

Richard James LOBB

Leading Carpenter's Crew, HMS "Highflyer"
Died August 26th 1914, aged 21

Commemorated on Plymouth Naval Memorial, and there is a memorial tablet in Roscarrock Chapel

Richard James Lobb was born in 1892 to Francis Ede and Mary Annie Lobb, and always known as Jim. In the 1901 census Francis (41) was recorded as a mariner. The household consisted of Jim's father and mother, Annie (39), as well as a brother Charles (2) and four sisters –Annie (15), Letitia (13), Florrie (10) and Olive (5). He also had an older brother Frank born in 1885. In the 1911 census 18 year old Jim was living with his aunt and uncle in Torpoint, where his occupation is shown as Carpenter's Crew RN, so presumably he had now joined the navy and was working in the dockyards. Jim was Leading Carpenter's Crew on HMS Highflyer when it left Plymouth on August 4th 1914.

Highflyer was part of 9th Cruiser Squadron patrolling in the Central Atlantic intercepting German commerce raiders and protecting allied shipping. She was transferred to the Cape Verde station to help in the search for German armed merchant raider, the SS Kaiser Wilhelm der Grosse.

The Kaiser Wilhelm der Grosse was a former transatlantic liner that entered service in 1897 as the largest and longest liner afloat. In March 1898 she gained the hotly contested Blue Riband for Germany with the fastest crossing of the Atlantic. When war broke out she was quickly converted into an armed cruiser and repainted in grey and black. At that early stage of the war her commander, Captain Reymann, acted not only in accord with the rules of war, but the rules of mercy. He sank three ships, but only after taking all their occupants on board. When he encountered two passenger liners, Galician and Arlanza, and found they had many women and children on board, he released both vessels to go on their way. Such notions of chivalry were soon to be lost in the all-out carnage of the next four years of total war. (The Galician was later to become the hospital ship Glenart Castle, which was torpedoed and sunk in February 1918 with the loss of 162 lives, despite being clearly marked and lit as a hospital ship. The Arlanza later became an armed merchant cruiser with 6 six-inch guns, to work as part of the Northern Patrol.)

Running low on fuel off the west coast of Africa, the German vessel arrived at the desolate Spanish Saharan colony of Rio de Oro on August 17th where she was discovered by the Highflyer nine days later and before the lengthy coaling had been completed. Although this was a port of neutral Spain, the rules of neutrality required vessels to leave the neutral port within 7 days. The Kaiser Wilhelm de Grosse only had six four-inch guns, and was no match for the Highflyer which was armed with 11 six-inch quick firing guns.

This 1920 account is based on official documents and tells the story of the Battle of Rio de Oro -

"Captain Buller in the Highflyer found the chase in the afternoon of the 26th coaling between two ships off the Rio de Oro. A third collier was standing off stopped - showing what lavish arrangements the Germans had made in this area for keeping their commerce destroyers supplied. Captain Buller being in much superior force, summoned the enemy to surrender. (Highflyer, 5,600 tons, 20.1 knots, eleven 6" and eight 12 pdrs. Kaiser Wilhelm had six 10.5 cm (about 4") guns firing 38-l. shells. (Diary of J Peters, her assistant engineer)). The prompt answer was, "German warships do not surrender. I request you to observe Spanish neutrality." The obvious retort was that she was violating it herself. This Captain Buller signalled, adding that he would sink her if she did not surrender, and warning her tenders to cast off. There was a second refusal, and after giving her an hour and a half to strike or put to sea, during which the tenders made off and the Highflyer manoeuvred to get a range clear of the land, Captain Buller at 3.10pm fired a challenging shot. The German at once opened fire, the Highflyer replied, and the unequal action began.

