

WESTERN FRONT ASSOCIATION, LANCASHIRE NORTH BRANCH

DESPATCH: May 2018 - Supplementary Information

DISTINGUISHED CROSS CASE STUDY - Chief Artificer Engineer Alexander Noble: Bill Myers

ONE of the rarer gallantry medals of the First World War was awarded to a former Barrow-in-Furness schoolboy for his bravery in the Battle of Jutland. **Alexander Noble** was born in 1887 and was number ES 2651 with the Royal Naval Reserve. He won the Distinguished Service Cross - one of under 2,000 awarded during the war.

The sailor is listed in Naval records as being born on September 22 in 1887 at Fraserburgh in Aberdeenshire. He was a pupil at Barrow's secondary school for boys when it was on Abbey Road. A report in the Barrovian magazine for the Municipal School for Boys in winter 1916 noted:



"It will be a great pleasure to all those who were with him at school to know of his success. He took part in the great naval battle of Horn Reef and did much to help to bring his torpedo-boat destroyer out of a perilous position."

Horn Reef, in the North Sea, is better known at the Battle of Jutland, the biggest naval engagement of the First World War, which was fought from 31st May to 1st June 1916.

He served on **HMS Porpoise**, an Acasta-class destroyer which was built in the John Thorncroft yard at Southampton. It was launched 21st July 1913. The ship was 265ft in length and displaced 934 tons. It was armed with three guns firing four-inch shells, a 2pdr pom-pom anti-aircraft gun and a pair of torpedo tubes. It had a crew of 73 and a top speed of 31 knots or 36mph.



Noble, who was a chief artificer engineer, had his gallantry recorded in government paper The London Gazette on September 15 in 1916. The brief citation gives a sense of the drama of battle where essential repairs to ships were carried out at sea and under enemy fire. It says:

"Went twice into the after stokehold, but was driven out by steam. Succeeded at the third attempt and shut off auxiliary feed pump and auxiliary stop Valve."

His ship, part of the 4th Destroyer Flotilla, took on German battleships and cruisers. Just after midnight, Porpoise was hit by two shells. One hit near the bridge and put the steering out of action while the other severed the main steam supply - killing two and injuring two more.

The Barrovian noted that Noble had recently returned for a school visit and gave encouragement to boys taking examinations in the mechanical skills needed to be an artificer in the Royal Navy. He told the youngsters: "There was no better training in the world to make engineers and men of them."

Noble's ship avoided any further battle damage at Jutland and managed to limp back to the River Tyne on 2nd June. By 12th September 1916 the ship had been repaired and was in

the English Channel with Spitfire and Unity when a German U-boat was spotted. It was depth charged without success.

Porpoise was sold to Brazil in 1920 and was in service until 1946 as Alexandro Dealenca and from 1927 as Maranhao.