

= Charles Fryatt =

Charles Algernon Fryatt (2 December 1872 ? 27 July 1916) was a British mariner who was executed by the Germans for attempting to ram a U @-@ boat in 1915 . When his ship , the SS Brussels , was captured off the Netherlands in 1916 , he was court @-@ martialled and sentenced to death although he was a civilian non @-@ combatant . International outrage followed his execution near Bruges , Belgium . In 1919 , his body was reburied with full honours in the United Kingdom .

= = Early life = =

Fryatt was born on 2 December 1872 in Southampton , the son of Charles and Mary Fryatt . He attended Freemantle School in the late 1870s . In 1881 , Fryatt 's family lived at 22 Trinity Terrace , in St Mary 's , Southampton , but later moved to Harwich , Essex where he attended the Corporation School . He and his wife , Ethel , had seven children ; six girls and one boy . The children were Olive , Victoria , Doris , Vera , Mabel , Charles and Dorothy . The younger Charles later followed his father into the merchant navy , training at HMS Worcester .

On leaving school , Fryatt entered the Mercantile Marine , serving on SS County Antrim , SS Ellenbank , SS Marmion and SS Harrogate . In 1892 , Fryatt joined the Great Eastern Railway as a seaman on SS Ipswich . Fryatt 's father had been the First Officer on SS Cambridge . Fryatt rose through the ranks , serving on various ships . His first command was SS Colchester . In 1913 , he was appointed master of SS Newmarket .

= = U @-@ boat attack = =

On 3 March 1915 , Fryatt 's command , SS Wrexham , a Great Central Railway ship , was attacked by a German U @-@ Boat . The ship was chased for 40 nautical miles (74 km) . With deckhands assisting the stokers , the vessel made 16 knots (30 km / h) when it would normally have been pushed to make 14 knots (26 km / h) . Wrexham arrived at Rotterdam with burnt funnels . The Great Eastern Railway presented Fryatt with a gold watch for this feat . The watch was inscribed Presented to Captain C. A. Fryatt by the chairman and Directors of the G.E Railway Company as a mark of their appreciation of his courage and skilful seamanship on March 2nd , 1915 . Later that month he was in charge of Colchester when it was unsuccessfully attacked by a U @-@ boat .

On 28 March 1915 , as captain of the SS Brussels , he was ordered to stop by U @-@ 33 when his ship was near the Maas lightvessel . Seeing the U @-@ boat had surfaced to torpedo his ship , Fryatt ordered full steam ahead and proceeded to try to ram U @-@ 33 , which was forced to crash dive . This action was in compliance with orders issued by Winston Churchill to captains of merchant ships . These orders included treating the crews of U @-@ boats as felons and not as prisoners of war , in consideration of the German Empire 's policy of unrestricted submarine warfare . White flags were to be ignored . Churchill 's order also stated that survivors from U @-@ boats might be shot if this was more convenient than taking them prisoner . If a captain were to surrender his ship he would be prosecuted by the British . The Germans became aware of these orders when they found a copy of them upon capturing the SS Ben Cruachan in October 1915 . For this second action , Fryatt was awarded a gold watch by the Admiralty . The watch was inscribed Presented by the Lords Commissioners of the Admiralty to Chas . Algernon Fryatt Master of the S.S. ' Brussels ' in recognition of the example set by that vessel when attacked by a German submarine on March 28th , 1915 . Fryatt was presented with a certificate on vellum by the Lords Commissioners of the Admiralty . He was also praised in the House of Commons .

= = Capture = =

On 25 June 1916 , Brussels left Hoek van Holland bound for Harwich . Lights were shown from the beach and a flare was fired . A passenger is reported to have remained on deck and signalled to

shore . Five German destroyers surrounded Brussels . The passengers were told to prepare to take to the lifeboats and orders were given for official papers to be destroyed , which was done successfully . Brussels was taken by the Germans , and the radio was destroyed . She was escorted into Zeebrugge and then to Bruges .

= = Court Martial = =

Fryatt and his crew were sent to the civilian internment camp at Ruhleben , near Berlin . On 16 July 1916 , it was reported in the Dutch newspaper De Telegraaf that Fryatt had been charged with sinking a German submarine . The Germans knew that U @-@ 33 had not been sunk . At the time of the trial she was on active service as part of the Constantinople Flotilla . The basis for the charge was the inscriptions on his watches . Fryatt was tried at a Court Martial on 27 July 1916 . The Court Martial was held at Bruges Town Hall . He was found guilty of being a franc @-@ tireur and sentenced to death . The sentence was confirmed by the Kaiser . At 19 : 00 , Fryatt was executed by firing squad and was buried in a small cemetery just outside Bruges that the Germans used for burying Belgian " traitors " . The grave was later visited by diplomat Sir Walter Townley (British Ambassador to the Netherlands from 1917 to 1919 .) and his wife .

An execution notice was published in Dutch , French and German announcing the death of Fryatt . It was signed by Admiral Ludwig von Schröder . A translation of the execution notice reads as follows :

NOTICE . The English captain of a merchant ship , Charles Fryatt , of Southampton , though he did not belong to the armed forces of the enemy , attempted on March 28th , 1915 , to destroy a German submarine by running it down . For this he has been condemned to death by judgment this day of the Field Court Martial of the Naval Corps , and has been executed . A ruthless deed has thus been avenged , belatedly but just . Signed VON SCHRÖDER , Admiral Commandant of the Naval Corps , Bruges , July 27th , 1916 .

