

Royal Naval Stoker Drowned ~ Slipped From Ladder?

311133 Leading Stoker George Neale ~ Royal Navy

George Neale was born on the 1st May, 1887 at Froyle, near Alton, Hampshire the son of William and Mary Neale. The household members living in Mill Coast Cottages, Froyle, at the time of the 1891 Census were William aged 40, an agricultural labourer, his wife Mary aged 34, sons James, aged 12, Frederick aged 6, George aged 4, Harry aged 1 and daughters Mary and Martha aged 10 and 8 years respectively. Three of the children, Mary, Martha and Frederick were attending a local school and James was listed as a carter boy. Their father William had been born at Holybourne, Hampshire in 1851 and his wife Mary (née Hawkins) was born at Binstead, Hampshire in 1857. They were married on Christmas Day 1872 at Holybourne Church.

Ten years later in 1901 the enlarged family were living at 19 Upper Froyle, the household members being William, aged 50, Mary aged 44, Martha (Wells) aged 18, George aged 13, Harry aged 12, Edward aged 9, Annie aged 7, Charlie aged 4, Beatrice aged seven months and Elsie Wells, granddaughter aged 1 year. George on leaving school was employed as a farm labourer and six years later, in order to seek perhaps a more rewarding career joined the Royal Navy at Portsmouth on the 4th January, 1907 for a 12 year engagement. He was described as being 5-ft 3¾-inches in height, with brown hair, grey eyes, a fresh complexion and had scars on his forehead above the right eye, on the right side of his head, across his little finger on the right hand and gave his occupation as that of a farm labourer.

His service details were as follows:-

<u>Ship</u>	<u>Rating</u>	<u>Period of Service</u>		<u>Remarks</u>
		<u>From</u>	<u>To</u>	
Nelson	Stoker 2 nd Class	4 Jan 1907	18 May 1907	
Spartiate	Stoker 2 nd Class	19 May 1907	19 Aug 1907	
Hampshire	Stoker 2 nd Class	20 Aug 1907		
Hampshire	Stoker 1 st Class	24 Feb 1908	3 Apr 1911	
Aboukir	Stoker 1 st Class	4 Apr 1911	4 Dec 1911	
Hampshire	Stoker 1 st Class	5 Dec 1911		

Hampshire	Act L/Stoker	1 Jan 1914	18 Jan 1914	
Europa	Act L/Stoker	19 Jan 1914	13 Mar 1914	
Victory II	Act L/Stoker	14 Mar 1914	1 Nov 1914	
T.B. 81	Act L/Stoker	14 Mar 1914	1 Nov 1914	Discharged Dead

George Neale's character was marked as 'Very Good'/'Superior' and he had received a Good Conduct Badge on the 3rd January, 1910. His service record is marked 'RUN' from the 2nd November, 1914 and written alongside it is Victory II. For naval personnel to be marked and recorded as 'RUN' was a very serious offence, indicating that the person had absented himself from the ship without permission or even had deserted.

HMS Victory II was the Crystal Palace/Sydenham training depot for the Royal Naval Division from 1914 until the Spring of 1919. It is curious that he was drafted there from his previous ship HMS Europa, an 1895 Diadem-class protected cruiser and there is no indication that he had any connection with the RND. Written below Victory II on his service record is T.B. 81, which has been squeezed in, almost as an afterthought. It may be that whoever made the entry initially made a mistake as to where



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George was to be drafted as the dates for Victory II were not altered or crossed out when T.B. 81 was inserted. As will become clear below, from the 1st November, 1914 George was to the naval authorities absent from H.M.T.B. 81, but it was not until January 1915, that the real reason for his absence would be tragically revealed.

During his naval career George served on HMS Hampshire, one of six Devonshire-class armoured cruisers, on two occasions: 20th August 1907 to the 3rd April 1911 and 5th December 1911 to the 18th January, 1914. She was built by Armstrong Whitworth at their Elswick

shipyard. HMS Hampshire was laid down on the 1st September, 1902, launched on the 24th September, 1903 and completed in July 1905.

Dimensions & Details:

Length Overall ~ 473-ft 6-inches; Beam 68-ft 6-inches; Maximum Draught 25-ft 6-inches;

Displacement ~ 10,850-tons;

Machinery ~ 2 x 4-Cylinder Quadruple Expansion Steam Engines; 2 x Propeller Shafts; 17 x Yarrow Water-Tube Boilers; 6 x Cylindrical Boilers; Designed HP 20,500; IHP 21,000 = 22-knots;

Fuel ~ Coal Normal 800-tons; Maximum 1,750-tons;

Armament ~ 4 x Single BL 7.5-inch Mk I Guns; 6 x Single BL 6-inch Mk VII Guns; 2 x 12-Pounders 8-cwt Guns; 18 x Single QF 3-Pounder Hotchkiss Guns; 2 x 18-inch Torpedo Tubes (Submerged);

Armour (Krupp) ~ 6-inch to 4.5-inch Belt (Amidships); 2 $\frac{5}{8}$ Belt (Forward); 2-inch Deck (Aft); 4.5-inch Bulkheads (Aft); 6-inch Barbettes; 7.5-inch to 4.5-inch Hood To Latter; 6-inch Casemates; 10-inch Conning Tower (Forward);

Complement ~ 653;

Built under the 1901 Naval Estimates at an approximate cost of £850,000.

