

## William John HUTCHINGS

Born 1 April 1886, Ellacombe, Torquay      Died 31 May 1916, age 30  
Able Seaman, Royal Navy      Service No: 224640 (Dev)      H.M.S.BROKE

**William John Hutchings**, age 14, is shown in the 1901 census at 1 Alma Place, Madrepore Road, Torquay, living with his parents. Charles Thomas Hutchings (1860-1942) married Louisa Margaret (Holding) (1863 – 1948) in 1884 and they had seven children, Herbert C (1885- ), **William John (1886-1916)**, Walter G (1889- ), Charles T (1891- ), Henry Ernest (1893- ), Lilian Louisa Bedford (1895-1960) and Winifred Margaret (1898-1903 ).

**William** joined the Royal Navy on 17 January 1903 as a Boy Seaman aged 16 ½. His service record shows that he had been working as a gardener. On his 18<sup>th</sup> birthday he signed on for a 12 year service, on 1 April 1904.

He served aboard various ships until December 1905 when he joined H.M.S.CAMBRIDGE, the Gunnery Training Ship that was a 'wooden wall' hulk moored in the Hamoaze off Devonport. Gunnery practise ashore took place at the Trevol ranges, Torpoint, and at sea in a number of ships. He stayed until April 1907, and during this appointment he married Lilian Elizabeth Ford in 4<sup>th</sup> quarter 1906.

*PHOTO shows William with his wife Lilian Elizabeth Ford and their son William John Ford Hutchings.*



Lilian Ford was a daughter, and one of 16 children of John and Mary Ford of Dawlish. Their father was a tailor in 3 Park Street in 1901 and 3 Strand Hill in 1911. *Their grandson, Frederick George Ford was living with them in 1901 and 1911 and he died in the Gallipoli campaign on 9<sup>th</sup> May 1915. (see separate entry).*

William and Lilian Hutchings had a son, William John Ford Hutchings (1908 – 1986) and in 1911 mother and son were living at 15 Elm Road, Highweek, Newton Abbot, while **William** was at sea.

He was rated Able Seaman in June 1905 and his service record shows a VG (very good) for character in each subsequent ship. He is shown in the 1911 census as part of the Ship's Company of H.M.S.ABOUKIR, an armoured cruiser.

In June 1911 he was posted to H.M.S.BLAKE which was a Destroyer Depot Ship based at Portland. His next posting in May 1914 was to the Naval Barracks, Devonport, then Portsmouth, and again to H.M.S.BLAKE (BROKE), which was then the depot ship to the 2<sup>nd</sup> Destroyer Flotilla at Rosyth. This was followed by H.M.S.HECLA taking the part of Depot Ship to the 4<sup>th</sup> Destroyer Flotilla at Scapa Flow where H.M.S.BROKE was one of twenty one destroyers, and was the Flotilla Leader (2<sup>nd</sup> in command).



H.M.S.ZULU, a Destroyer of the same general form as H.M.S.BROKE

In the major naval engagement in the North Sea, known as the Battle of Jutland, that began on 31 May 1916, there were more significant British naval losses than German, but the outcome was to persuade the Kaiser to instruct his navy to remain in port.

Towards the end of the battle the 4<sup>th</sup> Destroyer Flotilla encountered German forces that damaged H.M.S.TIPPERARY, the Flotilla Leader, and H.M.S.BROKE, became the senior ship in the Flotilla. She was then hit by *SMS Westfalen*. This blast destroyed the bridge, while the ship was in the middle of a turning manoeuvre to bring torpedo tubes to bear on the German ship. She continued to turn and collided with H.M.S.SPARROWHAWK. A young officer of H.M.S.SPARROWHAWK saw the ship approaching fast and was thrown onto the other ship, where he lay for a few minutes unconscious. When he awoke he was welcomed by a colleague with the words: "Who in hell are you?!?". Now chaos reigned on the collided ships. Both captains assumed they were sinking, and so ordered the crew onto the other ship! Finally, both ships were freed. But just at this moment H.M.S.CONTEST, another destroyer, collided with the stern of the H.M.S.SPARROWHAWK.

In this confusion, a German battle cruiser neared the crippled H.M.S.SPARROWHAWK. Although she fired the only gun that she could, the other ship carried on, but suddenly it sank just before hitting the destroyer. What ship this was is still a complete mystery.

About this time the Captain of the *SMS Lützow*, Viktor Harder, ordered his crew to abandon his sinking ship and to sink her with destroyer torpedoes. The loss of this ship was the most hurtful loss for the German fleet. There is still discussion about whether the ship was still in a condition to be saved, as *SMS Seydlitz* survived the battle in a similar condition.

Only half an hour later, at 3.15 the destroyer H.M.S.OBEDIENT met the German 2nd squadron. She launched a torpedo, which hit the German pre-dreadnought *SMS Pommern*, which went down in a huge explosion. In this last engagement, the German destroyer *SM V 4* was also lost. This marked the end of the battle.

About the death of **William John Hutchings**: The Battle of Jutland, 31 May 1916. **Fourth Destroyer Flotilla**, 2 flotilla leaders (Broke damaged on 31 May, Tipperary sunk on 1 June), Able Seaman Hutchings one of the casualties aboard H.M.S.BROKE.

Commonwealth War Graves entry:

Able Seaman, Service No:224640 Date of Death: 31/05/1916 Age:29 Royal Navy - H.M S "Broke."

[Plymouth naval memorial](#) Panel 12. Husband of Lilian Hutchings, of II, Commercial Rd., Dawlish, Devon.

UK, RN and RM War Graves Roll: generally as above, Buried at Sea.

Widow: Lilian, 3 Strand Hill, Dawlish.

*A B Hutchings* is listed on the Dawlish War memorial : HUTCHINGS W. A.B. R.N.

He is also included in the Devon Roll of Honour, but no date of death or location is shown.

The Devon Heritage site info:

224640 Able Seaman William John Hutchings of the Royal Navy, H.M.S.BROKE. Parents not known. Husband of Lilian (nee Ford) of 11 Commercial Road, Dawlish. Born nr Exeter 1 April 1886. Died 31 May 1916 aged 29 in the Battle of Jutland. *(Some of this early detail is corrected by material above.)*

References:

CWGC

Free BirthMarriage Death refs

Naval-History.org

Service Record from National Archives, Kew

Refs via subscription websites:

UK RN & RM War Graves Roll

Census entries

UK, Royal Navy Register of Seamens' Services

Family trees - Ancestry

Way Family Tree & Ford Family file – private file

Master Ford – Petherick File family tree (Ancestry) .