

EDWARD BARBER LEEDER

Born: 1897, Swanton Novers¹

Enlisted: (1) 1st September 1914, the Border Regiment (Private 14836); and
(2) 5th February 1915, the Royal Navy (Able Seaman SS/5311)²



Died: 31st January 1918 – drowned in a submarine collision in the North Sea³

Age: 21

Memorial: Portsmouth Naval Memorial (Panel 29)⁴

Medals: 1914-15 Star; British War Medal; Victory Medal⁵



Residence: Blyth in 1914⁶

Edward Barber Leeder was born in 1897, the son of Mary Leeder. He was baptised on the 4th April 1897 in Swanton Novers parish church (see Figure 1).

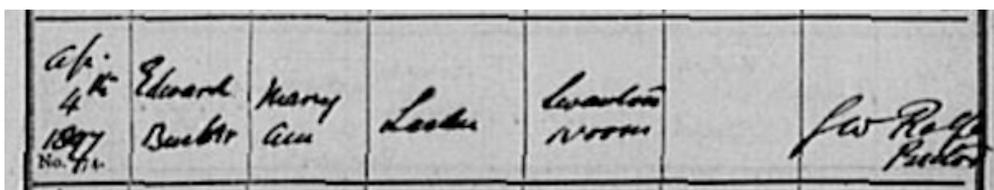


Figure 1: From the Baptisms Register, Swanton Novers, 1897

Edward enlisted on 1st September 1914 at Newcastle upon Tyne with the Border Regiment, and gave his age as 18 years 6 months.⁷ He gave his occupation as 'miner', and place of residence as Blyth on his enlistment papers. However, as he was born in 1897, he was only 17 years (and 6 months) old on enlistment. He did not remain with the Border Regiment for

¹ FreeBMD Quarter to June 1897, Walsingham Vol.4b, p.297 (www.freebmd.org.uk); Baptism Register, Swanton Novers, 1897 (www.familysearch.org).

² British Army WW1 Service Records 1914-1920 (www.ancestry.co.uk); UK, Royal Navy Registers of Seaman's Services, 1848-1939 (www.ancestry.co.uk).

³ CWGC commemoration (www.cwgc.org.uk); UK, Royal Navy Registers of Seaman's Services, 1848-1939 (www.ancestry.co.uk).

⁴ CWGC commemoration (www.cwgc.org.uk).

⁵ UK, Naval Medal and Award Rolls, 1793-1972 (www.ancestry.co.uk).

⁶ UK, Royal Navy Registers of Seaman's Services, 1848-1939 (www.ancestry.co.uk).

⁷ British Army WW1 Service Records 1914-1920 (www.ancestry.co.uk).

very long, as he was discharged on the 13th November 1914 under the King's Regulations K.R. 392 (iii) (c) '*not likely to become an efficient soldier*'. Edward then joined the Royal Navy on the 5th February 1915, giving his date of birth as 28th February 1896 (making him 18, when he was still only actually 17), so it appears that Edward was in fact born on the 28th February 1897 (he presumably just added a year to his age in order to enlist in the army and then the navy). His *Seaman's Service Record* notes that he was 5' 3" tall, with a chest measurement of 35½", and that he had brown hair, blue eyes and a 'fresh' complexion, and his occupation is given as 'miner'.

Edward served on five vessels between February 1915 and August 1917, and was promoted from Ordinary Seaman to Able Seaman towards the end of 1915. On the 24th August 1917, he joined the submarine *K-4*, (see *Figures 2 and 3*) a British K class Submarine, which were around 339ft/103m long, driven by oil-fired steam engines, and notoriously difficult to manoeuvre. *K-4* was built by Vickers (Barrow-in-Furness), and commissioned on the 1st January 1917.



Figure 2: K-4 pictured in harbour



Figure 3: November 1917, Walney Island. K-4 following a collision with K-1

On the 31st January 1918 (in what was later known as the Battle of the Isle of May), British warships steamed north from Rosyth to join their fleet at Scapa Flow, accompanied by a flotilla of nine submarines, as part of Exercise EC1. The vessels were organised in four flotillas, with a distance of 5 nautical miles between each group, led by the flagship HMS *Courageous*:

- HMS *Ithuriel*, followed by the submarines *K-11*, *K-17*, *K-14*, *K-12* and *K-22*
- HMS *Australia*, HMS *New Zealand*, HMS *Indomitable*, HMS *Inflexible* (plus destroyers)
- HMS *Fearless*, followed by submarines *K-4*, *K-3*, *K-6* and *K-7*
- HMS *Barham*, HMS *Warspite*, HMS *Valiant* (plus destroyers).

