

William John CRIDDLE

Born, Dawlish 2 April 1887,
Petty Officer 1st Class, R.N.

died 6 August 1914, aged 26
H.M.S.AMPHION

William was the oldest of six children, all born in Dawlish, of Frank and Charlotte Criddle who lived at Red Lion Court, Old Town Street. In 1901 he was 13 and had an occupation as Errand Boy. His father was a shepherd.

Frank Criddle was born in Bridgewater, Somerset in September 1863 and had married Charlotte Voysey Mutters. Their children were **William J (Q4,1887 - 1914)**, Frank (1889-), Edwin F (1892-), James (1894-), Frederick G (1896-) and Lilian A (1899-).

William's naval record shows his date of birth as 2 April 1887 and that he enlisted on 2 April 1905 for 12 years service. At the age of 18 he was 5'9" tall with dark brown hair, blue eyes and a fresh complexion. After initial training he served aboard several ships and was made Able Seaman in June 1906, Leading Seaman in September 1911 and after joining H.M.S.AMPHION on 25 October 1913 he was made up to Petty Officer on 1 December 1913.

William married Rose Evelyn Pudner on September 12, 1912 and they had a child, William James Pudner Criddle on 23 July, 1913 (1913-2005). Their last known address is variously shown as 28 and 65 Manor Row, Dawlish (now Brook Street).

In the *Exeter & Plymouth Gazette* of 8 December, 1914, it was stated that:

"Messrs F & T Criddle, sons of Mr and Mrs Fk Criddle, Old Town Street, have enlisted in the Wessex Royal Field Artillery (R.F.A.) for service in India. A younger brother is serving in the Royal Navy.

Another brother, a first-class **P.O in the Navy**, was killed on the Amphion."
(It may be imagined that Edwin was known as Ted and is thus the T Criddle referred to here.)

The *Exeter & Plymouth Gazette* of 20 May 1915 reported that:

"Mr and Mrs Frank Criddle of Old Town Street, Dawlish, who have two sons serving in the Royal navy and two in the Army, and whose **eldest son** lost his life in the AMPHION disaster, have received a letter of appreciation from His Majesty The King."

In the *Exeter & Plymouth Gazette* of 1 October, 1915 it was reported:

"Pte F.Criddle is reported to have been wounded in the recent heavy fighting in France. He belongs to Buller's Own (Devonshire Regiment)."

(it may be that this reference is to the engagement of the 8th Battalion, Devonshire Regiment at the Battle of Loos where Dawlish casualties were very high - ed).

About the death:

P.O. Criddle was one of 151 casualties from the first naval action of World War One, within 32 hours of the declaration of war.

HMS AMPHION was a light cruiser and attached to the 3rd Destroyer Flotilla based at Harwich. Leaving on patrol early on the 5th August they encountered a trawler which reported a suspicious 'ferry-like' ship dropping things over the side. In the morning at

10.40 the British ships sighted the German steamship, KONIGIN LUISE, engaged in minelaying about 30 miles E. of the Suffolk coast. The AMPHION and the destroyers LANCE and LANDRAIL immediately brought the KONIGIN LUISE to action and sank her at 12.20 p.m. without loss to themselves.

Later they found another German ship carrying the German ambassador back to Germany and passed it by, starting to return to Harwich at 2100.

Prior to this the KONIGIN LUISE had laid her mines, 200 in number, being of the heavy variety anchored at 11 feet below the surface. The position of these mines was not known accurately to the British and in the course of the day two destroyers, steaming at 30 knots, passed over the minefield in safety. The flotilla continued its operations for the rest of the day without incident and in the small hours of August 6th turned about for home.

The course set led the AMPHION immediately over the mines laid by the KONIGIN LUISE and at about 6.30 a.m., when all on board thought themselves clear of the danger, the ship struck a mine which exploded below her fore-bridge. The fore part of the cruiser was wrecked and nearly all those in it were killed, including 18 prisoners from the German vessel.

Capt. Fox was stunned by the explosion, but recovered consciousness in time to order "Abandon ship". The destroyers sent boats to rescue survivors but the ship still had way on and began turning in a circle, into the minefield, and at 0703 she struck another mine which detonated her magazine and caused further injuries.

The loss of life was one officer and 150 men, and 18 German prisoners. Capt. Fox was among the survivors, who numbered 139 officers and men.

AMPHION had inflicted the first German loss of the war but also became the first British Naval war loss. (Wikipedia and www.perthone.com/pampww1.html)

At his death **William Criddle** was 1st Petty Officer, Royal Navy, serving in H.M.S.AMPHION. His body was not recovered for burial.

Commonwealth War Graves entry: CRIDDLE, WILLIAM JOHN Petty Officer 222300
06/08/1914 Age: 29 Royal Navy H.M.S. "Amphion."

He is recorded in the Devon Roll of Honour, although the place of death is not shown.

Dawlish War Memorial inscription reads " CRIDDLE W J 1st CPO H.M.S. AMPHION".

He is also remembered on the [Plymouth Naval Memorial](#), Plymouth Hoe, Panel Ref: 1.

His war medals were sent to his widow.

References: BMD and Census data 1901, 1911, Royal Navy Graves Roll, www.navy-history
Malvern Family tree + Pudner/Stockham family tree - ancestry.com Devon Roll of
Honour Devon Heritage Site