

## FATAL ACCIDENT AT SCAPA FLOW 19<sup>th</sup> MAY 1919

John Thomas Legg was born on the 25<sup>th</sup> March, 1902, at Weymouth the son of Walter and Florence Legg. In 1911, the family resided at 24 Ferrybridge Cottages, Wyke Regis, Dorset and the household members were Walter (father) a general labourer at the Government Dockyard aged 38 years, his wife Florence aged 36 years, sons Louis, an errand boy for a boot maker aged 14 years, John aged 9 years, Herbert aged 4 years and daughter Kathleen aged



11 years. Their parents had Portland Royal Naval Cemetery both been born in Weymouth, Walter on the 27<sup>th</sup> July, 1871 and Florence (née Moore) on the 5<sup>th</sup> May, 1874. They were married in January 1896.

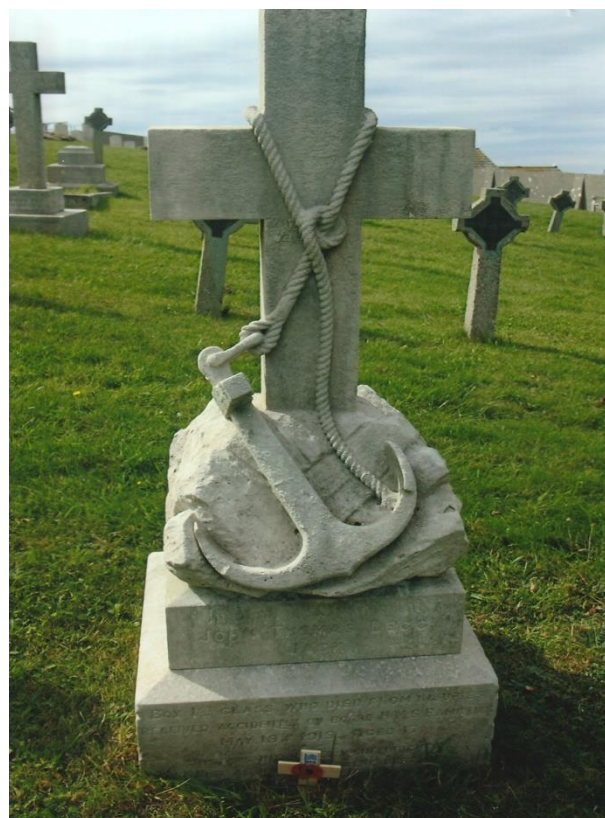
At the age of 15 years, John Thomas Legg joined the Royal Navy at Devonport as a Boy 2<sup>nd</sup> Class on the 24<sup>th</sup> September, 1917 – service number J78784 – and on reaching the age of 18 years for a twelve year engagement. He was described on entry into the Royal Navy as being 4-ft 11½-inches in height, with a chest measurement of 32¼-inches, brown hair, grey eyes, a healthy complexion and gave his occupation as a gardeners boy. The brief details of his service record were as follows:-

<u>Period of Service</u>				
<u>Ship</u>	<u>Rating</u>	<u>From</u>	<u>To</u>	<u>Character &amp; Ability</u>
Impregnable	Boy 2 <sup>nd</sup> Class	24 Sep 1917		VG/Sup
Impregnable	Boy 1 <sup>st</sup> Class	23 Mar 1918	23 Jul 1918	VG/Sup
Ramillies	Boy 1 <sup>st</sup> Class	24 <sup>th</sup> July 1918	19 May 1919 DD	VG/Sup

Although John's service in the Royal Navy was less than two years his character and ability, both on the training ship HMS Impregnable and the battleship HMS Ramillies had been marked 'Very Good' and 'Superior'.

