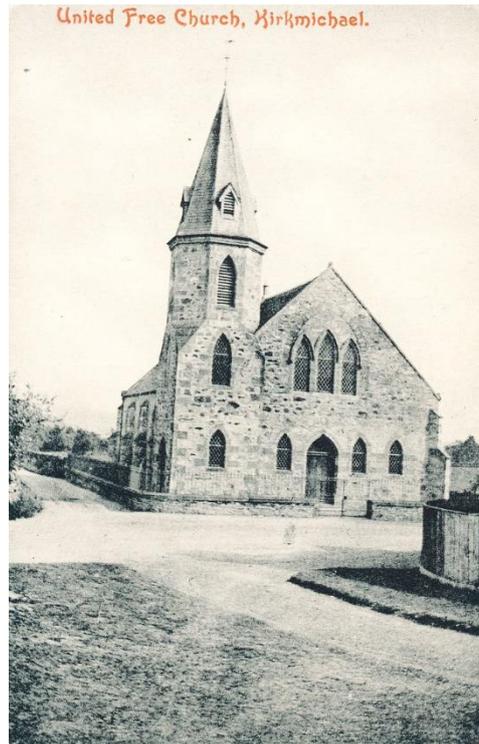


Peter Mitchell and Harry Morrison

Introduction

Peter and Harry were best friends. They both came from the village of Kirkmichael. Harry's dad, John Hunter Morrison, was the minister at the United Free Church, Kirkmichael, known as the Duff Memorial Kirk. Here is a picture of it from around the time of the First World War:



Joining the Navy

When both of them were 16 years old, they joined the navy - in late 1914 or 1915. They may have done this with the permission of their families, or they may have run away, thinking that it would be an adventure.

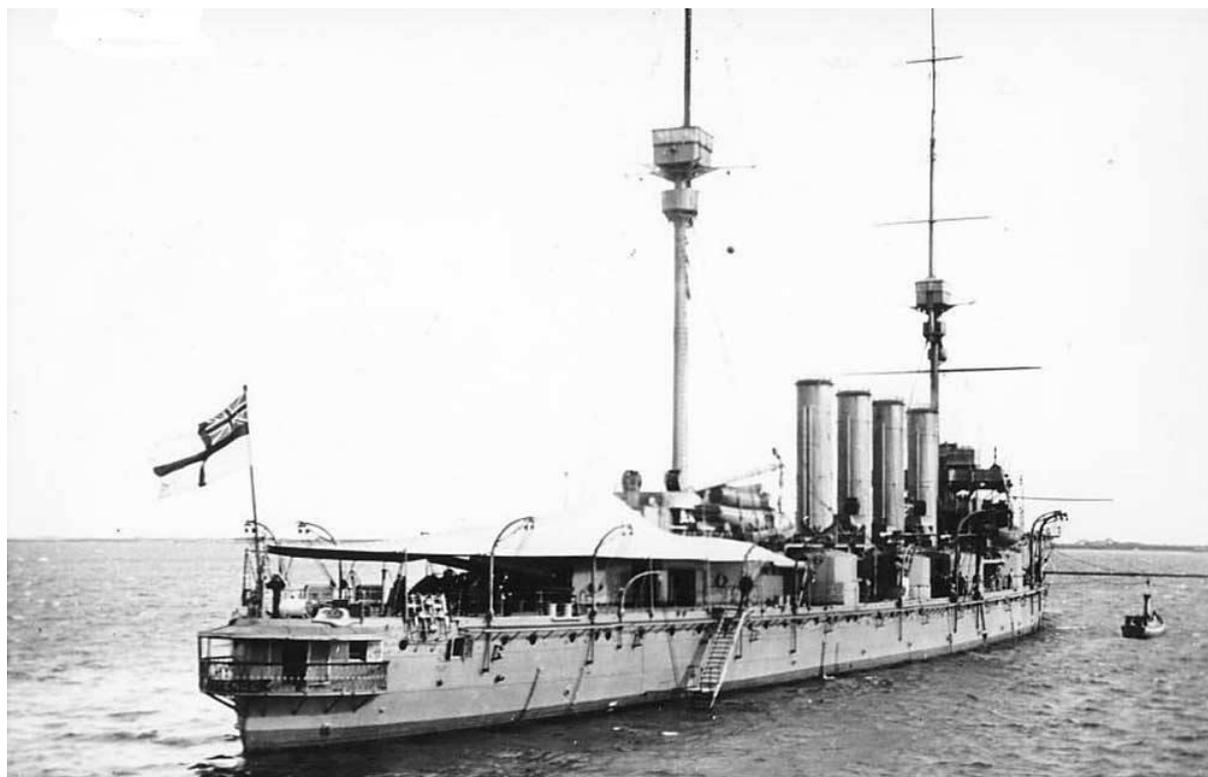
Remember that, in these days, many people would stay in the same place all of their lives. Very few people owned cars. Before there were machines like combine harvesters and tractors, lots of people were needed to work on the farms. Almost no working people went on holidays to other countries and many would never have the chance to go abroad at all. If you were from the countryside, the chances were that you would spend your whole life in one place, in one small community, speaking to the same people every day and following a similar routine.

