

PETTY OFFICER STOKER E.W.RATCLIFFE



Displayed Courtesy, The Ripley & Heanor News

RIPLEY & HEANOR NEWS 22ND FEBRUARY 1918 CODNOR STOKER DROWNED AN EVENTFUL CAREER

We further regret to learn that Petty Office Stoker E. W. Ratcliffe, of Codnor, was amongst the missing when H.M. armed boarding steamer LOUVAIN was torpedoed and sunk by a German Submarine in the Eastern Mediterranean on Jan 21st. Official news from the Admiralty was received on 29th January by the sailor's sister, Mrs J. Haslam.

P.O.S. Ratcliffe was 28 years of age and had served in the Navy for the past 10 years, seeing continuous active service afloat during the present war. He was present in the battle of Heligoland and served aboard H.M.S. Barham in the Jutland Battle. On several occasions his ship has been torpedoed and whilst serving on the mystery ships submarine destroying he had many narrow escapes. Ratcliffe was at home on leave exactly five weeks previous to his death, and it is somewhat of a coincidence that Miss Wright, of Codnor, received a letter from him the morning the Louvain was sunk. The deepest sympathy is felt for this gallant sailor's mother, sister and other friends and relatives in their sad loss.

RIPLEY & HEANOR 24TH MAY 1918 CODNOR STOKERS FATE

Writing home recently, Fred W Hill of Butterley who is a writer on board H.M. Ship "Eurupa", states how he and Major Sowter, travel led to Malta recently on board the

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"Louvain" and how by a lucky chance they were prevented from returning by the same boat, which was torpedoed and two hundred hands drowned including stoker Petty Officer Ernest Ratcliffe of Codnor, an account of whose death we published last February the letter goes:

"We Major Sowter and myself were in the same mess as Ernest Ratcliffe but until I saw his photo in the Ripley and Heanor News I was not aware that he came from Codnor. I have made enquires from a survivor who knew Ratcliffe, and he informs me that two stokers Petty Officers were told off for duty on the passage and Ratcliffe was unfortunately on watch in the stoke hold when she was torpedoed. The explosion damaged the dynamo, and plunged the ship into darkness, and all the engine room and stoke hold staff was lost. As I told you before, the ship sank in a few minutes so the men below had no chance of escape. In addition their first duty was to shut off steam and stop the engines and by the time this was done there was no hope for them."

A GERMAN ACCOUNT OF THE SINKING OF HMS LOUVAIN

The German submarine, UC 22 sighted an escorted steamer (HMS Louvain) and decided to lay mines in front of her while at the same time positioning herself for a torpedo attack. A minute after getting her 10th mine out, UC 22 began her torpedo attack. The single shot was fired at a range of 600 meters and hit the Louvain. The submarine was quite near the escorting destroyer when she fired her torpedo and she was soon counter attacked.

UC 22 surfaces about an hour after the attack. The Louvain is not visible (presumably sunk) and the destroyer was at the site of the attack, presumably conducting rescue operations. The U-boat could not get there because of the location of her own mines. UC 22 noted that visibility was excellent, with minimal winds and flat seas at midnight, German time, (about three hours after she surfaced). Given these weather conditions, and the presence of an escorting vessel to pick up survivors,

It must be concluded that HMS Louvain must have sunk quickly.