

A letter home from a survivor of HMS Amphion as published in the Dawlish Gazette of 29th August 1914

The following is the substance of a letter received the end of last week by Mr. and Mrs. Melhuish of Brook St. Dawlish from their son William Melhuish, A.B. who was on the ill-fated Amphion and had a provident escape.

Dear Father and Mother,

I am writing to let you know that I am getting on all right. I am able to write myself now, as my right hand is quite healed and my left hand is healing fast. I was quite blind for five days, but the worst is now over and I hope to be out of bed in less than a week. I came here on the 6th. We went out early on Wednesday morning with our flotilla (the 3rd) patrolling the Channel. At 9.30 we got information from a trawler that a German ship was dropping mines. So we gave chase. The captain sent two destroyers on ahead to stop her. When they got up with her she opened fire. Two more of our destroyers came up and all four opened fire on the German but still she resisted. Our Captain ordered the destroyers to stand off a bit. Of course they could easily have sunk her with a couple of torpedoes, but we didn't care to *wash them. Then we gave them a broadside and made a mess of her, carrying away her flag, but she hoisted another. A few more rounds sunk her. It was a pitiable site to see the poor chaps struggling in the water, about 100 of them. We lowered boats and saved twenty and the destroyers picked up a few more, but most of them went down before we could get to them. Most of them we didn't save got killed when she blew up. We went on patrolling. One watch closed up the guns, getting relieved every four hours. That is four hours at the guns and four hours sleeping near the guns. I took the first watch, that is from 8 to 12 and from 4 to 8, Criddle

was in the opposite watch. We relieved them at four. It was daylight then and they were allowed to go below and they slept on the mess deck. They were there when the ship ran into the mine at 6 o'clock. Everyone one of them was killed. I was in the fore-castle right over the explosion. How I got out I don't know. The chap that was beside me was killed as we were talking together. I was stunned for the moment - flames all around me. The fumes from lyddite were terrible. I was nearly gone when I saw someone's legs, so I crawled along in that direction and got out of it. I hurried aft, where everyone had crowded on the quarter-deck. She was going down quickly forward, when the destroyers came up and lowered boats. Someone lowered me down into them. I was quite exhausted and was lifted aboard the destroyer where my wounds were bandaged. Some of the seamen then took me and laid me on the mess table and I don't remember much after that, I just remember going into hospital. I lost everything and have not got any clothes at all now as mine were cut from me in here on account of being so badly burned, so I shall have to get a brand new kit. It will be just like joining again, won't it?

Give my love to all.

Your loving son,

WILL

** wash - could be a misprint in the newspaper and possibly it should have been "waste", they would not have wanted to use an expensive torpedo unnecessarily.*