

Horace Day

Born 1898. Naval officer and company secretary.

Life story by his son, James Day.

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Part 2

Part 2, also written by James Day, is linked from the Horace Day index page in the Lives Retold website as a separate PDF file. It describes the Southampton shipbuilding family from which Horace Day was descended.

Contributed to Lives Retold by the author, James Day, in 2021.

1. Horace's Parents

My grandfather, George Day, born on 13 December 1857 in Southampton, was educated at Marlborough College and went into the family ship building business, Day Summers and Company. On 21 November 1895 he married Rose Trelawny at St Lukes's, Southampton. On his marriage certificate he describes himself as an Engineer. Rose Trelawny was descended from the ancient Trelawny family of Cornwall. By her George had three sons, Clarence George, my father Horace Trelawny, and Arthur Gerald Brereton. Rose died in 1921 and George subsequently married again and had a fourth son, Michael.

2. Royal Navy in the First World War

Royal Naval College, Osborne

My father, Horace Trelawny Day, born on 14 June 1898, had been keen from an early age on going into the Royal Navy and with this in mind he attended the Royal Naval College, Osborne from 1911-1912 before going on to Dartmouth College.

Suddenly Posted to Active Service

Whilst there the First World War broke out and, despite their youth, on 1 August 1914 all the cadets of sixteen or over were posted to active service. My father's first ship was the ancient light cruiser, HMS SAPPHO, built in 1890. After two months of patrolling the seas around Scapa Flow he was transferred to the battle cruiser HMS NEW ZEALAND. HMS NEW ZEALAND, completed in 1912, had been presented to the Royal Navy by New Zealand.

Skirmishes with the German Fleet

A number of skirmishes between the British and German fleets took place during 1914 and the early part of 1915. On 18 December 1914 the Germans bombarded Whitby, Scarborough and Hartlepool. On Sunday 24 January 1915 four German and four British battle cruisers, including HMS NEW ZEALAND, were in action off the Dogger Bank. On the Saturday evening the British Battle Cruiser squadron consisting of the LION, TIGER, PRINCESS ROYAL, NEW ZEALAND and INDOMITABLE had weighed anchor and proceeded south from Rosyth. The LION was the flagship of Vice Admiral Sir David Beatty. Off Dogger Bank they came up with the German Battle Cruiser squadron consisting of the DERFLINGER, MOLKTE, SERDLITZ and BLUCHER. My father describes the ensuing action in his Midshipman's Journal:

" 6.55am. Went to action stations. 7.15am. Heard firing ahead and saw gun flashes on port bow. The Light Cruisers went ahead. Soon we came up with our destroyers who had been engaging the enemy. We sighted the German Battle Cruiser squadron and gave chase. The destroyers dropped astern. The "Indomitable" also began to drop astern as we increased speed. We kept up with the squadron working up to 29 kts. At 9.00am the "Lion" opened fire on the rear ship of the enemy. For about half an hour the shots fell short. 9.30am. Action became more or less general. At 9.35am we opened fire. Up to this time I had managed to watch a good deal of the action out of the top of my turret. The shots were now falling all around; but no ship seemed to be firing at us. We were now equally

matched, both the Germans and us having four ships each. The "Indomitable" had dropped well astern.

From now onwards I did not have much chance of seeing anything. News came through that two of the enemy's ships were on fire. "Tiger" was then reported on fire. I managed to get a glimpse of her and saw flames amidships. This fire however was soon got under control. 10.45am. The "Lion" losing speed, hauled out of line. She was rather badly damaged. She had been mined or torpedoed - probably the latter - in two places on her port side. She had two large holes, her armour plates being stove right in. She had more shell holes in her hull and a few in her upper works. She was wrecked badly down below in several places.

