

The Great War Record for Charles Harry Blaker

Charles Harry Blaker was born on 1 November 1899, the youngest of six children born to Harry Blaker and Emily Eileen Fuller. In 1901, according to the census, one year old Charley was living with his family at 52 Howards Grove, Shirley, Southampton. His father was an engineer's fitter, probably in the shipbuilding trade. By 1911 the family had moved to 61 Clarence Street, Northam, Southampton, and Charles is listed in the census as a schoolboy.

This time of innocence was not to last much longer, however, as in 1914 the First World War broke out, and according to the National Roll of the Great War, 15 year old Charles volunteered to join the Navy.

BLAKER, C., A.B., R.N., H.M.S. "Bristol."
He volunteered in 1914, and during the whole period of the war his ship was engaged on important duties in the Mediterranean and North Sea, where it rendered valuable services. He was demobilised in June 1919, holding the 1914-15 Star, and the General Service and Victory Medals.
25, Union Road, Northam, Southampton. 598

This is at variance with his official naval record which begins in 1917. We can only assume that he was classed as a boy sailor until his eighteenth birthday. According to his service records held at the National Archives, his occupation on enlistment was described as a Labourer, and he was 5ft 4½ inches tall with brown hair, blue eyes and a fresh complexion.

He began his adult career on HMS Victory II based onshore at the Royal Naval Barracks at Portsmouth and trained as a Stoker Second Class. He served the rest of his career on HMS Bristol, engaged on duties in the Mediterranean and the North Sea. HMS Bristol was a Bristol-class Light Cruiser launched in 1910 at John Brown's shipyard in Glasgow. She began her war career as part of the 4th Cruiser Squadron in the West Indies, and saw her first action in a skirmish with SMS Karlsruhe on 6 August 1914. The ship's log describes the event as follows- I'm not entirely sure this fits the dictionary definition of a skirmish!

8.10 p.m. *Sighted Karlsruhe: 4 points on Port Bow. Altered course to Eastward as requisite for chasing and engaging her.*

9.10 p.m. *Shaped course SE – Chasing Karlsruhe*

11.00 p.m. *Lost sight of Karlsruhe*

S.M.S. Karlsruhe was a German light cruiser. Her speed allowed her to escape and then to roam the Caribbean and off the Northern coasts of Brazil where she heavily disturbed British trade routes. On 4 November 1914 an internal explosion blew up her forepart. The aft part stayed afloat to allow the survivors to be picked up by colliers accompanying her. The Royal Navy did not know this until March 1915.

HMS Bristol was subsequently sent to South American waters to hunt the German East Asia Squadron consisting of the armoured cruisers SMS Scharnhorst and Gneisenau and the light cruisers

Emden, Leipzig and Nurnberg commanded by Vice Admiral Graf Maximilian von Spee. She was not, however, involved in the Battle of Coronel on 1 November 1914 in which HMS Good Hope and HMS Monmouth were sunk.

HMS Bristol rounded the year off by taking part in the Battle of the Falkland Islands on 8 December 1914. After his victory Spee coaled and then loitered in the Pacific whilst he decided what to do next, little did he realise that this indecision would prove fatal. Eventually he decided to enter the Atlantic and try to make it home. The squadron had passed Cape Horn by December 1 and on the following day they captured the Drummuir carrying coal. They then rested for three days at Pictou Island. Spee wanted to raid the Falkland Islands but his captains were opposed to the idea, however in the end Spee decided to go ahead anyway, another decision he was to regret.

HMS Canopus was now beached at Port Stanley, the capital of the Falklands, as guard ship. On December 7 the British warships arrived at Port Stanley to the aid of the pre-dreadnought Canopus; the battle cruisers Invincible and Inflexible, the armoured cruisers Kent, Carnarvon and Cornwall, the light cruisers Bristol and Glasgow and the armed merchant cruiser Macedonia. On the morning of December 8 1914 Gneisenau and Nürnberg were detached from the main squadron, which followed about fifteen miles behind, to attack the wireless station and port facilities at Port Stanley. At 0830 they sighted the wireless mast and smoke from Macedonia returning from patrol. They had, however, been spotted by a hill top spotter, and by 9.00 a.m., the battle was under way. It continued all day until at 16.17 the Scharnhorst sank and her entire crew, including Spee, was lost. The smaller cruisers continued to fight, but by 19.26 it was all over, the Bristol and Macedonia having sunk Spee's colliers Baden and Santa Isabel. The other collier, Seydlitz escaped, eventually being interned in Argentina.

According to the ship's log HMS Bristol spent 1915 patrolling the Mediterranean, and 1916 in the Adriatic without being involved in any major conflict.

Tantalisingly the log books for the period when she was next involved in hostilities, according to Charles' naval record - 19th November 1917, are not available. During 1918 HMS Bristol was deployed escorting convoys around the coast of West Africa, and then on patrol between Rio de Janeiro and Montevideo. On 19 October 1918 she was en route for Bahia when she suddenly returned to Rio to avoid the risk of the crew contracting Spanish Flu, which was of pandemic proportions at the time

The last wartime entry reads as follows: - quite an uneventful day as far as the rest of the war was concerned!

11 November 1918

- From Bahia to Patrolling, or at Bahia
- Lat -13.0, Long -38.5
- 2 on sick list
- 5.20 am: Sighted Itapuan Light: N22W
- 5.25 am: Sighted San Antonio Light: N67 1/2W
- 8.07 am: Antonio Light House: abeam 7 cables
- 8.35 am: Came to Starboard Bower 5 shackles 7 fathoms
- 5.00 pm: Hands to Bathe

Christmas 1918 was spent in Montevideo, with church parties going ashore on Christmas Day, and a children's party on board on Boxing Day. On 27 December, HMS Bristol set sail for Port Stanley and then remained off South America until May 1919, when she left for home, arriving in Portsmouth on 21 May. On 30 May the ship was paid off into Reserve, and was sold for scrap in 1921.

According to the National Roll of the Great War, he was awarded the 1914-15 Star, General Service and Victory Medals, and was demobbed in June 1919. His address at this time was given as 25 Union Road, Northam, Southampton.

His official naval record tells us that Charles was demobbed on 17 July 1919, and the official Naval Medal and Award Rolls tell us he collected the Victory and British War Medals in person

BLAKER, Chas.	Sto.1	K.47260		V.	B.	S.
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The British War Medal, a bronze medal was awarded to all those who served abroad during the entirety of the war. The Victory Medal was awarded to all military and civilian personnel who served in a theatre of war. .

Charles had obviously enjoyed his time at sea, as in August 1920 he had joined the Merchant Navy, this time as a coal trimmer, where he remained until 1926, travelling back and forth across the Atlantic

C.R. 10. No. of Identity Certificate... 413904

M.N.S. Region..... Regional No.....

Surname... *Blaker*

Christian Name... *Charles*

Rating... *Trimmer* R.N.R. No.....

No. and Grade of B/T Certificate.....

Date and Place of Birth... *11-11-99 Southampton Eng*

Nationality... *Brit* Father... *Brit*

Height..... Colour Hair..... Eyes.....

Tattoo Marks.....

Dis. A No..... N.H. Insurance No.....

Name and Address of Next of Kin.....

(2281) Wt. 20167-22. 100m. 8/18. Av. P. (508)

(9061) Wt. 2228-7 Rpt. 10m. 4/10. Av. P. (1250)

413904

124093/ 21.8.20

136828/ 20.1.21

124093/ 30.4.21

129547/ 26.9.21