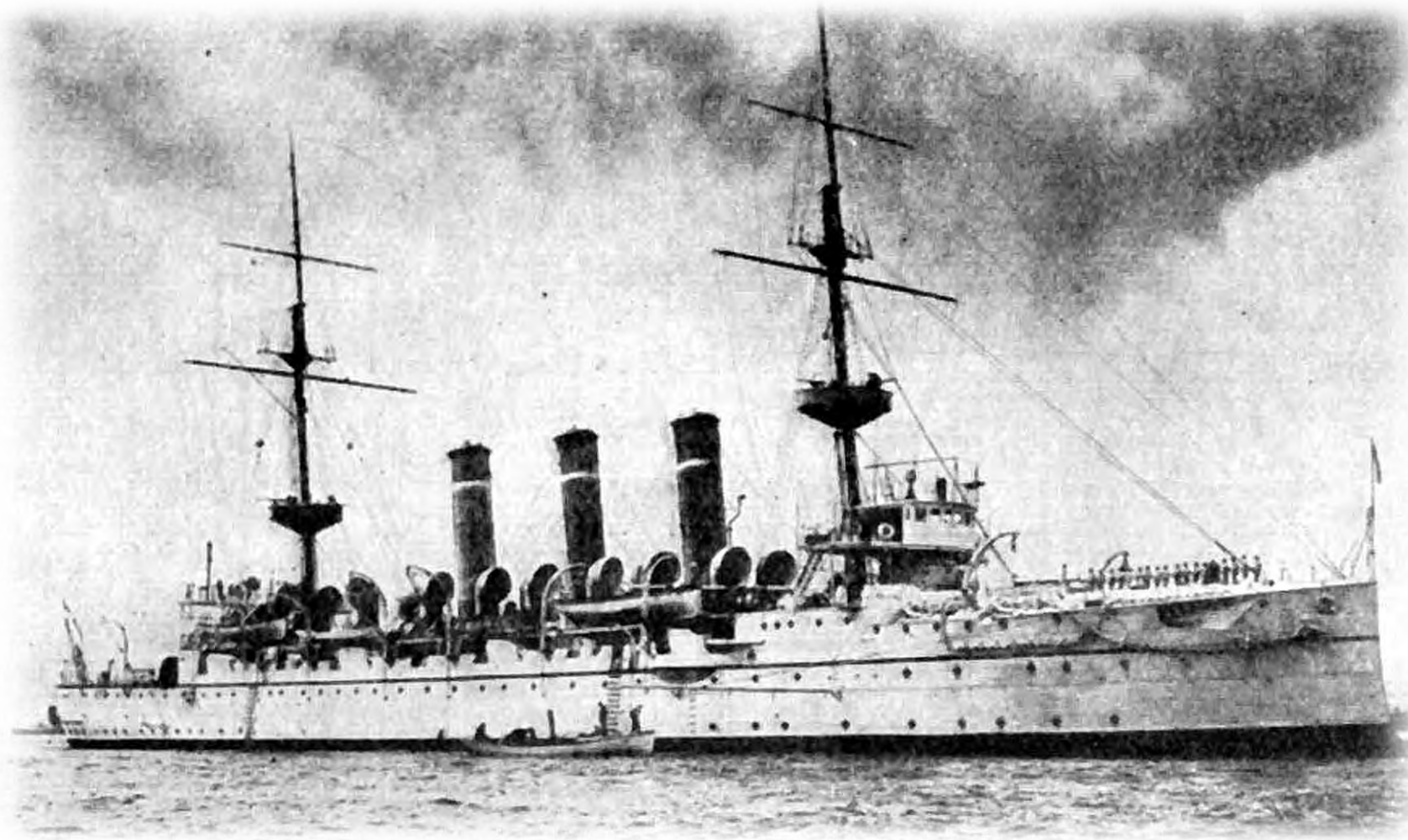
For an hour and a half it lasted briskly, but at 4.45 the Kaiser Wilhelm ceased fire and boats were seen to be leaving her. To save further bloodshed, Captain Buller signalled her to haul down her flag and sent off boats under the Red Cross with medical assistance. But before they could reach the battered ship she went down in shallow water. As the crew ashore had taken up a menacing position behind the sand-hills, Captain Buller then recalled the boats and left the Germans to their fate.

