

Albert James Dallen

My name is Albert Dallen.

My dad was also called Albert.

He was a sailor and he met and married Emily, my mum, in Liverpool in 1881 when he was twenty-two and she was eighteen.

I was their first child, born in 1883 in Liverpool. Dad brought mum and I back to St John, he was working in Devonport, and they had eight more children. I had four brothers and four sisters.

I grew up in the village.

I joined the Royal Navy in 1901 when I was just 18. I trained as a chippie. I served on several ships including the battleships Victorious and Magnificent.

It was peacetime and life in the Navy was good.

In January 1912 I was promoted to Shipwright 2nd Class, I was proud and in April 1912 I was posted to the Cruiser Monmouth. Just after that my Dad died, aged only 53.

In January 1914, I married Florence Glover who lived in Millbrook. She was the daughter of a sailor so she understood what being married to one meant.

She was a dressmaker.

I was serving on Monmouth when War was declared on 4th August 1914. My brother Fred had also enlisted in the Duke of Cornwall's Light Infantry and was later wounded, in 1917.

Monmouth was an old fashioned ship, built in 1895 and armed with six-inch guns

We were sent to the southern oceans to hunt the battle squadron of Admiral Max Von Spee, who was raiding in the South Pacific. His fleet included the powerful ships Scharnhorst and Gneisenau. These were much stronger cruisers than our two main ships, Monmouth and Good Hope.

On 22nd October we rounded the Horn and sailed north to find the German fleet. We spotted the enemy on 1st November. By 2pm we had formed into a battle line, in wild and stormy seas.

But when our Admiral Craddock saw the massive strength of the enemy ships we turned away from them and headed south, but by 5pm we were caught and were forced to fight.

Our sister ship Good Hope was sunk very quickly. We were targeted by Scharnhorst and by 7.30 pm we were badly hit, burning and listing badly in the dark evening and we tried to limp away.

The German ship Nurberg caught us up. Nurberg's captain directed his searchlights at our ship's ensign, which was an invitation for us to surrender. Our captain declined to surrender and we suffered a final onslaught and sank later that evening.

On that night of 1st November 1914, the British Navy suffered the worst defeat in 150 years; we lost 1600 officers and men, the entire crews from our Monmouth and Good Hope, including Admiral Craddock.

I was one of those that died that night at sea in the Pacific, just three months after the start of the war, and just ten months after Florence and I had wed.

I was the second man from St John to die in the war.

I was thirty years old.