

= Francis Harvey =

Major Francis John William Harvey , VC ( 29 April 1873 ? 31 May 1916 ) was an officer of the British Royal Marine Light Infantry during the First World War . Harvey was posthumously awarded the Victoria Cross , the highest military award for gallantry in the face of the enemy given to British and Commonwealth forces , for his actions at the height of the Battle of Jutland . A long serving Royal Marine officer descended of a military family , during his career Harvey became a specialist in naval artillery , serving on many large warships as gunnery training officer and gun commander . Specially requested for HMS Lion , the flagship of the British battlecruiser fleet , Harvey fought at the battles of Heligoland Bight , Dogger Bank and Jutland .

At Jutland , Harvey , although mortally wounded by German shellfire , ordered the magazine of Q turret on the battlecruiser Lion to be flooded . This action prevented the tons of cordite stored there from catastrophically detonating in an explosion that would have destroyed the vessel and all aboard her . Although he succumbed to his injuries seconds later , his dying act may have saved over a thousand lives and prompted Winston Churchill to later comment : " In the long , rough , glorious history of the Royal Marines there is no name and no deed which in its character and consequences ranks above this " .

= = Gunnery expert = =

Harvey was born in Upper Sydenham , Kent , the son of Commander John William Francis Harvey , RN and Elizabeth Edwards Lavington Harvey née Penny . At age 11 in 1884 , Harvey moved with his family to Southsea and he attended Portsmouth Grammar School , achieving excellent academic results and showing proficiency in languages and debating . Harvey was descended from a military family ; his great @-@ great @-@ grandfather John Harvey had been killed in the Glorious First of June in 1794 and his great @-@ grandfather Admiral Sir Edward Harvey , GCB , RN and grandfather Captain John Harvey of the 9th Regiment of Foot were also prominent military figures .

After leaving school , Harvey chose a military career and was accepted by both the Royal Military College , Sandhurst and the Royal Naval College , Greenwich for officer training . Choosing the latter school as a Royal Marines officer cadet , Harvey graduated in 1892 and the following year was made a full lieutenant , joining HMS Wildfire for his first seagoing commission . After just a year at sea , Harvey was back on shore attending gunnery courses at HMS Excellent , qualifying in 1896 as an instructor first class in naval gunnery . Harvey was appointed to the cruiser HMS Phaeton when she was commissioned at Devonport on 8 June 1897 for service on the Pacific Station . In 1898 , whilst on the Phaëton , he was reprimanded by the Admiralty for an unfavourable report he released on San Diego Harbour . Returning home the same year , Harvey was given the position of Assistant Instructor for Gunnery at Plymouth Division . During this period , Harvey married Ethel Edye and had one son , John .

Between 1898 and 1904 Harvey spent much of his time attached to the Channel Fleet , aboard HMS Edgar and HMS Diadem , practising and instructing in gunnery . On 28 January 1900 he was promoted to captain . In 1903 he was posted aboard HMS Royal Sovereign , the first of a string of big ship appointments teaching gunnery to the heavy units of the Channel Fleet . By 1909 , Harvey had served on HMS Duke of Edinburgh , HMS St George and the new battlecruiser HMS Inflexible . In 1910 Harvey became Instructor of Gunnery at Chatham Dockyard and the following year was promoted to major , a report on the gunnery school commenting " Degree of efficiency in Gunnery Establishment at Chatham is very high both as regards general training and attention to detail . Great credit is due all concerned particularly to Major F.J.W. Harvey , the I of G " .

The strength of this report subsequently gained Harvey a position as senior marine officer aboard HMS Lion , the 27 @,@ 000 ton flagship of the British battlecruiser fleet . Lion had eight 13 @.@ 5 @-@ inch guns and Harvey was stationed in an office under Q turret directing their operation and fire . Under her new commander , Admiral David Beatty , Harvey served as the senior marine officer on board into the First World War , his first military campaign .

= = First World War = =

Harvey did not have to wait long to see action , seeing combat for the first time at the Battle of Heligoland Bight just weeks into the war . On 28 August 1914 , Lion and her squadron of HMS Queen Mary and HMS Princess Royal , swept into the Heligoland Bight where German and British cruiser forces were already engaged in a bitter struggle . One German cruiser had already been sunk by the time Beatty 's force arrived , but the German flagship SMS Cöln and cruiser SMS Ariadne were surprised in the fog and destroyed by heavy calibre shells from Beatty 's battlecruisers . German Admiral Leberecht Maass and over 1 @, @ 000 of his sailors were killed , Harvey 's guns scoring several hits on the cruisers .

Six months later , Harvey 's guns again caused severe damage to a German force at the Battle of Dogger Bank . Over the previous months , a German battlecruiser squadron under Rear @-@ Admiral Hipper had crossed the North Sea and bombarded British coastal towns on several occasions . On 24 January 1915 another attempt was made , but this time British signals analysts had detected the German movement and using this information the Admiralty dispatched Beatty 's force to intercept and destroy them . Beatty and Hipper 's squadrons collided at 09 : 00 and during the engagement that followed , Lion was left exposed by mis @-@ communication between the ships , which led to HMS Tiger engaging the wrong ship , leaving SMS Moltke uncovered and so able to fire more accurately . The British flagship was hard pressed until one of Lion 's shots penetrated one of Seydlitz 's turrets . A huge explosion destroyed the neighbouring turret as well and killed 160 men , the German flagship only surviving due to the actions of sailor Wilhelm Heidkamp , who wrenched open the water valves to the magazines despite them glowing red hot .