So it was that the only commerce destroyer that had started from Germany ended her career ten days after she reached her cruising ground. What her losses were is unknown. Those of the Highflyer were one man killed and five slightly wounded, while the material damage was so small that she held her ground in spite of the Admiralty authorising her to return to Gibraltar to refit. The British prisoners from the Galician, Kaipara, Nyanga, and Tubal Cain suffered not at all: for the German captain, with the humanity that had distinguished him throughout, sent them on board one of his colliers before the action began, and she on August 28th set them free at Las Palmas. The capture of this ship was specially happy, for it seems to have gone some way to break up one of the only combinations which the Germans appear to have arranged against our trade."

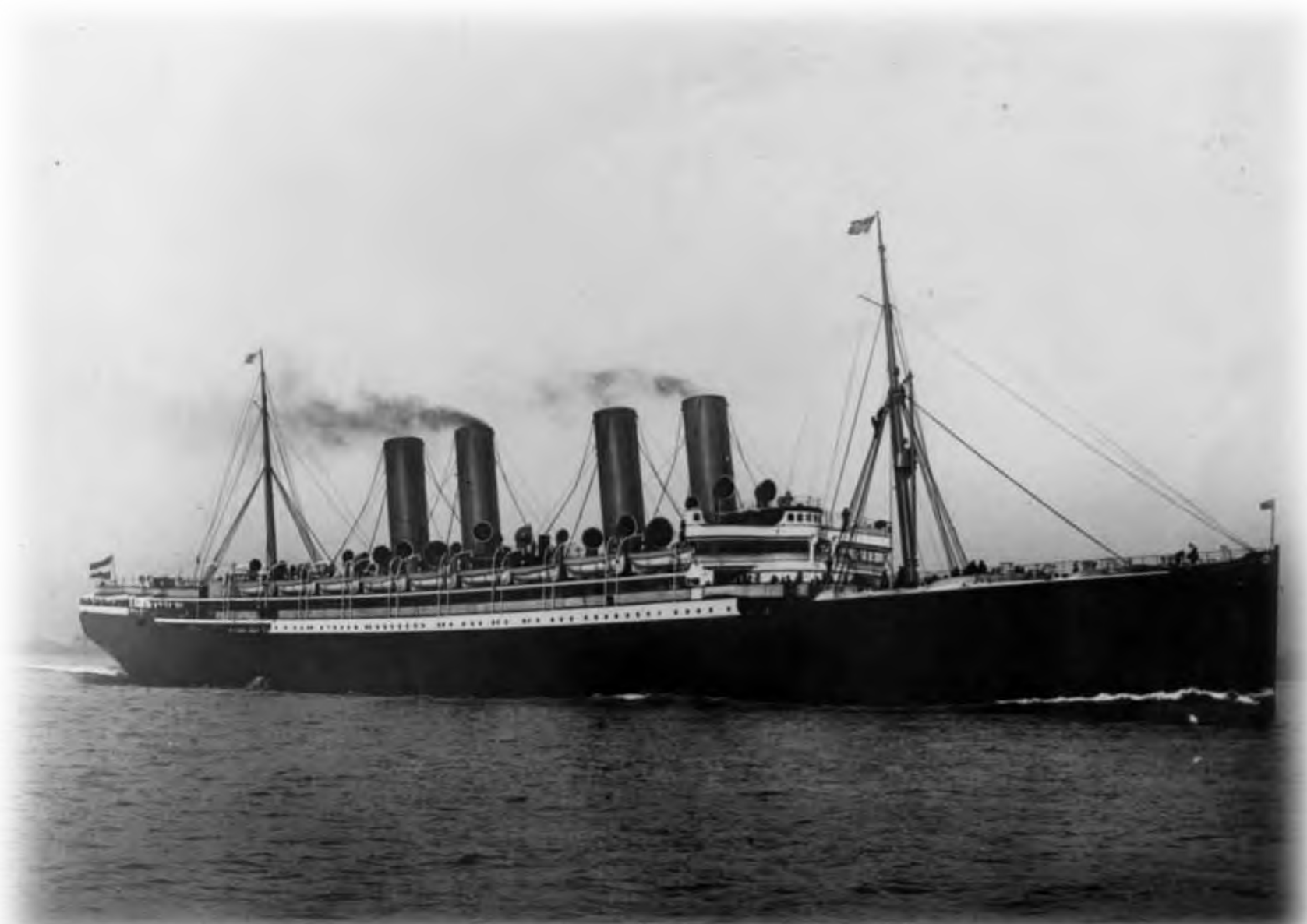
Captain Reymann of the Kaiser der Grosse has a different version, in that he states that he scuttled the ship with dynamite after running out of ammunition. Of course, after 1½ hours of unequal bombardment it may well have been doomed in any event. She went down before his men got close, and Captain Buller may have drawn his own conclusions that the ship sank as a result of her actions. Captain Reymann managed to swim ashore and eventually made his way back to Germany as a stoker on a neutral vessel.

