

Diary of Leading Stoker Victor Bethell, HMS Gloucester, 26th April - 5th June 1916

HMS Gloucester was a Town-class light cruiser that took part in the first naval encounter of the war, the chase of the German battlecruiser SMS Goeben and the light cruiser SMS Breslau in the Mediterranean, during which she engaged and hit Breslau. In May 1916, she was back in home waters with the 3rd Light Cruiser Squadron, part of the Grand Fleet's Battlecruiser fleet. The extract below covers the Irish Easter Rising and the Battle of Jutland. A Leading Stoker was in charge of a group of stokers, whose job was to shovel coal into the furnaces of a ship's boilers. Known as the 'Black Gang', they did hot, hard work in the bowels of the ship.

Wednesday 26th April: At Queenstown. We take onboard 100 Royal Marines and proceed to Galway Bay, on the west coast of Ireland.

Thursday 27th April: We arrive at Galway and land the soldiers to stop the Sinn Féin rising. The Irish Police bring aboard five leaders and we held them prisoners.

Friday 28th April: Troopship arrives and they land more soldiers.

Wednesday 10th May: Still at Galway. HMS Adventure relieves us and we proceed to Queensferry in the Firth of Forth.

Friday 12th May: Arrived at Queensferry.

Tuesday 30th May: Left Queensferry with the fleet and go full speed for Germany.

Wednesday 31st May: At four pm, enemy sighted and our battlecruisers open fire. We were alongside the battlecruisers (HMS Lion flagship) about the moment that HMS Invincible was blown up and sank in a few minutes (she was off the port side of us). Half an hour later HMS Queen Mary was also sunk,

the Germans having the whole High Seas Fleet out. Then the armoured cruiser HMS Defence steamed in between the line of fire and was also sunk. A little later we found ourselves alongside a German light cruiser. We opened fire on her and greatly damaged her. She hoisted the white flag at the same time one of our destroyers finished her off with a torpedo. Shell was flying all around us, we were in the thick of it but we came out without a scratch, then the Light Cruiser Squadron under Rear-Admiral Rear-Admiral Napier (Falmouth flagship), steamed around to prevent them retreating back to Germany. Our battlecruisers keeping up a constant fire. By this time, Admiral Jellicoe's Fleet had come up (HMS Iron Duke flagship). The battle lasted until ten pm. Then we lost sight of our Big Ships, the sky being one mass of fire. The Battle took place off Jutland.

Thursday 1st June: Still out searching for the enemy.

Friday 2nd June: Went back to Queensferry and left after coaling to search for survivors.

Saturday 3rd June: We came across a destroyer upside down. We put two shells into her and sank her.

Sunday 4th June: The destroyers with us picked up a few survivors.

Monday 5th June: Back in Queensferry.



HMS Gloucester (Imperial War Museum SP459)