Soon enemy's rear ship the "Blucher" which had gradually dropped astern, turned 16 points. She was on fire. The three ships remaining of our squadron concentrated on her, letting the others escape. We could not have chased them further owing to minefields. The "Indomitable" soon came up and we four sunk her. A Zeppelin appeared and hung over the sinking ship. We turned round and returned. The "Blucher" blew up soon after. She was entirely our prey. We were firing at her the whole time. The casualties were slight on our side. Engineer Captain Taylor was killed in the "Tiger" and a few men. 'P' Turret (amidships) was put out of action as well, a shell exploding on it. We proceeded in a northerly direction all night".

Soon after this the journal comes to an end. Presumably the increasing demands of war interfered with the writing of a journal.

Battle of Jutland

My father was on HMS NEW ZEALAND for two and a half years, during which time she also took part in the Battle of Jutland in May 1916, when she was hit for the only time on 'X' gun turret aft, where a huge chunk of metal was punched out of the armour plating. In truth he was very lucky to survive unscathed as over 6000 British were killed and over 2500 Germans apart from the wounded on both sides..

Life was Very Boring and Routine

As my father records in his Midshipman's Journal, mostly life was very boring and routine, with constant patrols of the North Sea in all weathers interrupted by spells in port for coaling ship, and the occasional excitement of action. On 8 May 1915 he writes, "Lusitania reported sunk", perhaps one of the most significant actions of the war, which was to initiate American involvement and thereby hasten its end.

In October 1917 he was appointed to HMS TORNADO, a new torpedo boat destroyer, as a Sub-Lieutenant. The TORNADO was just over 1000 tons and would have had a complement of about 100 men. This must have been a dramatic change from being a Midshipman on a large battle cruiser, but no doubt the experience gained there proved invaluable.



H.M.S.Tornado

Sunk off the Dutch Coast

HMS TORNADO, along with HMS TORRENT and HMS SURPRISE, were sunk off the Dutch coast two miles north of the Maas buoy at about 3.00am on 23 December 1917. They had been engaged in escorting a Dutch convoy in foggy conditions. My father describes this incident in a somewhat self-deprecating fashion in a letter to his elder brother, Clarence, who was in the army in India at the time.

Letter addressed to Lt C.G. Day, Messrs Cox and Co., Army Agents, Bombay, India and re-directed to 6th Cavalry Brigade, Cavalry Division.

Postmark 22 March 1918.

Quenington Court,

Fairford,

Gloucestershire.

Dear Clarence

I'm afraid I have not written to you for ages and ages, but when I'm on board the scrappy letters that I can get together never seem worth sending. However this time I think I have a fair amount to tell you.

I dare say you are wondering how I manage to get home so often. I think Mummy has told you why, this time. She told you I have now been blown up, and lost my ship and practically her entire crew. The only people saved were myself, our midshipman - an RNR - and six hands. My packet was one of three lost on the night 22-23 Dec (1917). I'll tell you all about it.

We were going in single line ahead - 4 of us - just off the Dutch coast. I was on watch when the last of the line (TORRENT) was hit by a "mouldy" I think. We came round, my packet (TORNADO) on her starb'd quarter and our leader (SURPRISE) and no. 3 in the line (RADIANT) on her port quarter. She was then sinking pretty rapidly. We then went up alongside her starboard side.

We had hardly got alongside when the one on her port quarter went up in a cloud of smoke. Then the one alongside us was hit again and we were covered with oil and debris. Soon after she sank.

We had only just time to go ahead when we were hit. I was on the bridge at the time we were hit, but before I had been all over the place doing what I could. I went down to assist in getting the boats out and finding them well under way made my way aft to a Carley float. The hindship part was then rapidly settling. After a bit of a struggle we got the float over. There were 5 of us, and then the damn thing got hung up on the berthing. We managed to cut it free when the deck where we were was unpleasantly awash. Our mascot, a dog, hopped in just before we got free, and we were drifted away from the old ship which was settling rapidly.

We were picked up after two and a quarter hours in the float. It wasn't exactly a Turkish bath I can tell you. I got home in what I stood up in at 12.15 am on Xmas morning. My first Xmas at home since war began. I suppose now I shall have at least a month's leave to allow my nerves to recover not that I think I'm shaken very much.