Lion was badly damaged in the action by shells from the passing SMS Derfflinger and with her engines failing , dropped back to engage the already sinking SMS Blücher . Misread signals resulted in the rest of the British fleet returning to support Lion in this task , allowing the rest of the battered German fleet to retire as the British destroyed the hapless Blücher and 792 of her crew . Following the battle , Harvey remained aboard Lion at Rosyth for the whole of 1915 and the first five months of 1916 , continuing his gunnery training and preparations for major fleet action . His preparations came to fruition on the last day of May , when the British fleet sailed to engage the main body of the German High Seas Fleet at the Battle of Jutland .

Just after Dogger Bank , Harvey had written to a fellow RMLI officer in HMS Orion describing his experiences :

= = = Jutland = = =

Beatty 's battlecruisers led the British fleet in its attack , casting south into the North Sea to find the enemy during the afternoon of 31 May 1916 . At 14 : 15 , scouting cruisers spotted the German vanguard and Beatty closed to attack the enemy with his main force . Given time to prepare , Hipper was ready for Beatty with his battlecruisers in line to face Beatty 's approaching ships with their full broadsides . Hipper was also encouraged by the main German battleship fleet under Vice @-@ Admiral Reinhard Scheer , which was steaming northwards close behind him . At 15 : 45 Beatty came within range of the German fleet and the vanguards engaged one another with their opening fusillades . As the two squadrons closed , the Germans found the range better and faster than the British , who were silhouetted against the sun . As a result , German shells pounded the British ships while the German ships remained untouched for the first 10 minutes of the engagement . During this stage of the battle Lion was hit by nine shells from SMS Lützow . One shell at 16 : 00 struck the right upper corner of the left hand gun port at the junction of the face plate and the roof , and punched a piece of the 9 @-@ inch face plate into the turret before detonating , blowing off the armoured roof of the turret and starting a fire , which a damage control party working from outside the turret fought to put out .

The initial explosion killed or wounded everyone stationed in the gun house itself . Harvey , despite severe wounds and burns , realised that the shell hoist leading to the ship 's main forward magazine was jammed open . With the hatch open , the flash fire would rapidly travel down to the main

magazine resulting in an explosion that would tear the ship in two and kill everyone on board . Staggering across the wreckage of the turret , Harvey gave orders down the voice pipe for the magazine doors to be closed and the magazine compartments to be flooded , an action which would prevent the cordite in the magazines detonating . Turning to his sergeant , the one man still standing , Harvey instructed him to proceed to the bridge and give a full report to the ship 's captain Ernle Chatfield ( a standard drill in damage exercises ) . Seconds later , Harvey collapsed and died from his wounds . The sergeant went immediately to the bridge and notified the captain of Harvey 's actions before being taken below to have his wounds dressed .

As soon as the turret had been hit the captain had ordered Q magazine doors closed and the magazine flooded , the order passing to the Transmitting Station below the armoured deck where Stoker 1st Class William Yeo was entrusted with passing the order on . The magazine was consequently flooded and locked up within minutes of the hit . However the cordite charges which had fallen down from gun house after the hit were not removed to safety , and there were still ready charges in the working chamber . A large number of crewmen still remained in the shell room , magazine handing room and working chamber . The fire which was thought to have been put out after the hit on the turret gained strength and ignited the remaining cordite charges , setting off a large explosion at 16 : 28 which killed the turret crewmen , the flame of the explosion reaching as high as the top of the ship 's masts . Even with the precautions taken in hand , the magazine doors were later found to be severely buckled ? only the seawater in the magazine behind it prevented the blast reaching inside . Other ships of the battlecruiser fleet were less lucky ; at about the same time as Harvey 's death , HMS Indefatigable was torn to pieces by a series of magazine explosions that claimed 1 @, @ 013 lives and just minutes after that HMS Queen Mary exploded " like a puffball " in one huge column of grey smoke , killing 1 @, @ 275 sailors . Hours later during the main battlefleet engagement , Admiral Horace Hood 's flagship HMS Invincible was destroyed with 1 @, @ 032 lives . All three ships were lost as the result of magazine explosions similar to the one narrowly avoided on Lion .

= = Remembrance = =

Harvey 's charred corpse was taken from the wreckage of Q turret in the aftermath of battle and buried at sea with full honours alongside the other 98 fatal casualties Lion had suffered . His bravery in the face of certain death did not go unnoticed ; he was mentioned by name in Admiral Jellicoe 's post @-@ battle dispatch and he was posthumously awarded the Victoria Cross . Harvey 's widow Ethel was presented with the award at Buckingham Palace by King George V on 15 September 1916 . His medal group was later loaned to the Royal Marines Museum , Eastney Barracks by his son Lieutenant @-@ Colonel John Malcolm Harvey of the King 's Regiment in 1973 . Harvey 's name is inscribed on the Chatham Naval Memorial to those with no known grave , administered by the Commonwealth War Graves Commission .

= = = Victoria Cross citation = = =