HMS Impregnable was built at Chatham Dockyard and launched in July 1810 as a 98-gun, three-deck ship. After commissioning she was sent to the Mediterranean, joining a squadron there to subdue piracy, but was not involved in any serious action. On return to the United Kingdom she was placed in reserve in 1819 for 20 years. Re-commissioned in 1839 she relieved HMS Adelaide as the Commander-in-Chief's flagship moored at the entrance to Hamoaze, Plymouth. The Hamoaze is an estuarine stretch of the tidal River Tamar between its confluence with the River Lynher and Plymouth Sound which flows past Devonport Dockyard.

After another commission to the Mediterranean in 1841, HMS Impregnable was, again placed in fleet reserve, on return to Plymouth in May 1843. She remained in reserve for 19 years until 1862 when she became a boy's training ship at Devonport. Many boys were orphans or poor boys found begging in the streets. They were reported to the magistrate who then ordered them on to the training ship. Parents or guardians of boys could also ask a magistrate to send them to a training ship if they felt they were unable to control them.



Grave Of Boy 1<sup>st</sup> Class J.T. Legg Royal Navy

HMS Impregnable was joined by HMS Circe in 1874, due to the increase in the number of boys under training. HMS Impregnable was replaced by HMS Howe in 1886 and renamed HMS Impregnable II. In 1906 HMS Inconstant was added to the training establishment and became HMS Impregnable III and HMS Circe which had operated under her own name became HMS Impregnable IV. Although the HMS Impregnable training establishment was paid off at the end of hostilities in 1918 it was re-established in November 1919 until 1929 when all the ships were put on the sale list. The boys training establishment was re-commissioned in 1936 in the former Saint Budeaux Barracks at Bull Point. During the Second World War it was used to train naval signalmen and later, a demobilisation centre at the end of the war. In 1946, the barracks reverted to a Boys Training Establishment. The Devonport Boy's Training Establishment HMS Impregnable was finally closed in 1948.

HMS Ramillies was one of five Revenge-class 1913-1914 Dreadnought battleships. The four other battleships were HMS Royal Sovereign, HMS Royal Oak, HMS Resolution and HMS Revenge. The technical details of HMS Ramillies:-

Builder ~ William Beardmore and Company, Dalmuir, Scotland;

Laid Down ~ 12<sup>th</sup> November, 1913; Launched – 12<sup>th</sup> September, 1916; Completed and Commissioned 1<sup>st</sup> September, 1917;

Dimensions ~ Length Overall 624¼-ft; Length Between Perpendiculars 580-ft; Beam 88½-ft (with bulge protection) 101½-ft; Mean Draught 27-ft; Deep Load 33½-ft;

Guns ~ 4 x Twin 15-inch, 42 Calibre; 14 x Single 6-inch, 50 Calibre; (Both the 15-inch and 6-inch guns Director Controlled); 2 x 3-inch Anti-Aircraft Guns; 4 x 3-pounder; 5 x Machine-Guns; 4 x 21-inch Torpedoes (Submerged);

Armour (K.C.) ~ 13-inch Belt (Krupp Cemented Armour At Waterline); 6-inch to 4-inch (ends); 1-inch Belt Bow; 6-inch to 4-inch Bulkheads Fore and Aft; 6-inch Battery's; 10-inch to 7-inch Barbettes; 13-inch Gunhouses; 1½-inch Funnel Uptakes; 6-inch to 3-inch Conning Tower Base; 11-inch Conning Tower; 6-inch to 3-inch Hood; 6-inch Fore Communication Tube; 6-inch Torpedo Conning Tower; 4-inch Tube (Torpedo Conning Tower);

Armour (H.T.) ~ 1-inch Forecastle Over Battery; 1¼-inch x 1½-inch Upper Belt; 2-inch~1½-inch~1-inch Main Battery; 2½-inch to 1-inch Forward; 4-inch~3-inch~2½-inch Aft Lower Battery; Special Protection 1½-inch to 1-inch Internal Citadel Between End Barbettes;

Machinery ~ Two Pairs of Parsons Steam Turbines, Each Driving Two Shafts;

Designed HP ~ 40,000 = 23-knots Without Bulges; 21½-22-knots With Bulges;

Boilers ~ 18 x Babcock Watertube Boilers;

Oil Fuel – Normal 900-tons; Maximum 3,400-tons;

Coal ~ For Domestic Use 140-tons;

Range ~ 7,000 Nautical Miles at 10-knots;

Complement ~ 937 to 997 Officers and Ratings;

## General Notes

Guns ~ 6-inch Batteries were wet in head seas but dwarf walls in the battery retained water which was rapidly drained away.