So as well as wanting to fight for their country, these boys also believed that joining the navy would be an adventure. There are a few reasons why they might have wanted to join the navy instead of the army. One reason could have been that you could legally join the navy at 16 years old, while you had to be 18 before you could join the army (and you could only go abroad once you were 19). However, lots and lots of boys lied about their age to join both the navy and the army over the course of the war.

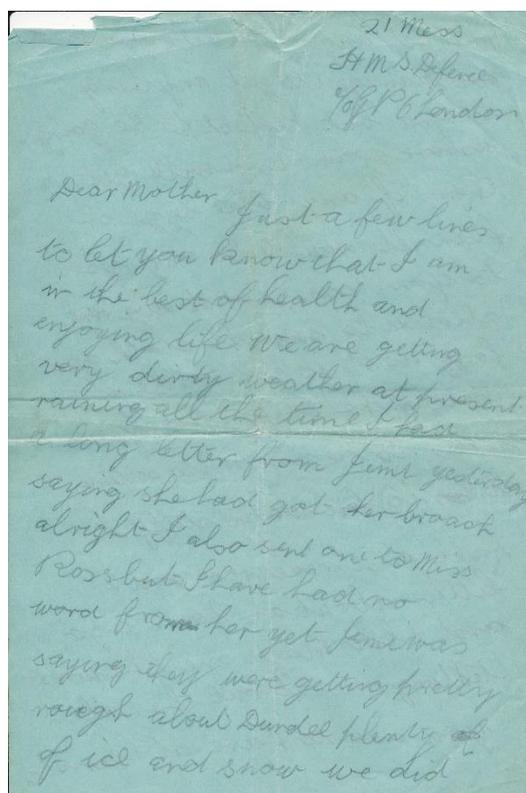
Another reason why they might have wanted to join the Royal Navy is because, in 1914, it was the most powerful navy in the world. At this point in time, the British Empire ruled over 458 million people – 1/5th of the population of the entire world at the time! Here is a picture of Peter Mitchell and his friends in the navy – **can you spot him?**:



H.M.S. Defence:



Peter and Harry were both stationed on the H.M.S. Defence. Even though they were on a ship, the men could send and receive letters and parcels. Here is a letter from Peter to his mother:



“Dear mother,

Just a few lines to let you know that I am in the best of health and enjoying life. We are getting very dirty weather at present, raining all the time. I had a long letter from Jemi [Jemima, his sister] yesterday saying she had got her broach alright. I also sent one to Miss Ross but I have had no word from her yet. Jemi was saying they were getting pretty rough about Dundee, plenty of ice and snow. We did not get any of that. I have not managed to get anything to send but I expect to be going ashore soon and will get them if any blue serge [?] or flannel would be any use to you I can send it. We are allowed to send