= = = German post @-@ war confirmation of Court Martial = = =

On 2 April 1919 , a German International Law Commission named the " Schücking Commission " , after its chairman Walther Schücking , reconfirmed Fryatt 's sentence :

" The execution by shooting of Captain Charles Fryatt , which was given by the Court Martial Bruges , due to the sentence of the court martial proceedings on 27 July 1916 , contains no violation of international law , The Commission apologizes most vividly for the hurry in which the judgement was enforced . "

The Commission 's ruling was not unanimous . Two members of the legal review panel , Eduard Bernstein and Oskar Cohn , dissented because in their opinion Fryatt 's sentence had been a severe infringement of international law .

= = Reaction = =

On 31 July 1916 , British Prime Minister H. H. Asquith issued a statement in the House of Commons .

I deeply regret to say that it appears to be true that Captain Fryatt has been murdered by the Germans . His Majesty 's Government have heard with the utmost indignation of this atrocious crime against the laws of nations and the usages of war . Coming as it does contemporaneously with the lawless cruelty towards the population of Lille and other occupied districts of France , it shews that the German High Command , under the stress of military defeat , have renewed their policy of terrorism . It is impossible of course to conjecture to what atrocities they may proceed .

His Majesty 's Government desire to repeat emphatically their resolve that such crimes shall not , if they can help it , go unpunished . When the time arrives they are determined to bring to justice the criminals whoever they maybe and whatever position they may occupy . In such cases as these the authors of the system under which such crimes are committed may well be the most guilty of all .

The question of what immediate action can be taken is engaging the earnest attention of the Government and I hope very soon to announce to the House of Commons what we can do .

Lord Claud Hamilton , MP , Chairman of the Great Eastern Railway , denounced the execution as " sheer , brutal murder " . The Mayor of Harwich opened a fund to erect a permanent memorial to Fryatt . A similar fund was opened in the Netherlands .

In the United States , The New York Times denounced the execution as " a deliberate murder " . The New York Herald called it " The crowning German atrocity " . In the Netherlands , the Nieuwe Rotterdamsche Courant described the execution as " arbitrary and unjust " , while the Handelsblad Holland called it " A cowardly murder inspired by hatred and revenge " . In Switzerland , the Journal de Genève said " It is monstrous to maintain that armed forces have a right to murder civilians but that civilians are guilty of a crime in defending themselves " . The Dutch branch of the League of Neutral States presented the Great Eastern Railway a memorial tablet which was erected at Liverpool Street station . The memorial was unveiled on 27 July 1917 , exactly a year after Fryatt 's execution . The scrap value of Brussels was donated towards the cost .

The Great Eastern Railway awarded Fryatt 's widow a pension of £ 250 per annum . The Government granted her an extra £ 100 per annum pension on top of her entitlement . Fryatt 's insurers , the Provident Clerk 's Association , paid the £ 300 that Mrs Fryatt was entitled to immediately , dispensing with the usual formalities . The Royal Merchant Seaman 's Orphanage offered to educate two of Fryatt 's seven children . The King expressed his indignation and abhorrence at the execution of Fryatt in a letter to Mrs Fryatt . In the letter , he also wrote " The action of Captain Fryatt in defending his ship against the attack of an enemy submarine was a noble instance of the resource and self @-@ reliance so characteristic of his profession . "

The incident inspired an Australian film , The Murder of Captain Fryatt (1917) .

= = Funeral and reburial = =

In 1919 , Fryatt 's body was exhumed and returned to the United Kingdom for burial . His coffin was landed at Dover , and transported in South Eastern and Chatham Railway PMV No.132 to London . On 8 July 1919 , his funeral was held at St Paul 's Cathedral . Hundreds of merchant seamen and widows of merchant seamen and fishermen attended . Representing the Government were many members of the Admiralty , the Board of Trade , the Cabinet and the War Office .

The band of the Great Eastern Railway , augmented by drummers from the Royal Marines , played the Dead March . Eternal Father , Strong to Save and Abide with Me were sung , and a blessing given by the Bishop of London . The route of the coffin to Liverpool Street station was lined with people . Fryatt was buried at All Saints ' Church , Upper Dovercourt . His coffin was carried from the station to the church on a gun carriage . His widow was presented with the insignia of the Belgian Order of Leopold that had been posthumously awarded to Fryatt . Fryatt was also posthumously awarded the Belgian Maritime War Cross .

= = Namesakes = =

In Zeebrugge there 's a street named after Captain Fryatt , It 's the place where he was forced to border by the Germans

A wing at Dovercourt Cottage Hospital ? which is now known as the Captain Fryatt Memorial Hospital . ? was named in Fryatt 's honour . A public house in nearby Parkeston is also named in Captain Fryatt 's honour .

In Canada , the 11 @,@ 027 feet (3 @,@ 361 m) high Mount Fryatt (52 ° 33 ? 00 ? N 117 ° 54 ? 35 ? W) was named in 1921 in honour of Captain Fryatt . The 10 @,@ 317 feet (3 @,@ 145 m) high Brussels Peak (51 ° 31 ? 00 ? N 117 ° 49 ? 20 ? W) was named in honour of his ship .

= = Commemoration = =

In 2016 , an exhibition was held at the Masonic Hall , Harwich to commemorate the 100th

anniversary of his execution . The exhibition runs from 23 to 31 July .