

## The First World War touched Danish west coast communities in the first week of September 1917

28.06.17

A body was found washed up on Blokhus beach on the afternoon of 5<sup>th</sup> September 1917. The next day the local newspaper described the body as having been in the sea for some time. It was assumed he was a British seaman. The man was wearing a sailor's dark blue shirt and dark blue trousers, with a leather belt, dark blue wool socks and laced boots. There were no tattoos on the body. He had, on his left hand ring finger, a gold signet ring with the initials R.C.E. on the bezel. It was engraved inside "*Dear mother died 10. June 1915.*" After the inquest the body was taken to the chapel at Hune church to be buried in the churchyard. The newspaper article mentioned that bodies and mines had recently washed up on other beaches after stormy west winds.

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| <p>Findet død. 1917-5 September.<br/>paa Blokhus Strand.<br/>Hune Lign, Nørre Hered.</p> | <p>Hune Lign, Nørre Hered.<br/>1917- 9 September.</p> | <p>Ikke et Mandeperson.</p> | <p>Indvandt; engelsk. Frimand. (Paa vandskud<br/>haandlingssag og indbragningssag<br/>Bogstavelig R. C. E. paa Næsen.<br/>Indvandt i den var gravet: hans<br/>moder død 10 juni 1915.)</p> | <p>Hellum 40 7<br/>60141.</p> |
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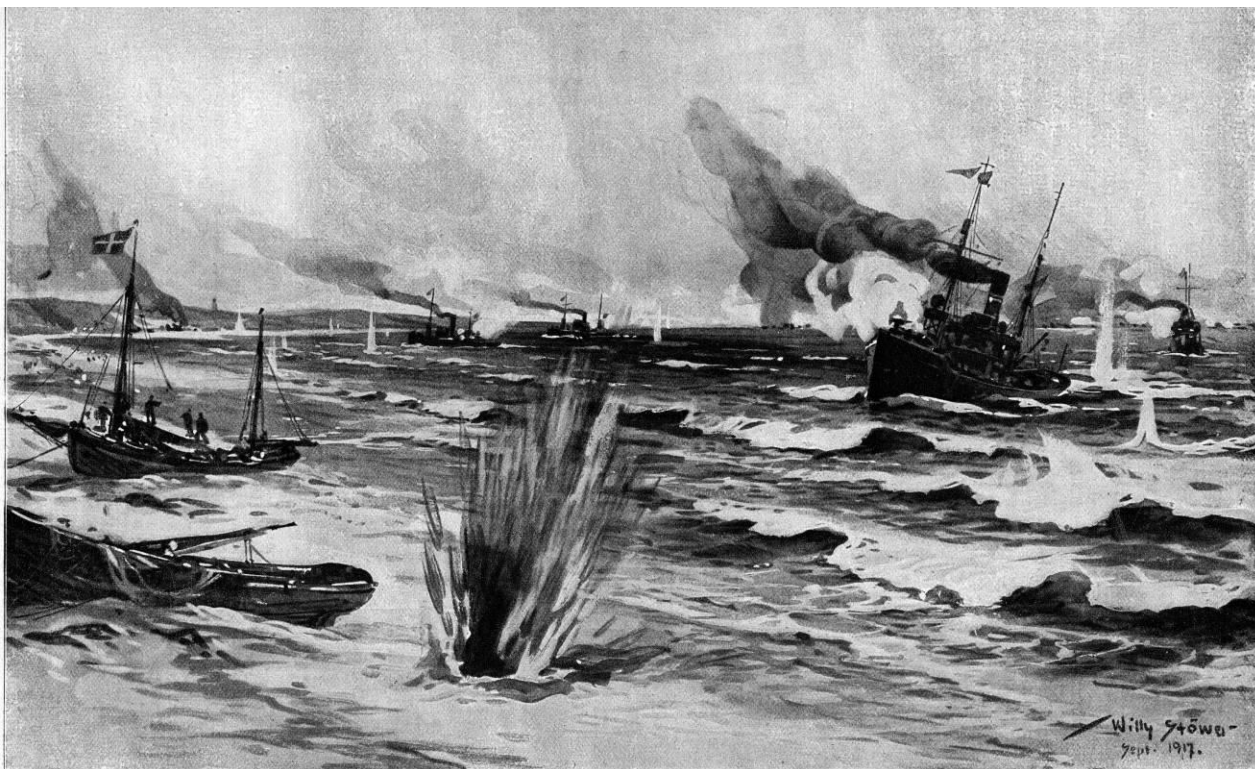
Several bodies had indeed been washed up on the beaches near Harboore, 174 km to the south of Blokhus. The day before on the 4<sup>th</sup> September a body was identified as Chief Petty Officer Stone from H.M.S. "Recruit". He was wearing dark blue clothing and he had a letter written in English dated 8/8/17 in his pocket addressed to C.P.O. Stone. Also in his pocket were keys with tags on which were written various provisions. HMS "Recruit" had sunk on 9<sup>th</sup> August. His death was reported in his local newspaper "Western Times" on 17<sup>th</sup> August "*C.P.O. Robert L. Stone, of Ashburton, has lost his life through the sinking of one of his Majesty's ships. Much sympathy is felt for the widow and four children. Deceased was 43 years of age.*" CPO Robert Lethbridge Stone had been honoured only a week before on 11<sup>th</sup> August 1917 when his name appeared on the Supplement list of the London Gazette as having been "mentioned in dispatches". The bodies of 3 Germans, one found on the 2<sup>nd</sup> and two on the 3<sup>rd</sup>, were also waiting to be buried at Harboore Church. The funeral for all four took place on 6<sup>th</sup> September, they share a plot. Strangely this funeral doesn't appear to have been reported in the Danish local newspaper.