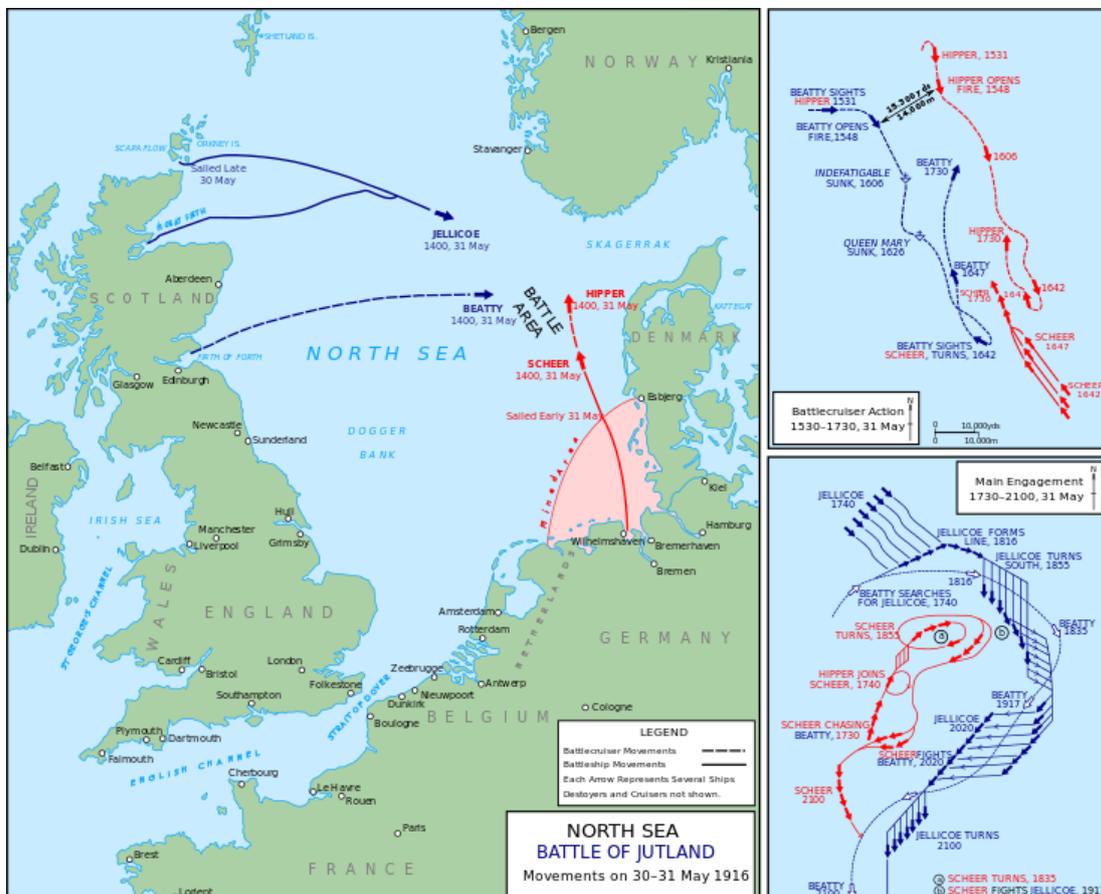
the cloth as long as it is not made up. Lots of the chaps send it away to be made into costumes it is fine warm stuff. I have just received your letter about an hour ago and also May's one. She was telling me about the sale you are to have at Christmas. Willie Grant of the Boreland [Farm] is to do very well if he gives them all the stuff she was telling me. This is all I have time to write at present please let me know if you want any of the two things. Hoping you are all well.

Best wishes,

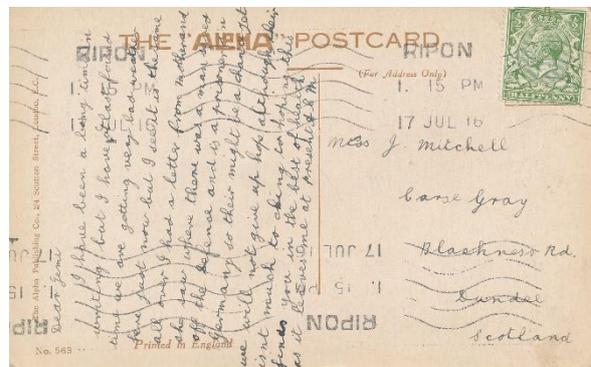
From Peter"

Battle of Jutland

However, the horrors of the First World War caught up with Peter and Harry and on the 31st May 1916, both men died when the H.M.S. Defence was destroyed at the Battle of Jutland, off the coast of Denmark. This battle lasted only two days (May 31st – June 1st) but was the biggest naval battle of the entire war. The British lost 6,784 men, while the Germans lost 3,039, making a total of 9,823 men dead.



It took some time before all of the dead were identified and it was reported that there were some survivors of the Battle of Jutland. Therefore, we have this postcard in which one of Peter's siblings writes to Jemima, Peter's sister in July 1916 saying:



“ Dear Jemi,

I have been a long time in writing but I have at last found time. We are getting very bad weather here just now but I see it is the same all over. I had a letter from mother and she saw where there was a man saved off the Defence and is a prisoner in Germany so there might be a chance yet. We will not give up hope although there isn't much to cling to.

Hoping this finds you in the best of health as it leaves me at present,

A.L.M.”

Peter's grave lies at the Portsmouth Naval Cemetery in England.

Harry's life is commemorated on the same grave as his father, who died 4 years after his son. The grave is in Kirkmichael Cemetery (pictured, left).

