

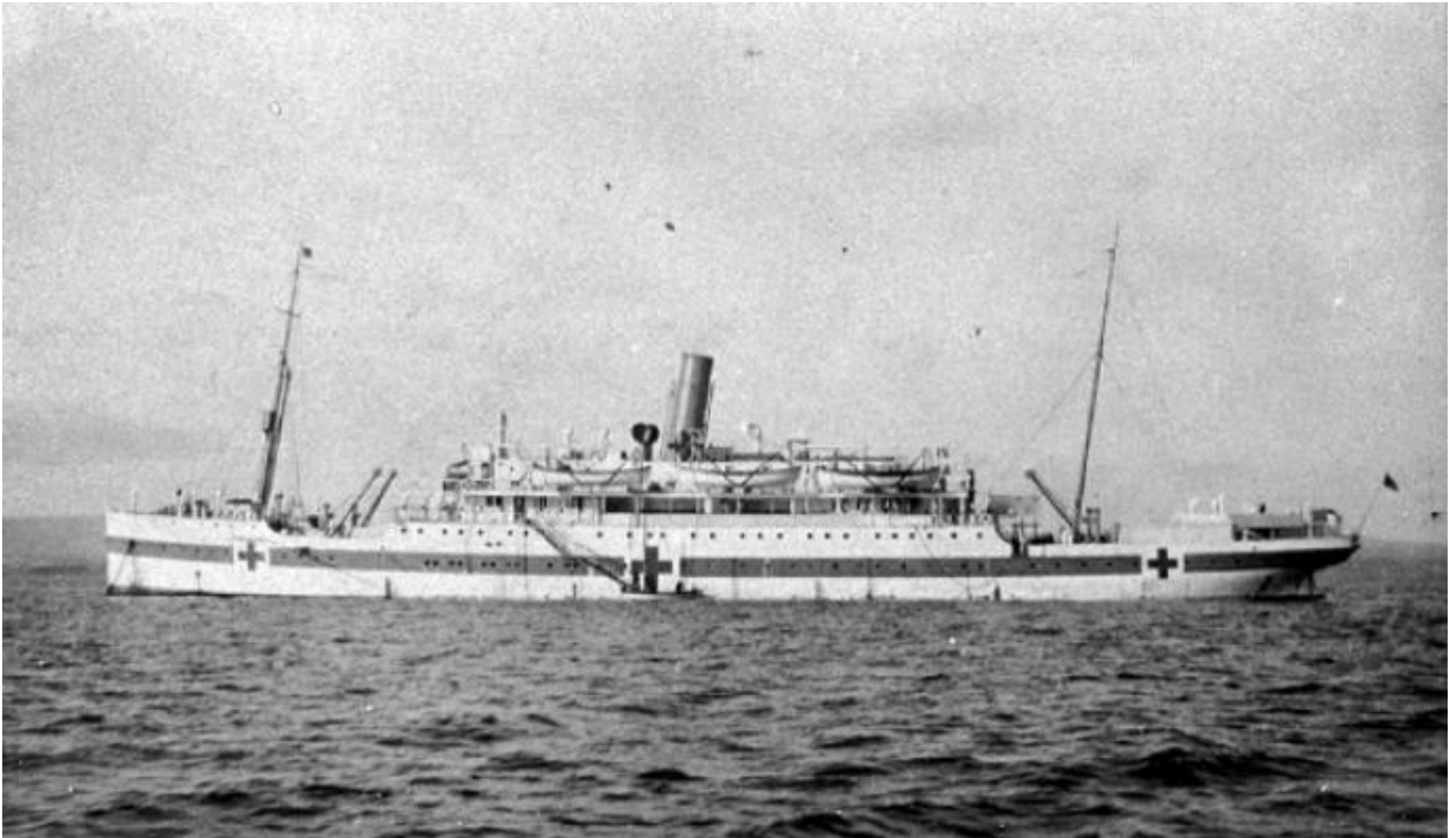
HUGHSON FAMILY OF LAXFIRTH

Hugh Hughson, Seaman, H.M. Hospital Ship *Berbice*. Torpedoed off the Irish Coast, 1917. Laxfirth, North Nesting.

Gilbert Hughson, Seaman Gunner, R.N.R., *HMS Drake*. Torpedoed off the Irish Coast, October, 1917, Laxfirth, North Nesting.