Armour ~ Internal protection very good and with bulge protection these ships were heavily defended against underwater attack.

Machinery ~ Originally for reasons of economy it was intended that the warships of the Revenge class would be coal/oil fuel fired. However, it was decided during construction that they were to be redesigned to burn oil fuel which gave an increase in engine power of 9,000 SHP.

Bulges ~ During the construction of HMS Ramillies the Admiralty decided to fit anti-torpedo bulges before her hull was completed. The addition of bulges brought the designed speed down to 21-knots. On deep load the bulge protection limited the speed to 19½-knots until some of the oil fuel had been burnt off.

When HMS Ramillies was launched on the 12<sup>th</sup> September, 1916 her hull and rudders were seriously damaged on striking the slipway. The dry docks at Dalmuir were not long enough to dock down HMS Ramillies. It was therefore decided that she would be towed to Camell Laird's Liverpool Shipyard. Temporary repairs were carried out at Dalmuir to make her seaworthy. Completed at the beginning of May 1917, a further misfortune occurred when she ran aground on the 7<sup>th</sup> May. Eight tugs pulled her free on the 23<sup>rd</sup> May and she was then towed to Liverpool. These accidents delayed the completion of HMS Ramillies, the last of her class to join the Grand Fleet, and assigned to the 1<sup>st</sup> Battle Squadron in September 1917.

Her sea trials were extensive in order to evaluate the efficiency of her bulges with regard to speed and stability. It became apparent that the bulges had a marginal effect on her speed and actually improved stability. The outcome of these successful trials resulted in the Admiralty taking the decision to install bulges on the other four ships of Revenge class.



Wyke Regis War Memorial

By 1917 it was unlikely that there would be a major surface fleet action with Germany in the North Sea. The German High Seas Fleet remained in their home ports and adopted a cautious strategy as did the Grand Fleet. In 1917, the Germans however embarked on a campaign of unrestricted submarine warfare against Allied and neutral mercantile shipping.

During the last two years of war, the Grand Fleet, including HMS Ramillies were not involved in any fleet action. On the 21<sup>st</sup> November, 1918 after the signing of the Armistice the Grand Fleet left port to escort the surrendered German High Seas Fleet into internment at Scapa Flow. On the 19<sup>th</sup> May, 1919 HMS Ramillies was at Scapa Flow where Boy 1<sup>st</sup> Class John Thomas Legg was accidentally killed. A court of enquiry was held aboard the battleship into the cause of the fatal accident. It was concluded that Boy 1<sup>st</sup> Class John Thomas Legg was killed through the after guy of the port TV-Derrick taking charge while he was easing it and throwing him against some obstructions, fracturing his left arm, right leg and skull. No blame was attachable to anyone. He was 17 years old.

Southern Times ~ Saturday, 31<sup>st</sup> May, 1919.

Wyke Regis ~ Naval Funeral

On Saturday morning the mortal remains of 1<sup>st</sup> Class Boy Legg. R.N., the son of Mr and Mrs Walter Legg, of Ferry Bridge, were laid to rest in the Naval Cemetery at Portland. The body had been brought from Scapa Flow. A contingent of bluejackets escorted the body, which was drawn on a gun carriage and covered with the Union Jack, and the service was impressively conducted by the Naval Chaplain.

