

A First-World War Story

From the recollections of
Walter Edwin Buckler
Father of Ted Buckler a Tranmere Parishioner

My father was English. He was born in Longford, North Dorset in 1896. He came from what would be known in Europe as the peasant class. In his early days the family moved to the near-by village of Thornford. In 1910, aged 14, Dad joined the Royal Marines as a lad. He was not one to talk about his time in the Royals and I can only remember two occasions when he spoke about his time in the Royal Marines during the First World-War and his experiences in the Australian Army in the Second World-War. Before I go on — a warning: there are no Marines in England — only **Royal Marines**.

Prior to the Gallipoli landings my Father's ship, the Battleship HMS *Majestic* was the first Battleship (in late February 1915) to enter the Dardanelles and she was the last to remain there doing its best to obliterate the Turkish forts and defences along the shores of the Dardanelles. During the ANZAC landings the *Majestic* was the northern most ship in the line and as with the other major ships had Colonial soldiers on board who were taken off by the lighters which were being towed ashore, each with their own helmsman, many of whom were young Midshipmen aged 14 and more. When Dad was talking about the landings I asked him what was the bravest thing he saw; the answer, these young men standing on the sterns of the lighters; many of these youngsters were wounded or killed during the landings.

After the landings the *Majestic* was sent south to Cape Hellas to be rested and to take on supplies. As well as its crew, there were a lot of wounded soldiers going back to their base. The *Majestic* was regarded by all who sailed on her as a lucky ship. Sadly, the *Majestic's* luck was about to come to an end. Early on the morning of May 27, 1915 a German submarine managed to navigate its way into the stretch of water on which the battleship was moored. It took only one torpedo to completely destroy the *Majestic* as a fighting force with a loss of 40 souls..

It was every man for himself. Many of the crew were in bed when the torpedo struck the *Majestic's* bow and so they had run for safety without decent clothing. My father was among them. The only way they could leave the ship was to swim; fortunately the water was warm. When these men reached safety they were eventually clothed in old uniforms or hand-me-downs mostly suitable for men of a different stature.



*At fourteen years and a lad in the
Royal Marines.*