Gifford G Hughson, Seaman, R.N.R., *HMS Alsatian*. Laxfirth, North Nesting.

Their parents were Gilbert Hughson and Jean Gray. They had six sisters, although one died aged nine of whooping cough, one died aged 16 and one died aged 27, and one more brother that died as an infant.



HMHS *Berbice*,

Shetland's medical provision in 1914 was limited. The main hospital, the Gilbert Bain, was small and had only been open twelve years. The initial effect of the war was to decrease the Gilbert Bain's flow of cases, as the season fish trade came to a halt along with the large numbers of fishermen and fishworkers it brought. It was able to deal with a huge increase in servicemen patients and shipwrecked mariners. There was at least one crisis when an ammunition hut exploded in Lerwick.

Since the islands were far from the Western Front, Shetland wasn't a part of Britain that encountered the immense medical effort to deal with those casualties. Shetland's wounded were treated further south and convalesced there. If their "Blighty" (a wound needing treatment in Britain) merited leave they made a long and very welcome journey home.

The main Royal Naval unit based in Shetland, the Tenth Cruiser Squadron, provided its own medical care. HMHS *Berbice*, a hospital ship, was stationed at Busta Voe. Although the squadron suffered casualties in action, much of *Berbice's* work was dealing with cases not directly caused by the war – fevers, accidents, and so on.

From "Scotland's War"



HMS *Drake*

HMS *Drake* was the lead ship of her class of armoured cruisers built for the Royal Navy around 1900. She was assigned to several different cruiser squadrons in home waters upon completion, sometimes as flagship, until 1911 when she became the flagship of the Australia Station. Upon her return home, she was assigned to the 6th Cruiser Squadron of the 2nd Fleet and became the squadron's flagship when the fleet was incorporated into the Grand Fleet upon the outbreak of the First World War.

She remained with the Grand Fleet until refitted in late 1915, when she was transferred to the North America and West Indies Station for convoy escort duties. In 1916 she participated in the unsuccessful search for the German commerce raider SMS *Möwe*. In late 1917 *Drake* was torpedoed by a German submarine off Northern Ireland and sank in shallow water with the loss of eighteen lives. The wreck was partly salvaged, beginning in 1920; a fishing trawler collided with the remainder of the wreck in 1962 and sank the next day. The wrecks of the two ships were demolished during the 1970s, but their remnants remain a popular dive site. Since June 2017, *Drake's* wreck has been a scheduled historic monument. Diving is still permitted, but avoid contact with the wreck and do not remove anything from it.

Design and description

The Drake-class ships were designed as faster and larger versions of the preceding Cressy class with a slightly more powerful armament. They displaced 14,100 long tons (14,300 t), over 2,000 long tons (2,032 t) more than the earlier ships. The Drakes had an overall length of 553 feet 6 inches (168.7 m), a beam of 71 feet 4 inches (21.7 m) and a deep draught of 26 feet 9 inches (8.2 m). They were powered by two 4-cylinder triple-expansion steam engines, each driving one shaft, which produced a total of 30,000 indicated horsepower (22,000 kW) and gave a maximum speed of 23 knots (43 km/h; 26 mph) using steam provided by 43 Belleville boilers. On her sea trials, *Drake* reached a speed of 24.11 knots (44.65 km/h; 27.75 mph). She carried a maximum of 2,500 long tons (2,500 t) of coal and her complement consisted of 900 officers and ratings.

The main armament of the Drake class consisted of two breech-loading (BL) 9.2-inch (234 mm) Mk X guns in single turrets, one each fore and aft of the superstructure. Her secondary armament of sixteen BL 6-inch (152 mm) Mk VII guns was arranged in casemates amidships. Eight of these were mounted on the lower deck and were only usable in calm weather. A dozen quick-firing (QF) 12-pounder (76 mm) 12-cwt guns were fitted for defence against torpedo boats. Two additional 12-pounder 8-cwt guns could be dismantled for service ashore. The ships also carried three 3-pounder (47 mm) Hotchkiss guns and two submerged 18-inch (450 mm) torpedo tubes. By February 1916, all of the lower casemates for her six-inch guns had been plated over and six of them had been remounted on the upper deck so they could be used in heavy weather. Several twelve-pounders had to be removed to make room for the six-inch guns. The ship's waterline armour belt had a maximum thickness of 6 inches and was closed off by 5-inch (127 mm) transverse bulkheads. The armour of the gun turrets and their barbets was 6 inches thick while that of the casemates was 5 inches thick. The protective deck armour ranged in thickness from 1–2.5 inches (25–64 mm) and the conning tower was protected by 12 inches (305 mm) of armour.

