. Am sinking'. *Engadine* then drove alongside *Warrior* and took its men on board. Reuben survived the war and went on to work as a postal clerk during the Second World War. He died in 1975 at the age of 79.  
<https://livesofthefirstworldwar.org/lifestory/6298439>
- **Stoker First Class Robert Francis Kitt\*** was serving on board HMS *Indefatigable* when the ship exploded during the battle killing all but two crew members. Sadly Robert was one of those killed, his body was never recovered and he is now commemorated on the Plymouth Naval Memorial, his mother later donated Robert's image to the IWM Bond of Sacrifice Collection in 1918.  
<https://livesofthefirstworldwar.org/lifestory/6401526>

**Paul Cornish, Historian at Imperial War Museums said:** 'The Battle of Jutland was the greatest naval engagement of the First World War and the only battle ever to be fought between rival fleets of Dreadnought battleships. By 1916 the Royal Navy's blockade of Germany – which cut off almost all seaborne trade – was causing food and raw material shortages. The German High Seas Fleet was eager to break the blockade, but was outnumbered by the British Grand Fleet at Jutland. Germany claimed the battle as a victory, but the British maintained mastery of the North Sea and Germans were doomed to suffer the blockade until the Treaty of Versailles in 1919'.

**Dan Snow, Naval Historian and TV Broadcaster said:** Jutland is one of the greatest sea battles of all time. It decisively affected the outcome of the First World War and thus the course of the twentieth century. It was the apogee of 400 years of naval warfare which saw battleships fire guns at each other; the last major battle before the advent of aircraft changed war at sea forever. The experience of the men

involved or the terrible fate of those sailors trapped on doomed ships deserve to be remembered. Digital memorials like *Lives of the First World War* help to ensure that they will be’.

Do you have a relative who fought in the Battle of Jutland? Can you help us complete the stories by uploading photos, linking to evidence and adding stories? Help us to piece together more life stories, remember and share your First World War connections on [www.livesofthefirstworldwar.org](http://www.livesofthefirstworldwar.org)

## ENDS

**For further information, images, interviews or audio interviews with Jutland veterans please contact Faye Jackson in the IWM press office on [fjackson@iwm.org.uk](mailto:fjackson@iwm.org.uk) or on 020 7416 5420.**

**Full transcripts of the accounts given by Walter Greenaway and Reuben Poole are also available.**

### \* Case Studies

#### [Chief Baker Petty Officer Walter Joseph Henry Greenaway](#)

Walter Joseph Henry Greenaway was born on 8 May 1885 in Islington, London to Laura and George Foster. In 1908 Walter married Marion Walberton using the Alias Foster.

He was educated at Longwick Church of England School prior to joining the Navy at the age of 18. Upon joining the Navy, Walter became a Cook's Mate, soon rising to the rank of 3rd Class Petty Officer before being promoted to 2nd Class Petty Officer. In November 1911 Walter entered the examination process at Chatham for the position of Chief Baker Petty Officer. He was the youngest candidate yet his name was one of the top on the list of successful candidates.

During his 13 years' service Walter served on HMS *Dominion* and HMS *Industan* and had travelled around the world.

In 1912 he joined the commission on HMS *Vanguard* and in 1916 he took part in the Battle of Jutland. Walter had begun the proving process for a batch of bread just before the battle started. In letters written home to his parents, he describes in detail his experience of the Battle of Jutland.

*“While my dough was proving in tins I went out on the quarter deck and witnessed a magnificent spectacle, one never to be forgotten. The whole visible horizon which was not more than four miles was one long blaze of flame, the hulls of the enemy's ships was not visible to the naked eye, but could be seen dimly through the haze with the telescope.*

*“Shortly afterwards some enemy destroyers appeared suddenly out of the mist to attack this ship. We opened up with our anti-torpedo armament and the leading destroyer was observed to be hit and catch fire aft. (sic). She quickly turned and dropped out of station and shortly after was observed to turn over..... This shows you the awful havoc of modern gun fire”.*

In the heat of the battle, Walter's bread had baked without fire and turned out “fairly creditable”.

Walter also talked of the bravery of the German sailors fighting at Jutland:

*“One must pay tribute to the enemy, they are brave men and fought splendidly. Several instances was (sic) observed during the battle where their vessel was awash and they blazed away with one gun... The sight of the gun flashes, searchlights, starshells (which the enemy use) was a grand but terrible spectacle, for we realised hundreds of brave men were going to their doom.”*



Image of Walter Greenaway.

