

Being in 'lockdown', with time on my hands, I have gone through my medals and have come across some interesting stories which I would like to share. So, I will be sending out, on a monthly basis,

- a *Monthly Newsletter*,
- a *Mid-Month Visit*, and
- an article titled *The Man behind the Medal*.

I hope you enjoy these stories, and find them of some interest.

## **The Man behind the Medal Able Seaman Clement Chapman Queen South Africa Medal (no bar)**

Clement Chapman was born at St. Pancras in London on 22<sup>nd</sup> July 1877.

On 22<sup>nd</sup> July 1892, his 15<sup>th</sup> birthday, he joined the Navy as 'Boy 2<sup>nd</sup> Class', having previously been employed as an 'Errand Boy'.

His official schooling was obviously limited.

At the time of attestation it was recorded that he was 5 foot 3 inches tall, had auburn hair, brown eyes and his complexion was recorded as being fair. He also had a number of tattoos – a cross and pierced heart on his left arm and flowers on the back of his right hand. He had a bracelet on his right wrist.

He was promoted to 'Boy 1<sup>st</sup> Class' in November 1893 when based at Ganges, to 'Ordinary Seaman' in 1895 when on HMS Cruiser, and to 'Able Seaman' in 1899 when on HMS Repulse.

He saw initial service in the South African War (1899-1902) whilst on the latter ship before being transferred to the 2<sup>nd</sup> class cruiser, HMS Sybille, on 16<sup>th</sup> October 1900 – and here starts the story as to why I was interested in this medal.



*HMS Sybille*

On 15<sup>th</sup> January 1901 the HMS Sybille was lying at anchor in Lambert's Bay, which is about 250 km west of Cape Town. There were rumours that the crew were unhappy with the attitude of Captain Williams towards his men.

That evening, the Captain and some of the officers aboard went ashore and the sailors were ordered to remain on board. After a good night out, Captain Williams and those who had joined him, decided to remain on land for the night.



Quite understandingly, the sailors and the officers not chosen to join the Captain, having been left to their own vices, decided to have their own party. With the on-board party in full swing, a couple of those on board decided to take the HMS Sybille on a short trip out to sea – a 'booze cruise' of sort.

This 'booze cruise' turned out to be the last trip the HMS Sybille ever made as, encountering a strong wind once she had left the protection of the bay, she struck a reef before running aground and breaking into two. This was in the early hours of 16<sup>th</sup> January 1901.

Realising the seriousness of the situation, a sailor, with his senses not numbed by the intake of alcohol, fired an emergency signal from one of the guns on board.

The HMS Sybille had run aground about 10 km south of Lambert's Bay and an inhabitant of a settlement at Steenbokfontein realised the situation and rode on horseback to Lambert's Bay to alert the authorities.

Later that morning a rescue operation was mounted with all the crew, other than two who drowned, being rescued.



Clement Chapman was one of 187 men of the vessel to be awarded the QSA Medal without clasp.

A month later, at the end of February 1901, Chapman was assigned to the HMS Monarch and then on 27<sup>th</sup> May 1901 to the HMS Forte, on which he served until the end of the war.

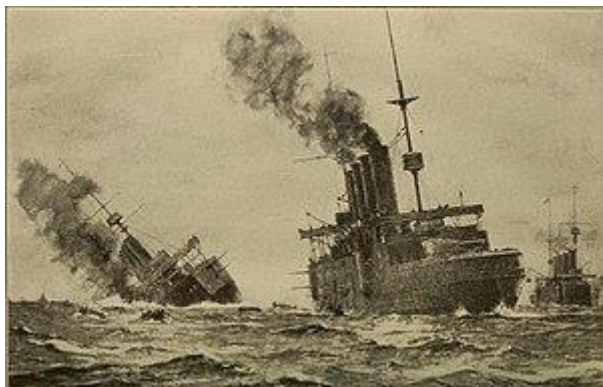
In July 1905 he was based at Pembroke with the rank of Sailmaker's Mate and on 1<sup>st</sup> September the same year he was discharged and joined the Royal Fleet Reserve.

He was recalled for war service in 1914.

At the outbreak of World War 1 he was assigned to HMS Aboukir, an armoured cruiser, built in 1900.

On the morning of 22<sup>nd</sup> September 1914, HMS Aboukir, HMS Cressy and HMS Hogue were on patrol in the North Sea off Ymuiden, when they were attacked by the German submarine U-9.

With HMS Aboukir sinking rapidly, Captain J. Drummond requested the other ships to close in and rescue survivors.



*HMS Aboukir*

However Captain Otto Weddigen of the U-9 had other ideas and completed two more attacks, sinking both other ships.

After the attacks several Dutch vessels rescued as many survivors as they could.

Despite these efforts, the combined loss from the three ships was 62 Officers and 1 397 seamen.

HMS Aboukir's loss was 527, Clement Chapman being one of them.

His name is commemorated on the Chatham Naval Memorial.

In his early days in the Navy, Chapman's conduct left something to be desired being rated 'good' in 1896 and 1897, and 'fair' in 1899. Whilst serving on HMS Repulse in June 1899 he was sentenced to 14 days in cells, which he served on HMS Pembroke. However, he was one of the many who paid the ultimate sacrifice for his country. I do not have his World War 1 medals.

**REMEMBER** to keep an eye on our website ([www.battletoursza.com](http://www.battletoursza.com)) - our blog has regular posts on Anniversaries / Battles / Activities / Births & Deaths / etc.

**Allan Gordon**