Construction and service

HMS *Drake*, named after the Elizabethan adventurer Sir Francis Drake, was laid down at Pembroke Dock on 24 April 1899, and launched on 5 March 1901, when she was christened by Mrs. Lort Phillips, wife of local landowner F. Lort Phillips, of Lawrenny. Based at Portsmouth for her gun, torpedo and circle trials in late 1902, there was also trials with a new type of propeller. She was completed on 13 January 1903 and assigned to the Cruiser Squadron of the Channel Fleet, under the command of the future First Sea Lord, Captain Francis Bridgeman.

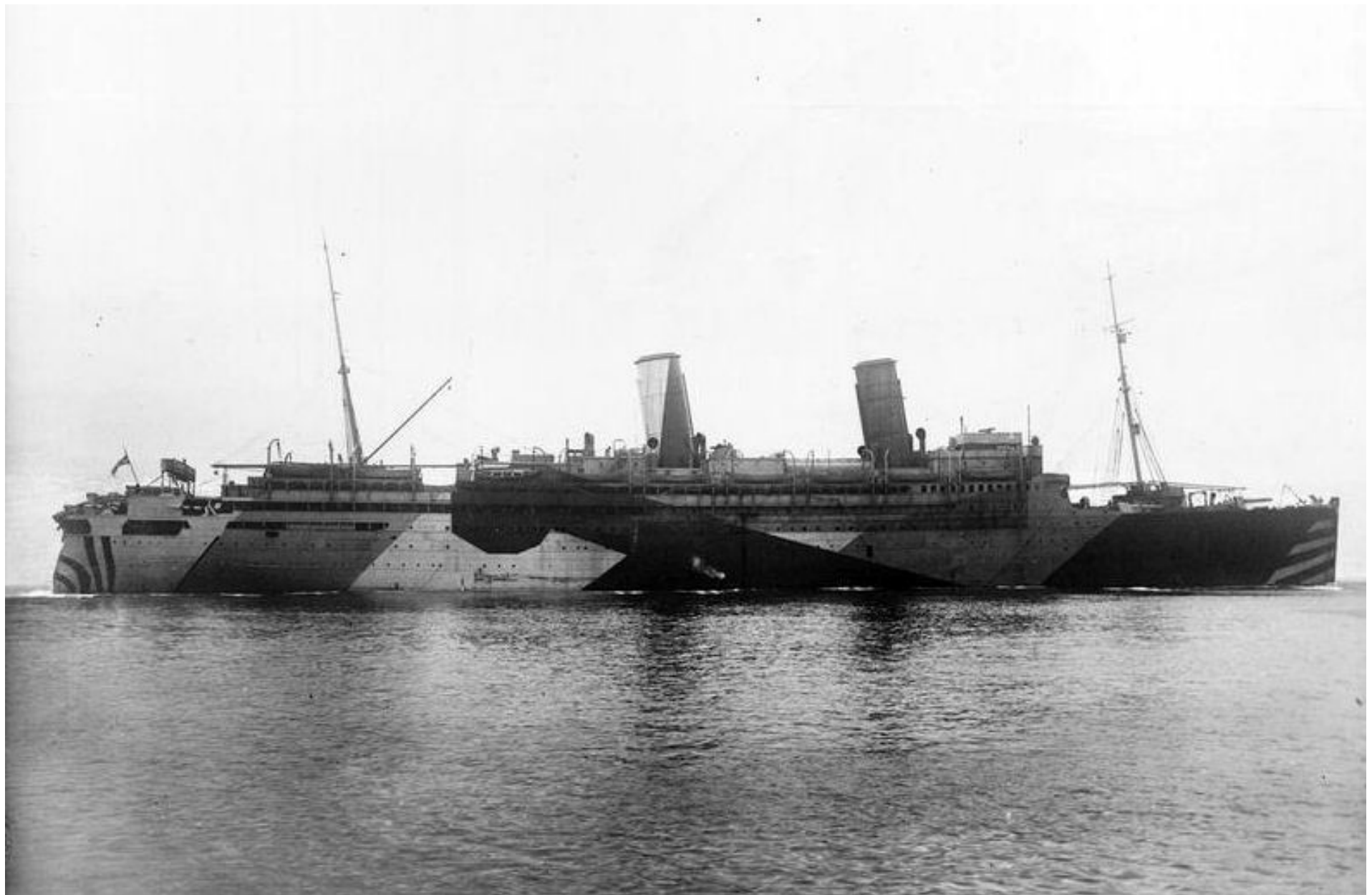
John Jellicoe, also a future First Sea Lord and commander of the Grand Fleet, was her next captain in 1903–04. In 1907 the ship was commanded by Captain Arthur Hayes-Sadler and serving as the flagship of the 2nd Cruiser Squadron under the command of Rear Admiral Charles Henry Adair. The following year, *Drake* became the flagship of 1st Cruiser Squadron of the Channel Fleet (attending the Hudson-Fulton Celebration during this time) and then was assigned to the 5th Cruiser Squadron of the Atlantic Fleet of the Channel Fleet