The principle mourners were Mr and Mrs Legg (father and mother), Fred and Kate Legg (brother and sister), Mr H. Legg (uncle) and Mr Murray. By the special request of the deceased's captain, he was represented by his wife, Mrs Luce, who is residing in the neighbourhood. The parents have received most sympathetic letters from Captain J. Luce, H.M.S. Ramillies, and from the Chaplain and Surgeon who attended him.

It was a happy inspiration of the Empire Day Committee who, were arranging the festivities of the day to send a wreath with national colours affixed, to this promising young son of the Empire. Wreaths: Mother and Father, and Friends, in loving memory; Auntie Ede and Uncle George, Barnstaple, to our dear sailor nephew; From his chum, Sam Wallbrine; Friends of Ferry Bridge, with deepest sympathy; Empire Committee, Wyke Regis, with deepest sympathy; Captain and Mrs John Luce, H.M.S. Ramillies; Uncle Harry and Mr H. Murray; Brother and Sister in loving memory.

### Births, Marriages & Deaths

LEGG – May 19 (accidental death), John Thomas Legg (Jack), of H.M.S. Ramillies, third son of Mr and Mrs W.W. Legg, Ferry Bridge, Wyke Regis, aged 17. Interred at Naval Cemetery, Portland.

### Portland Royal Naval Cemetery

Portland Harbour is a manmade harbour attached to the north of Portland. Originally it was a natural anchorage known as Portland Roads, protected by Portland to the south, Chesil Beach to the west and mainland Dorset to the north.

Portland Roads was transformed into a naval base following the building of two breakwater arms in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century. The Cemetery was established by the War Office in 1876 for the



burial of the soldiers Boy 1<sup>st</sup> Class J.T. Legg ~ Name On Wyke Regis War Memorial garrisoned at Verne Citadel (part of the harbour defence fortifications) and Royal Navy sailors based at Portland. In 1907 the site was transferred to the Admiralty, who went on to extend the site to the west in 1914. Throughout the First World War, Portland Harbour was used regularly for training exercises and patrols for German U-boats. There are 67 burials from the First World War, 50 of which are unidentified. In addition, there is a Special Memorial to a casualty buried in Portland (St George) Churchyard. After the War the maintenance of the Cemetery was passed to the Imperial War Graves Commission and in November 1926, the Cross of Sacrifice was unveiled in the presence of detachments from ships stationed at Portland and the local garrison. With the outbreak of the Second World War, Portland continued hosting training exercises. However, after Germany's successful invasion of France, the naval base quickly became the target of air attacks. On the 4<sup>th</sup> July, 1940 HMS Foylebank was attacked while at Portland Harbour, which resulted in her sinking on the 5<sup>th</sup>. Over 70 crew members lost their lives, some of whom are buried at Portland Royal Naval Cemetery, the rest are commemorated on memorials to the missing. By May 1944, both Portland Harbour and Weymouth Harbour were

used as part of the D-Day preparations. They were major embarkation points for American troops, particularly the US 1<sup>st</sup> Division who embarked for 'Omaha Beach' in June 1944. There are 103 burials (including 1 Norwegian Merchant Navy seaman and 12 German airmen) 10 of which are unidentified, from the Second World War, the majority of which are in the Church of England section, near the Cross of Sacrifice.



Grave Of Boy 1<sup>st</sup> Class J.T. Legg Royal Navy ~ (Front Left)

The Cemetery was extended eastwards in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, where many post-Second World War burials are found. In 1996 the Naval Base at Portland was closed.

Boy 1<sup>st</sup> Class John Thomas Legg is also commemorated on the Wyke Regis War Memorial. His mother made a Dependant's Pension claim, but there is no indication as to whether it was awarded or any other payment made to her. The campaign medals of Boy 1<sup>st</sup> Class John Thomas Legg, the British War Medal 1914-1918, Allied Victory Medal 1914-1919, Bronze Memorial Plaque and Scroll were subsequently forwarded to his father. Walter, John's father died aged 76 in February 1948 and Florence, his mother died on the 14<sup>th</sup> December, 1961 aged 87 years.

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## Sources

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