Initial visibility had been good, but nearer to the Isle of May visibility was hampered by a sea mist and the vessels had been ordered to maintain radio silence and extinguish navigation lights as they made their way to join the fleet. There then followed a series of unfortunate collisions.⁸

Two submarines in the first flotilla (*K-11* and *K-17*) found themselves bearing down on two small vessels (possibly minesweepers) and changed course; a third submarine, *K-14*, veered to avoid colliding with the two small vessels but started to circle out of control as her helm

⁸ For a full account see N.S. Nash, *K Boat Catastrophe: Eight Ships and Five Collisions – The full story of the 'Battle of the Isle of May'* (Pen & Sword Maritime; 2009), especially Chapter Three (pp.52-71).

jammed; at approximately 1914 hours she was then rammed by *K-22*, bringing up the rear of the first flotilla. At around 1943 hours, the cruiser from the second flotilla, HMS *Inflexible*, collided with *K-22*. At around 1940 hours, the remaining vessels in the first flotilla - HMS *Ithuriel*, *K-11*, *K-17* and *K-12* – had turned back towards the site of the collision between *K-14* and *K-22*. Unfortunately they only added to the unfolding debacle, as they were sailing into the path of the third flotilla led by HMS *Fearless*. At around 2032 hours, HMS *Fearless*, unable to avoid a vessel crossing in front of her, collided with *K-17*. *K-17*'s crew abandoned ship; the submarine was lost and she sank in around eight minutes. Meanwhile *K-4* had been brought to a stop in response to *Fearless*' warning sirens. *K-6*, part of the third flotilla, mistaking the lights of *K-4* for *K-3* (which she had been assiduously following), found themselves bearing down on the stationary *K-4* instead. At 2036 hours, *K-6* struck *K-4*, slicing her almost in half, and as *K-6* detached herself from the stricken submarine *K-4* sank almost immediately, with the loss of all the crew (59 men – 6 officers and 53 ratings). Of the crew of *K-17*, only nine men survived - the escaping crew were inadvertently mown down in the ensuing chaos by the destroyers escorting the fourth flotilla.

The K class of submarines earned the nickname 'Kalamity'; the men who served on them came to be known as the 'suicide club'. Of the eighteen that were built, none were lost in action, but six were sunk in accidental collisions.⁹ The crew of submarines *K-4* and *K-17* are commemorated by a plaque in Anstruther Harbour, erected in their memory during the submarine centenary year 2001 and unveiled on the 31st January 2002. It reads:

'To commemorate those members of the ships' companies of His Majesty's submarines K4 and K17 who gave their lives in the service of their country off the Isle of May on 31st January 1918'

The wrecks of *K-4* and *K-17* were surveyed in 2011, to ensure that they could be left undamaged should a proposed wind farm be constructed in the area. They lie about 100 metres apart and 50 metres down on the sea bed.¹⁰

It appears that Edward's mother, Mary, applied to the British Ministry for Pensions for a Dependant's Pension in 1918, where the pension card records the vessel that he was serving with HMS *Fearless*, and that he *Lost his life on duty* (see Figure 4).¹¹ Mary was awarded a weekly pension of 3s 6d on the 26th September 1918, which appears to have been backdated to the 11th February 1918. This was increased on the 10th March 1919 to 5s per week, backdated to the 6th November 1918.

⁹ The Scottish War Memorials Project (<http://warmemscot.s4.bizhat.com/warmemscot-ftopic4847.html>); The Guardian, 29 August 2011, Simon Bates *Divers survey Scottish graveyard of first world war submarine disaster* (<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2011/aug/29/divers-war-submarine-disaster>); the Royal Navy Submarine Museum, *Submarine losses 1904 to the present day* (<http://www.submarine-museum.co.uk/what-we-have/memorial-chapel/submarine-losses?start=8>); Wikipedia, *Battle of May Island* (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Battle_of_May_Island); Wikipedia, *British K class submarine* (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/British_K-class_submarine).

¹⁰ There is an excellent video taken in June 20017 of a dive to the wreck on YouTube at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=K7khYjJf4aA>.

¹¹ UK, WW1 Pension Ledgers and Index Cards, 1914-1923 (www.ancestry.co.uk).

DEPENDANT'S PENSION.	
Name <i>Leeder Edward Barber</i>	Regimental No. <i>88/5311.S.</i>
Regiment or Ship <i>H.M.S. "Fearless"</i>	Rank <i>A.B.</i>
Documents received from Paymaster	
Date and cause of death <i>31. 1. 18. Ref. C.L. 151. "Lost his life on duty"</i>	
Dependant <i>Mrs Mary Graveling</i>	
Address <i>Wood Norton, Norfolk.</i>	
Relationship <i>Mother.</i>	
Pension <i>3/6 5/- 21/100</i>	a week from <i>6. 11. 18.</i>
Date awarded <i>26. 9. 18. 10. 3. 19</i>	refused
Papers <i>P.A.</i>	reason

