

About English naval uniforms and HMS IRRESISTIBLE

Introduction

The acquisition of two new postcards gave me the opportunity to do a few studies of English naval uniforms before and during the First World War, as well as the maritime pre-history of the battles on the Gallipoli Peninsula in 1915.

Sailor from HMS IRRESISTIBLE



Wounded sailor from HMS IRRESISTIBLE, approx. 1915.

From contemporary postcard drawn by Harry Payne.

The card - sent on 7 August 1915 - comes from a series of five postcards that were sold in aid of the English Red Cross.

The text on the back reads:

There is no shirking with Jack 1) - his stout hart know no fear; he faces the foe gallantly, and he knows full well that when necessary he may look to the kindly nursing of the British Red Cross Society to

alleviate his sufferings and help him to recovery.

The sailor's cap band bears the name HMS IRRESISTIBLE. On the left upper arm is worn the degree sign for *leading seaman* (an anchor); the angle denotes three years of satisfactory service, while the crown marks proficiency in the function. The badge on the right arm is *the Good Shooting Badge, 1st Class*.



Leading Seaman



*Good Shooting Badge,
1st Class*

Tradition attributes the three white stripes of the sailor's collar to Nelson's victories at Aboukir Bay (*The Nile*), Copenhagen and Trafalgar, just as the associated black bow is to mark the mourning of his death, but this has nothing to do with it (Source 10).

The sailor's blue-edged cotton undershirt is somewhat yellowish in the rendering, and should have been white.

HMS IRRESISTIBLE

The sailor's ship - HMS IRRESISTIBLE - was lost on 18 March 1915 in the Dardanelles, where it ran on a mine; the postcard may thus show one of the surviving crew members aboard another ship.

HMS IRRESISTIBLE was a heavy cruiser/pre-Dreadnought battleship of the Formidable class of the early 20th century. The class numbered the following ships:

Formidable classes

Command hoist Further destiny

HMS *FORMIDABLE*

September 1901

Torpedoed by U-24 on 1 January 1915

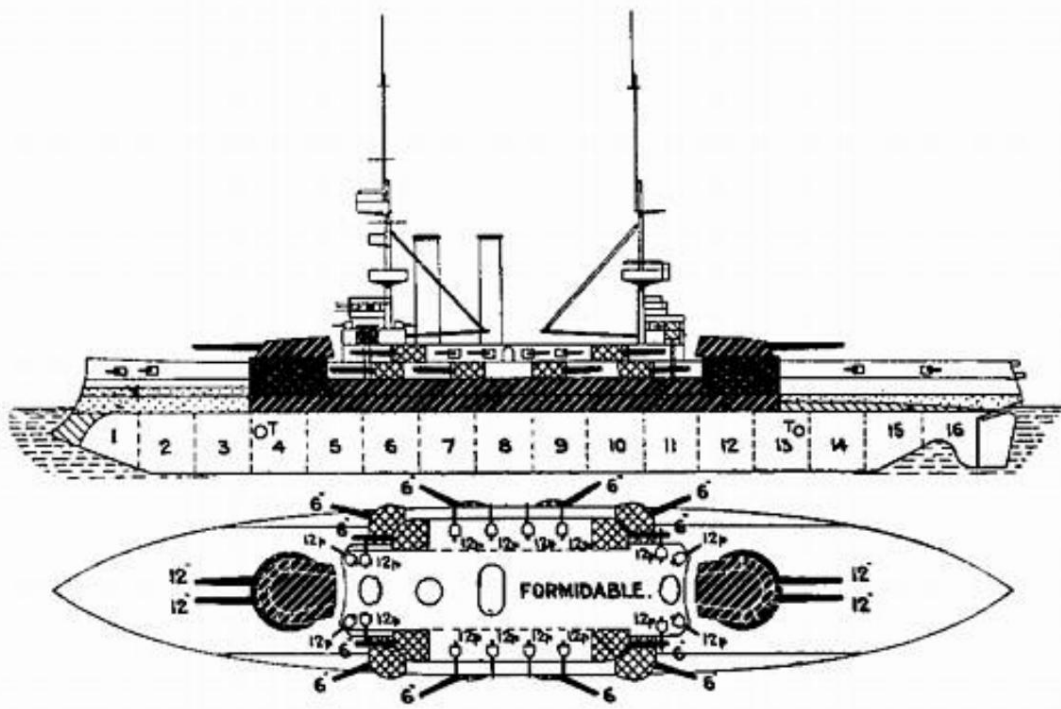
HMS IRRESISTIBLE *February 1902*

Sunk by a mine 18 March 1915

HMS *IMPLACABLE*

September 1901

Sold for scrap November 8, 1921



HMS FORMIDABLE.