There was already one British seaman buried at Hune Churchyard First Class St. John McGrath HMS "Shark" who had been killed in the Battle of Jutland. R.C.E. was buried next to him in the afternoon of Sunday 9<sup>th</sup> September. A short notice in the local newspaper a couple of days later reported that 6 men from the coast guard carried the coffin to the grave, on which a number of beautiful wreaths were laid. He was classed as unidentified and was later given a Commonwealth War Grave headstone inscribed with the poignant text.

A seaman of the Great War Royal Navy 9<sup>th</sup> September 1917

Known unto God

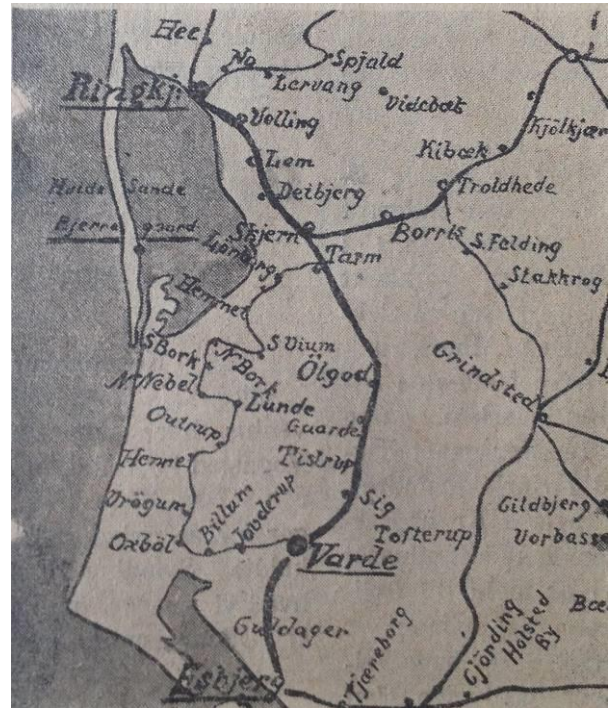


Englische Neutralitätsverletzung gegen Dänemark: Überfall überlegener englischer Seestreitkräfte auf deutsche Wachtschiffe am 1. September 1917. Englische Granaten schlugen auf dänischem Boden ein.  
Nach einer Originalzeichnung von Professor Willy Stöwer.