Today is the anniversary of my promotion to one stripe, so we are having the last turkey and Mrs Squire is coming in. Tomorrow I'm going up to London to meet the other officer survivor.

Well I hope you are getting along well. I'll endeavor to write more in future if I can find sufficient news. I'm just about fed up with writing to people about my stunt and I'm treated here as a kind of curious animal that ought not to be alive. Still people are quite decent. They at least don't ask questions.

Well cheerio

With love from B. ('B' was my father's nickname)



Horace Day as a Midshipman.

Court of Enquiry

My father took part in the Court of Enquiry and said that prior to the TORNADO being hit it had taken on board a lot of survivors from the TORRENT. Whether mines or torpedoes were the cause was never definitely settled. Signalman George W Haveren of HMS RADIANT described the sinking of the TORNADO thus:

"Tornado was struck about the centre funnel. Broke like a V shape, stern part higher than the bows. She went down almost immediately."

HMS RADIANT meanwhile had wisely decided to steam around to avoid becoming the fourth target. After about a couple of hours the Captain decided it was safe to risk picking up survivors, - two boat loads.

Back on Active Service Again

This incident, along with his other war experiences, left my father scarred for the rest of his life and he would never afterwards sleep below decks. However, he was soon back on active service again, having been appointed to another Torpedo Boat Destroyer, HMS RETRIEVER, on 25 January 1918, where he served until the end of the war.

My father's last post before retiring from the Navy was as a Lieutenant on the staff of HMS GANGES, the boy seaman shore-based training establishment at Shotley, near Harwich. He was here for just over two years before deciding to retire at his own request, possibly as a result of his experiences.

3. Imperial Chemical Industries

On 31 March 1928 my father married Clodagh Kennedy at St Saviour's in Chelsea. At this point he applied to the Navy resettlement board and obtained an appointment as Establishment Officer with the newly formed Imperial Chemical Industries at Billingham, County Durham. In those days many large companies provided rented accommodation for their employees, ICI being no exception.

The job of Establishment Officer was to look after all aspects of this property. My father and two other candidates were put forward and my father was offered the job. So in 1928, at the age of thirty, married and on a salary of £400 per annum, he found himself launched on a career in industry on the North East coast. For someone born and bred in the South whose whole life had been the Royal Navy, this must have been quite a culture shock.

My parents lived in Norton-on-Tees which at that time was a very attractive village some two miles from Billingham with a Norman Church, a large green and pond surrounded by Georgian houses, several shops and pubs, a village school and its own blacksmith's shop. After a few years my father was promoted to Company Secretary at Billingham and as a result, on an increased salary of £800 per annum, he became the occupant of the Company Secretary's house, "Ivy Cottage", for a rent of £80 pa. He later had central heating installed for an additional £10 pa!

4. An Idyllic Life

My father could not get the Navy out of his system, and over the desk in his study he had a narrow set of shelves built on which resided a Dinky Toy lead model of every ship in the fleet. Sometimes I would be allowed to play with them. The battle ships had miniature rotating gun turrets and detachable seaplanes. I remember some of the names to this day, HMS HOOD, REPULSE, RENOWN - many were to meet unfortunate ends in the ensuing war.



H.M.S.Hood.

5. Royal Navy in the Second World War

This idyllic life was shattered by the outbreak of the Second World War. On 2 October 1939 my father was recalled to the Royal Navy as a Lieutenant Commander and served in a number of shore bases around England. During the war I can only remember seeing him on leave three or four times and not much more after that, because in 1946 my parents divorced. After the war my father returned to ICI Billingham as Company Secretary , but died at the age of sixty on 5 April 1958.

My mother married for the second time Philip Charles Dickens, a grandson of Charles Dickens, on 22 January 1947. He died in 1964. My mother died on 26 September 1977.