On acceptance into the Royal Navy HMS Hampshire joined the 1st Cruiser Squadron of the Channel Fleet. After a refit at Portsmouth in December 1908 she was transferred to the Reserve of the Third Fleet in August 1909. Re-commissioned in December 1911, HMS Hampshire was assigned to the 6th Cruiser Squadron of the Mediterranean Fleet and then to the China Station in 1912, remaining there until the outbreak of the First World War. With a small squadron she left Wei Hai Wei under the command of Vice-Admiral Martyn Jerram, Commander-in-Chief of the China Station. With the armoured cruisers HMS Minotaur and the light cruiser HMS Newcastle they were ordered to destroy the German radio station at Yap. Whilst on passage to the radio station they captured and sank an enemy collier the S.S. Elspeth on the 11th August. Low on coal HMS Hampshire returned to Hong Kong with the crew of the collier. After coaling she was sent to the Dutch East Indies to search for enemy ships until November and then undertook escort duties of ANZAC troops through the Indian Ocean and the Red Sea to Egypt. From there she

sailed to Gibraltar in December for a refit and then returned to the United Kingdom to serve with the Home Fleet.

Later on the 5th June, 1916 HMS Hampshire on passage to Russia was sunk by a mine between Brough of Birsay and Marwick Head off the Orkneys. Among those lost was the Secretary of State for War Field Marshal Lord Kitchener.

The last ship on which George served was H.M. Torpedo Boat 81, originally named HMS Swift. She was built in 1884 at J. Samuel White's Shipyard on the Isle of Wight, as a private venture – without an order from a customer. HMS Swift was larger than contemporary torpedo boats with a dual role of torpedo-boat catcher and defend against enemy torpedo-boats – an initial type of torpedo-boat destroyer. HMS Swift was flush-decked with a strengthened bow for ramming enemy torpedo boats. She was purchased by the Royal Navy in 1885.

Dimensions & Details

Length Overall ~ 153-ft 8½-inches; Beam 17-ft 6-inches; Draught 9-ft 6-inches;

Displacement ~ 137-tons;

Machinery ~ 1 x 3-Cylinder Compound Steam Engine; IHP 1,300 = 23.75-knots on Sea Trials; Normal 18-knots;

Armament ~ 4 x 3-pounder Guns; 3 x 14-inch Torpedo Tubes;

Complement ~ 25;

In July 1887 HMS Swift was renamed HM Torpedo Boat 81 and took part in Naval Manoeuvres and in the Jubilee Fleet Review of 1897 at Spithead. During the First World War she was based at Portsmouth and Portland having been fitted with hydrophones and depth charges. At the end of the war HM Torpedo Boat 81 was paid off and sold for scrap in 1921.

Under uncertain circumstances it was from HM Torpedo Boat 81 that Leading Stoker George Neale fell overboard and was drowned. He was 27 years of age.

Southern Times 23rd January, 1915.

Gruesome Discovery In The Harbour

On Saturday morning some of the men working on the pier head noticed an object floating in the water not far from the Breakwater, and on putting off to inspect it found it to be the body of, in a very advanced state of decomposition, of a naval stoker. On being brought ashore the clothing

was examined, and proved to be that of George Neal(e), a leading stoker of H.M.T.B. 81, who had been missing from his ship since November 1st. On account of the state of the body an inquest was, held at once in the R.N. Hospital, by Mr G.P. Symes (Coroner), Mr Edward Comben being foreman of the jury.

Mr Huxtable, representing the Admiralty, said that it was not possible to produce deceased's official papers, as they were kept at Portsmouth, and the exigencies of the case demanded an immediate inquest. Joseph Northover, pensioned petty officer, stated that that morning he was on the jetty near the inner fort, about 30 yards from the chief boatswain's office, when he saw the body floating. He reported it to the chief constable (Mr Whittle), and acting on his orders recovered the body, which was afterwards taken to the mortuary. It was that of a leading stoker with two good conduct badges.

John Gordon, stoker petty officer of H.M.T.B. 81, identified the body as that of George Neal(e), a leading stoker of the same ship. He last saw him on November 1st, when witness came back from leave. Deceased went ashore at dinnertime and did not return. He believed the officers held an inquiry. Deceased bore an



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excellent character and to the best of witness's knowledge was unmarried and between 28 and 30 years of age.

William Ashwell, A.B., of the same boat said that he last saw deceased on the afternoon of November 1st. Witness had been ashore and saw deceased at the Cove House Inn with other sailors. They left at 2.20 to return aboard, going different ways. Deceased was perfectly sober at the time. The torpedo boat was lying alongside the coaling pier, and they had to go down a swinging ladder to get aboard. Deceased was on his way aboard when witness left him. Both were perfectly sober, and there had been no row in the public house. They had only one hour ashore.

Cross-examined: They got to the Cove House at 1.50 p.m. and left at 2.20. They came ashore at 1.30 and had to be back again at 3 p.m. All they had was two pints each. To get aboard they had