A naval action had taken place off Horn's Reef approximately 235 km down the coast from Hune on Saturday 1st September. At 7 o'clock on this fine sunny morning with little wind Danes living in the tiny fishing hamlet of Bjerregaard were aroused by the sound of shells exploding nearby. 25 year old Peter Christian Dahl who lived at Gl. Bjerregaard, was woken by his father who was beach bailiff and told to run directly down to the beach to see what was happening. But as shells from British torpedo boats started falling around them, he and the other villagers on their way to the beach turned back and sought shelter. P. Chr. Dahl, who later took over the job after his father, wrote a detailed account of what happened that day<sup>1</sup>. Gl. Bjerregaard was the only farm with a telephone, installed because of their official duties, which also included the life-boat. It became the headquarters for all activities related to the incident. 8 British ships had driven 4 German mine-trawlers to strand on the beach and subsequently destroyed them. A couple of German submarines and airplanes were in the vicinity but kept out of the way until all was clear. There were no British casualties. Only one German seaman was killed and a couple wounded, about 100 others managed to reach land and were interned in Denmark for the rest of the war. Fortunately no Danes were injured by the shelling on the village although windows in Christian Christiansen's house were damaged, a sheep was killed by a grenade and 4 horses scared by it all ran into the fjord and drowned.

<sup>1</sup> <http://milhist.dk/slaget/neutralitetskraenkelsen-ved-bjerregaard-1-sep-1917/>





This occurrence was extraordinary in being the only occasion Britain violated Danish territory in this way. The Danish government protested immediately to the British Government regarding “the recent naval fight off the coast of Jutland.” Danish newspapers ran, understandably so, front page accounts of the violation of Danish territory and it had certainly been dramatic and life threatening for the inhabitants of Bjerregaard during the 20 minutes bombardment. The outcome could easily have been much worse. Grev v. Brochdorff Rantzau from the German Legation in Copenhagen thanked the Danes for helping the German seamen particularly the wounded. On 2<sup>nd</sup> September British newspapers reported “The Admiralty reports :- Our light forces destroyed four enemy mine sweepers off the Jutland coast.” Three weeks later the British Government apologized to the Danish Government, they “expressed sincere regret for the violation of Danish neutrality during the naval fight off the coast of Jutland at Bjerregaard on September 1.” The British Government offered to pay compensation for whatever damage was done.

While the village of Bjerregaard amazingly got through the 1. September with no casualties a tragedy was waiting to happen 6 days later in Tyborøn. A good number of mines had washed up on the west Jutland coast and the Danish navy had been busy destroying them during the week. On Friday 7<sup>th</sup> September a large mine washed up on the beach near Tyborøn. A group of 14 to 18 year old lads, working on Esbjerg fishing boats went for a walk on Tyborøn beach at 6 o'clock on the Saturday evening. They had been warned about the danger but were playing around having fun. They went over to the mine and began throwing stones at it! The mine exploded in a cloud of sand and smoke. 6 were killed, the seventh of the group later explained that he had taken the warning seriously and although jibed by his friends had stood some 100 meters from them and the mine. Gerhardt Christensen survived but with serious injuries. The local newspaper brought a detailed account of the horrendous sight of what was left of the bodies of the teenagers. This was probably an attempt to prevent others from such madness.



Killed, Jens Breinholdt Andersen

Back at Hune R.C.E. was obviously not a casualty of the naval action off Bjerregaard. But he could possibly have been on the HMS "Recruit". With that as a clue, his initials and his mother's date of death it was possible to identify him as Able Seaman Reginald Cecil Evenden by material now available on-line. Reginald Evenden's mother had died on 10<sup>th</sup> June 1915 and he had lost his life on 9<sup>th</sup> August on HMS "Recruit" along with CPO Stone.