After the battle Walter recounts the sight of dead bodies and wreckage floating adrift at sea:

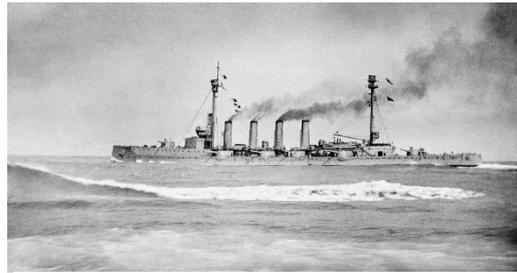
*"We was (sic) constantly passing wreckage and dead bodies in rafts and floating, comrades and foe... but one does not grumble if they possess the heart of a Briton and one feels proud they have done their bit and took their chance"*

Walter died at the age of 31 on 9 July 1917 in an internal explosion on HMS *Vanguard* while working as the Ship's Chief Baker Petty Officer.

## **Signalman Reuben Poole**

Reuben Poole was born in Walsall, Staffordshire on 15 November 1895 to Charles and Fanny Poole. He had five brothers and three sisters and before the war Reuben worked in a timber yard as a leather harness maker.

Reuben joined the Royal Navy as a Boy Sailor on his 18<sup>th</sup> birthday in 1913. Starting off on the ship HMS *Impregnable*, he rose to the rank of Leading Signalman. During the Battle of Jutland in 1916 Reuben was working as a Signalman on HMS *Warrior*. *Warrior* sank during the battle and Reuben was tasked with signing 'Come alongside. Am sinking' to the *Engadine* who had come to rescue the crew.



© IWM (SP 355) HMS WARRIOR under way 1916.

In the 1970s Reuben wrote his memoirs about his time serving in the Royal Navy, entitled *The Memoirs of a Non Entity*. Reuben's account sheds light on the atmosphere on a sinking ship in the midst of battle.

*"Down below decks, in Warrior, tired Seamen struggled with the hand pumps to keep the ship afloat. Holes were plugged, and bulkheads shored up, but the struggle all night was in vain, as the water in the ship was rising and it was a question of how long Warrior could stay afloat.*

*"I was on the bridge during the early morning watch of June 1st 1916, and at about 7am, I heard the Engineer Commander report to Captain Molento that the after main Bulkhead had burst and that the ship would sink soon. This was confirmed by the Ships Commander.*

*"On the Captain's orders, I personally made a signal to the Engadine, by Semaphore hand flags, from the port side of the bridge, 'come alongside, am sinking.'"*

After the call to abandon ship, Reuben went below deck to save a few possessions:

*"Captain Molento in Warrior, had given orders "close all watertight doors, batten down all hatches, prepare to abandon ship." As my work was finished on the bridge, I was sent down to join the crew for "abandon ship". I nipped down the hatchway to the messdeck for a few personal items ... Farther along the port messdeck, in the dark, were about 30 bodies of a stoker-fire party. All of them were killed by a heavy calibre shell. Previously, I had seen the bodies being turned over, by dim lamp light, by the Surgeon Commander, to see if any were still alive.*

*"The souvenirs I had brought down from the bridge were one white ensign, one Union Jack, my pair of hand semaphore flags, and binoculars. From the canteen I salvaged one large carton of Players Cigarettes and one large carton of Fry's Cream bars. When my turn came to abandon ship my goods were thrown onto the deck of our rescue ship Engadine.*

*"The wounded were passed across the starboard after gun turret to the Engadine. One unfortunate wounded man fell between the two crashing ships. Bravely, Lieutenant F.J. Rutland, the seaplane pilot*

*of Engadine, risked being crushed to death and went over the side to rescue the wounded man. The Albert medal was awarded to Lieutenant Rutland for his gallant act."*

The men on board HMS *Warrior* were rescued by *Engadine* and taken to Scotland for recovery on 2 June 1916, Reuben recalled: "*To me Scotland was a beautiful sight after the horrors of the battle.*"

Reuben survived the war, and continued to serve in the Navy until 1925. In December of that year he married Elsie Edwards in Coventry. During the Second World War he worked as a postal clerk. Reuben and Elsie did not have any children and he died aged 79 in 1975.

### **Stoker First Class Robert Francis Kitt**

Robert was born on 13 February 1896 in Hatt, Cornwall to Lucretia and Thomas Kitt. He grew up in St Stephens in Cornwall with one sister and two brothers.

