

Alfred James WILLIAMS

- Born:** 30th November 1889, Padstow, Cornwall
- Occupation:** Serving sailor
- Enlisted:** Devonport: 30th November 1907
- Unit:** HMS Monmouth
- Rank/number:** Yeoman Signaller: No.236410
- Death:** Killed in action, 1st November 1914
- Detail:** Alfred died when *Monmouth* and *Good Hope* were sunk by *Scharnhorst* and *Gneisenau* off Coronel in Chile. The old out-gunned British cruisers, crewed largely by raw reservists, were no match for the modern German ships and well-trained crews. Heavy seas stopped *Monmouth* and *Good Hope* using their casement guns and silhouetted against a dying sun, were easy prey. All 1,600 British sailors died.
- Age at death:** 25
- Naval info:** Butcher boy Alfred joined the Royal Garrison Artillery in Padstow aged 14. Two years later he changed tack and on 4th May 1906 he became a Boy Seaman in the Royal Navy. On 30th November 1907, his 18th birthday, he signed on as an Ordinary Signaller. Alfred must have been bright for such a role, as reliability and speed were crucial. He would have been situated near the ship's bridge. In 1912 Alfred married Bessie Campbell, aged 18, a servant girl from Plymton in Devon. They had a son, whom they also called Alfred. In March 1913 Alfred was made Yeoman Signalman. When war came he was posted to *Monmouth*, an obsolete cruiser based at Plymouth. Three Coastguard reservists from Padstow were also aboard as well as a serving seaman from his home town. All sailed south to join the 4th Cruiser Squadron in their hunt for two fast German raiders, *Scharnhorst* and *Gneisenau*. On 1st November they sighted the enemy off the Chilean coast at Coronel and gave battle. But the British stood no chance and Alfred, from the bridge, would have quickly realised they were outgunned and doomed. *Monmouth* and the ageing *Good Hope* were sunk with all hands - Britain's first naval defeat in a century. Just a month later the navy destroyed both enemy raiders at the Falklands. All 2,200 Germans, including Admiral Von Spee and two sons, died.
- Grave/memorial:** Alfred's body was never found. He is commemorated on Plymouth Naval Memorial, at St Petroc's Church, Padstow and on Padstow War Memorial.
- Family info:** Father: Joseph Williams, born Padstow in 1857. Domestic gardener. Mother: Amelia Higgins, born St Eval, Cornwall in 1860. They married in 1881.
- Additional info:** Alfred's only son died in WW2 when his destroyer *Matabele* was torpedoed whilst on Arctic Convoy duty. His name is also on Padstow War Memorial.



This information was researched by Peter Smith, who is currently writing a book about Padstow's part in the Great War. Anyone wishing to correct errors or supply additional information can write to him at 24 Mallard Drive, Uckfield, East Sussex TN22 5PW. Also phone 01825 762226 or email smithpeter24@gmail.com

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