D.1
Navy
Case No.
D.F. / 40/L
TF 4993

F.6436 Wt. 1814/975 50.000(12) 2/18 J.P. Gp. 159

Figure 4: Dependant's Pension card in respect of Edward Barber Leeder

Edward records his mother on both his Army and Navy service records as Mary Graveling, of Duckers Beck, East Dereham.¹² Mary Wilhelmina Leeder was born in 1878 and baptised on the 28th December 1879 (along with her sisters Lucy Ann and Eliza Lydia) in Swanton Novers parish church, the daughter of William and Eliza Leeder.¹³ Mary married Alfred Graveling in 1899,¹⁴ and by the time of the 1911 census for Wood Norton they had eight children (4 boys and 4 girls). Alfred died in 1930 aged 53; Mary died in 1946, with her age recorded as 66.¹⁵

It is not clear whether Edward lived with his mother after her marriage to Alfred Graveling. In the 1901 census for Swanton Novers, Mary and Alfred Graveling are living in The Street, Swanton Novers, with their two small children, Lucy (aged 2), and William (9 months), together with a lodger (a young man of 20, George Porter from Ely, a blacksmith's striker so perhaps a worker on the nearby railway works at Melton Constable) – but not Edward.¹⁶ Edward (aged 4) is recorded in the 1901 census with his grandparents, William and Eliza Leeder, in Giles Road, Swanton Novers.¹⁷

In the 1911 census for Swanton Novers, Edward (aged 14) is recorded in the household of his aunt, Elizabeth Louisa Bullen, rather than with his mother in Wood Norton. Elizabeth Louisa Leeder was Mary's older sister, who married William James Bullen in 1889. The census records Edward's name as Edward *Bullen* Leeder, and he is a 'mother's helper (at present)'.¹⁸ Sometime between 1911 and 1914 Edward moved from Norfolk to Blyth, Northumberland to take up the occupation of miner. It is worth noting that Edward was not the only serviceman with Wood Norton connections to have enlisted in the northeast – Thomas Charles Colman

¹² British Army WW1 Service Records 1914-1920 (www.ancestry.co.uk); UK, Royal Navy and Royal Marine War Graves Roll, 1914-1919 (www.ancestry.co.uk).

¹³ FreeBMD Quarter to March 1876, Walsingham Vol.4b, p.281 (www.freebmd.org.uk); Baptism Register, Swanton Novers, 1879 (www.familysearch.org).

¹⁴ FreeBMD Quarter to September 1899, Walsingham Vol. 4b, p. 582 (www.freebmd.org.uk).

¹⁵ FreeBMD Quarter to September 1930, Erpingham Vol.4b, p.74 (www.freebmd.org.uk); FreeBMD Quarter to March 1946, North Walsham Vol.4b, p.83 (www.freebmd.org.uk).

¹⁶ 1911 Census, Wood Norton (Schedule 163) (www.ancestry.co.uk); 1901 Census, Swanton Novers (Page 11) (www.ancestry.co.uk).

¹⁷ 1901 Census, Swanton Novers (Page 7) (www.ancestry.co.uk).

¹⁸ 1911 Census, Swanton Novers (Schedule 33) (www.ancestry.co.uk).

(Nicholas Robert Colman's brother) was living in Blyth (Rotherham) when he enlisted in Newcastle upon Tyne in May 1916. Exactly why men from rural Norfolk moved so far away, presumably for work, is unclear and would bear further investigation.

Edward Barber Leeder is commemorated on a memorial in St Margaret Pattens, Eastcheap, London, which contains the names of all the 104 men who died in the Battle of the Isle of May incident.¹⁹ It is dedicated by the widow of the captain of the K-4:

"To the Proud and Undying Remembrance of my Husband Comm^{dr} David De Beauvoir Stocks, R.N. D.S.O. Legion of Honour, who was drowned January 31st 1918, serving his King & Country, and in Memory of all those who died with him."

The official papers and the subsequent Court of Inquiry into the incident, held in early February 1918, were not released until 1994, by which time all the survivors had died. Despite the secrecy surrounding the incident, the King (George V) had been fully briefed, and in a letter he wrote to Admiral David Beatty on 12th February 1918 he expressed his distress at the 'deplorable accident which has just occurred to the K boats in which two were sunk and four others damaged beside the loss of valuable trained officers & men'. His is the only expression of regret at the loss of life that is recorded.²⁰

The 75th anniversary of the loss of submarines K-17 and K-4 were marked on the 31st January 1993 by the issue of a Commemorative Cover (see Figure 5).²¹



Figure 5: Commemorative Cover, Battle of May Island

¹⁹ War Memorials Online (www.warmemorialsonline.org.uk/memorial/145094 and www.warmemorialsonline.org.uk/memorial/251194).

²⁰ N.S. Nash, *K Boat Catastrophe: Eight Ships and Five Collisions – The full story of the 'Battle of the Isle of May'*; pp.87-88; p107 (Pen & Sword Maritime; 2009).

²¹ Author's personal collection.