from 1910–11. She served as the flagship of the Australia Station from 1911–13 before returning home and joined the 6th Cruiser Squadron of the 2nd Fleet in reserve.

That fleet was merged into the Grand Fleet upon mobilisation in mid-1914 and *Drake* became flagship of Rear Admiral William Grant, commander of the squadron. The squadron was briefly deployed at the beginning of the war to blockade the northern exit from the North Sea. In October 1914, under the command of Aubrey Smith, the ship was used to carry Russian bullion worth eight million pounds to Britain; on arrival, *Drake* lay thirty miles off Archangel, and the gold was brought to her at night. The ship was refitted in October 1915 and then transferred to the North America and West Indies Station for convoy escort duties. She participated in the unsuccessful search in the West Indies for the German commerce raider SMS *Möwe* in December 1916.

Drake was torpedoed by the German submarine *U-79*, commanded by Kapitänleutnant Otto Rohrbeck, on 2 October 1917 after her Convoy HH24 had dispersed for its several destinations. The ship was about five miles (8.0 km) off Rathlin Island at the tip of Northern Ireland when she was hit. The torpedo struck the No. 2 Boiler Room and caused two of her engine rooms and the boiler room to flood, killing 18 crewmen. These gave her a list and knocked out her steam-powered steering. Her captain decided to steam for Church Bay on Rathlin Island and accidentally collided with the merchant ship *SS Mendip Range* before she dropped anchor. The collision did not damage *Drake* much, but *Mendip Range* was forced to beach herself lest she sink. *Drake's* crew was taken off before she capsized later that afternoon.

Her wreck at 55°17.1084'N 06°12.5136'W Coordinates: 55°17.1084'N 06°12.5136'W in Church Bay is a favourite site for divers because the wreck is only at a depth between 15–19 metres (49–62 ft) and generally has good visibility. Salvage of the wreck began in 1920 and continued for several years. On the night of 3 November 1962, the steam trawler *Ella Hewett* struck the wreck and subsequently sank almost atop *Drake*. Ammunition and ordnance was salvaged during the 1970s and the wrecks were demolished with depth charges to reduce the chance of any other ships coming to grief on the wrecks. In 1978, the remaining fuel oil was salvaged to reduce pollution from leaking oil.



HMS *Alsatian*

HMS *Alsatian* was an armed merchant cruiser. Built as an ocean liner in 1913 for the Allen Line, her maiden voyage was in January 1914. She was requisitioned for service with the Royal Navy on 7 August 1914 and initially armed with eight 4.7-inch guns, later increased to eight 6-inch guns and two 6-pound anti-aircraft cannons. She had a large crew—67 officers and 480 crewmen—who became officers of the Royal Naval Reserve or men of the Mercantile Marine Reserve.

Alsatian spent most of the war in 10th Cruiser Squadron, on the Northern Patrol, on duties around the Faeroe Islands and Iceland. She was the Squadron Flagship for Rear Admiral Sir Dudley de Chair CB, MVO and, from March 1916, Vice Admiral Reginald Tupper CVO. In August 1917 she became the first Royal Navy ship to be painted in dazzle pattern camouflage. 10th Cruiser Squadron ceased operation in 1917 and, from early 1918, HMS *Alsatian* was used on trans-Atlantic escort duties.