Robert worked as a farm boy and general labourer in Saltash before enlisting in the Royal Navy on 12 May 1915 at the age of 19. He served on board the ships HMS *Vivid I* and HMS *Indefatigable*, rising to the rank of Stoker Second Class in January 1916.

On 31 May 1916, Robert was on board HMS *Indefatigable* when it took part in the Battle of Jutland. In the first hour of the battle, HMS *Indefatigable* was struck by German shells that triggered catastrophic explosions, sinking the ship.

Signaller Charles Farmer, one of two survivors from HMS *Indefatigable* recalled:

*'I suppose we had been in action about an hour-and-a-half or so when a shell or something hit the magazine. There was a terrific explosion, the guns went up in the air just like match-sticks, 12 -inch guns they were, and [the ship] began to settle down and in about half a minute she was gone'.*

Aged 20, Robert died in the explosion on HMS *Indefatigable*, along with 1,017 of the 1,019 men on board. In April 1918 Robert's mother donated his portrait photograph to the IWM Bond of Sacrifice Collection, stating that:

*'Having seen in the paper that you have formed a National War Museum, I am enclosing a photo of my son, who was killed in the Jutland Battle having joined the Navy just a year before at the age of nineteen'.*

Robert's body was never recovered and his name is now among the list of 7,251 sailors of the First World War commemorated on the Plymouth Naval Memorial.



© IWM (HU 123633)  
Stoker 1st Class Robert Francis Kitt, died 31 May 1916 at the Battle of Jutland on board HMS *Indefatigable*.

### **Notes to Editors**

- Over the Centenary (2014-2018) *Lives of the First World War* will grow to become the permanent digital memorial, accessible to millions of people regardless of their location.
- *Lives of the First World War* will be maintained and preserved by IWM beyond the centenary as a research tool for future generations.
- *Lives of the First World War* is being delivered in partnership findmypast Ltd.
- It is **free** to discover, remember and share information on *Lives of the First World War*, including uploading pictures and adding family stories.
- Subscription is only necessary if visitors wish to research using premium data sets that currently exist

behind pay walls, or if they want to access special features such as creating their own Communities.

**Imperial War Museums is not seeking original copies of letters, photographs or diaries. We encourage people to keep these in family collections for future generations and to upload and share their digital images on *Lives of the First World War*.**

## **IWM**

IWM (Imperial War Museums) tells the story of people who have lived, fought and died in conflicts involving Britain and the Commonwealth since the First World War. Our unique Collections, made up of the everyday and the exceptional, reveal stories of people, places, ideas and events. Using these, we tell vivid personal stories and create powerful physical experiences across our five museums that reflect the realities of war as both a destructive and creative force. We challenge people to look at conflict from different perspectives, enriching their understanding of the causes, course and consequences of war and its impact on people's lives.

IWM's five branches attract over 2 million visitors each year. [IWM London](#), our flagship branch, marks the Centenary of the First World War with new permanent First World War Galleries and a new Atrium with iconic large object displays. Our other branches are [IWM North](#), housed in an iconic award-winning building designed by Daniel Libeskind; [IWM Duxford](#), a world-renowned aviation museum and Britain's best preserved wartime airfield; [Churchill War Rooms](#), housed in Churchill's secret headquarters below Whitehall; and the Second World War cruiser [HMS Belfast](#).

## **About the First World War Centenary**

2014 - 2018 marks the centenary of the First World War, a landmark anniversary for Britain and the world. IWM is marking the centenary by leading a vibrant, four year programme of cultural activities across the world including. For more information visit [www.1914.org](http://www.1914.org)

## **About Findmypast**

Findmypast (previously DC Thomson Family History) is a British-owned world leader in online genealogy. It has an unrivalled record of online innovation in the field of family history and 18 million registered users across its family of online brands, which includes Mocavo, Genes Reunited, The British Newspaper Archive amongst others.

Its lead brand, also called Findmypast, is a searchable online archive of over two billion family history records, from parish records and censuses to migration records, military collections, historical newspapers and lots more. For members around the world, the site is a crucial resource for building family trees and doing detailed historical research.

In April 2003 Findmypast was the first to provide access to the complete birth, marriage, and death indexes for England & Wales, winning the Queen's Award for Innovation. Since that time, the company has digitised records from across the globe, including major collections from Britain, Ireland, Australia, and the United States.