That single British fatality was Jim Lobb, who was shot through the left chest. He was the first Port Isaac casualty of the war, and possibly the first fatality in a naval action during the First World War.

Leading Carpenter's Crew Richard James Lobb was buried at sea around 10am on the morning of August 27th 1914, about 100 nautical miles south west of the Rio de Oro at 22.45 degrees north, 17.41 degrees west. His parents had this marble memorial plaque made, which is still on the wall inside Roscarrock Chapel.



HMS Highflyer



SS Kaiser Wilhelm der Grosse

The image shows two pages of handwritten log entries from the HMS Highflyer. The left page is dated August 26th and describes the battle with the SS Kaiser Wilhelm der Grosse. The right page is dated August 27th and describes the burial at sea of Richard James Lobb. The logs include details of the ships' positions, actions, and the names of crew members involved.

Captain Buller's log entries for the battle, and the burial at sea of Leading Carpenter's Crew Richard James Lobb

A PORT ISAAC HERO.
HE DIES FOR HIS COUNTRY.

Newspaper cutting from the
Cornish Guardian,
September 4th 1914



Richard James Lobb, son of Capt. and Mrs. Frank Lobb, was killed on H.M.S. Highflyer in action on August 26th. off the West Coast of Africa, when she sank the German cruiser Kaiser Wilhelm der Grosse. Deceased was greatly respected. He was only 21 years of age, and entered the Navy as a carpenter three years ago last March on the Indus, after serving an apprenticeship with Mr. W. H. Oatten, boat builder, of Port Isaac. He served two years on the Donegal, and transferred to the Highflyer on January 19th last. He very early proved himself ambitious, and in the first and second examinations he came out on top, first ratings in May last, becoming leading carpenter on June 5th, and at the time of his death had passed as second petty officer, and third rating for joiner and fourth rating for shipwright (4th class). He was the youngest man in the Navy to do this. The Commander of the Donegal complimented him for his great ability and character and perseverance. In all his various examinations he never received less than "v.g."

He was Miss Agnes Weston's secretary for the Temperance League on the Donegal, and all periodicals passed through his hands for the men on board. The opinion of all is that had he lived he would have made his mark in the service.

He was a member of the United Methodist Church and Band of Hope and Liberal Club. His parents received his last letter (written on August 14th) on Monday, August 24th. He then expressed the hope soon to see them all, and stated he was in God's keeping. He was highly respected by old and young alike for his frankness and kindly word and smile for all.



Memorial to Leading Carpenter's Crew Richard James Lobb in Roscarrock Chapel

Sources
HMS Highflyer: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/HMS_Highflyer_\(1898\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/HMS_Highflyer_(1898))
SS Kaiser der Groose: <http://www.thegreatoceanliners.com/kwdg.html>
1920 Account of the Battle of Rio de Oro: <http://www.naval-history.net/WW1Book-RN1a.htm#9>
Cornish Guardian, September 4th 1914
PISCES is grateful to Allan Green for providing family information on Richard James Lobb and for copies of the Highflyer's log book entries