Reginald born on 26 July 1894, in Heathfield, Sussex was his parents' firstborn. Luther his father was 21 while Ada his mother was 20. The couple had 14 children, 7 sons and 7 daughters, the youngest, Winston Kitchener Evenden being born in 1914 the year before Ada died. Reginald with brown hair, blue eyes and a fair complexion joined the Navy in 1912 at 17 years of age. He didn't have any tattoos, the only mark that could identify him was a scar on his right great toe. Reginald served on HMS "Queen Mary" for a couple of years but was serving on HMS "Dido", a depot ship, during the Battle of Jutland. Of his younger brothers Laurence and Thomas joined the army, Thomas lying about his age. His father sent his birth certificate and explained to the authorities that Thomas had joined up against his recently deceased mother's wishes. Thomas was sent home as under age, a year later he joined the navy.

## HELLINGLY SAILOR DROWNED.]

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R. C. EVENDEN, A.B.

Reginald had married Fanny Florence Newman in November 1916 in Eastbourne where the Newman family lived. He was 22 while his bride, who worked as a servant, was 27. Fanny had already lost 3 brothers to the war, one of them on HMS "Defence" in the Battle of Jutland. HMS "Recruit" was a new destroyer built at Sunderland and ready for service with Able Seaman Reginald Cecil Evenden on board on 1<sup>st</sup> May 1917. Three months later it was sunk in the North Sea 3 miles north of the North Hinder, the wreck has been located. Laurence Evenden sent home from the army because of heart problems had died on 1<sup>st</sup> August. 3 weeks later the Evenden family got the news of Reginald's death. . They placed the following in the "Eastbourne Gazette" on 22 August *"Will the many friends who have shown so much kindness and sympathy accept the grateful thanks of the widow, father, brothers and sisters of the late R.C.E. Evenden, R.N. whose three years' faithful duty in the North Sea came to such a sudden end"*.

A piece in their local newspaper Sussex Agricultural Express on 24<sup>th</sup> August reads *"Hellingly sailor drowned – Mr. Luther Evenden, of Britannia, Horsebridge, Hellingly, has received official notice from the Admiralty that his eldest son, Able Seaman Reginald Cecil Evenden, was on a destroyer sunk, the 9th inst., and that he was not among the survivors. The deceased was 23 years of age last month and joined the Navy six years ago this month. He was for two and a half years on the ill-fated "Queen Mary" but had been transferred to another boat when she went down. He was married last November and his wife, for whom the greatest sympathy is felt, resides at Eastbourne. Additional pathos is lent to the event by the fact that the deceased expected twelve days' leave commencing next Saturday and his wife had already booked rooms at Grimsby, where they intended spending their holidays. The deceased has two younger brothers Tom and Gordon, in the Navy, each whom joined up since the beginning of the War"*. This last sentence was not quite true but it appears that Gordon had also joined the Royal Navy as a "boy" i.e. noncombatant in November 1916.



Luther and Ada Evenden surrounded by their children<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Photos of Evenden family from John Evenden's family tree on [www.ancestry.co.uk](http://www.ancestry.co.uk)



Newspaper reports about the sinking of HMS "Recruit" on 9<sup>th</sup> August 1917 are very vague. On the 14<sup>th</sup> August the headline was *"Destroyer Sunk – Strikes a mine in the North Sea – The Secretary of the Admiralty makes the following announcement:- One of His Majesty's destroyers has struck a mine in the North Sea and sank. The captain, two officers, and 43 men were saved. All the next-of-kin have been informed."* No more information was forthcoming; the destroyer's name was not mentioned nor how half of the crew was rescued. It would appear from today's on-line information about HMS "Recruit" that the ship had actually been hit by a torpedo from the German submarine SM UB-16.



Fanny Evenden lost not only her husband Reginald but all her 5 brothers to the war. She married William H. Wright in 1920. Reginald's younger brothers Tom and Gordon survived the war. Reginald's name is on the Naval Memorial at Portsmouth. Both Reginald and Laurence are named on the Hellingly War Memorial in Hellingly Cemetery, on the war memorial in Hellingly Church and on their mother's gravestone at Punnetts Town Chapel. A rededication ceremony will take place on 28<sup>th</sup> June 2017 at Hune Church. Able Seaman Reginald Cecil Evenden will be given a new headstone, he is no longer only "Known unto God".



Luther Evenden surrounded by his 11 surviving children