From Source 1.

Armament

- 4 pcs. 12-inch guns 12
- pcs. 6-inch guns 18 pcs.
- 12-pdr guns 6 pcs. 3-
- pdr guns 2 pcs.
- machine guns (Maxim) 4
- torpedo tubes.

History

HMS IRRESISTIBLE was sent to Gibraltar immediately after commissioning.



HMS IRRESISTIBLE. From Source 3.

When the Navy mobilized in 1914, HMS IRRESISTIBLE joined the Channel Fleet's 5th Squadron.

On 25 August 1914 HMS IRRESISTIBLE took part in the transfer of *10th (Portsmouth) Bn. Royal Marines* [2](#) to Ostend.

HMS IRRESISTIBLE took part in October and November 1914 in the Dover Flotilla's shelling of German positions on the Belgian coast.

HMS IRRESISTIBLE was sent to the Dardanelles in February 1915, where she took part in the initial bombardment of the Turkish coastal forts, prior to the later landings on the Gallipoli Peninsula (25 April 1915).

On the morning of March 18, 1915, the Anglo-French naval force, under the command of Vice-Admiral Sir John de Robeck, made an attempt to penetrate through the Dardanelles - the narrow strait between the Gallipoli Peninsula and the Asian part of Turkey.



HMS IRRESISTIBLE's final, photographed from HMS LORD NELSON.

From Source 1.

Here HMS IRRESISTIBLE ran on a mine and was badly damaged. Despite heavy fire from the Turkish batteries, the crew managed to be rescued aboard a destroyer. HMS OCEAN was ordered to salvage the ship, but ran into a mine herself and further salvage attempts had to be abandoned. After dark, Flotilla Admiral (*Commodore*) Roger Keyes, Chief of Staff at the Naval Force, searched forward with the destroyer JED to sink HMS IRRESISTIBLE and, if possible, salvage HMS OCEAN, but by then both warships had sunk.

The operation was aborted due to losses. In addition to the two English warships, the French battleship BOUVET was also lost. In addition, three ships were so badly damaged that they had to seek docking; a further four warships were slightly damaged.

The naval operations were not resumed and instead they focused on the land operations that began with the landing on the Gallipoli Peninsula on 25 April 1915.



Cannon exercise with a 6-inch cannon, approx. 1905.

Cannon exercise

Two of the sailors wear the badge for three years of satisfactory service.

The sailor on the left in the gun turret wears the functional insignia of *Gunners Mate* (Sub-Quartermaster).

The sailor on the right may be a *Petty Officer, 2nd Class*.

As far as is known, the degree was discontinued in 1907, but persons in the degree could continue their term of service.



Gunners Mate



Petty Officer, 2nd Class Sub-Lieutenant



The naval officer's one gallion shows that he is a *Sub-Lieutenant*.

The name of the ship is not given, but the cannon could be one of the 12 pieces. 6-inch guns that stood on HMS IRRESISTIBLE.

Sources

1. World War 1 Naval Combat - Formidable Class Battleships og HMS IRRESISTIBLE.
2. Battleships- Cruisers - HMS IRRESISTIBLE.
3. The Royal Navy 1873-1946 - Formidable/London Class pre-Dreadnought battleships.
4. Log of HMS Ocean.

5. Rank at a Glance in the Army & Navy, 1915.
6. Index to late 18th, 19th and early 20th Century Naval and Naval Social History.
7. *Gallipoli 1915* by Philip Haythornthwaite, Osprey, Campaign Series no. 8, London 1991, ISBN 1-85532-111-4.
8. *The Dardanelles Commission, Part 1: Lord Kitchener and Winston Churchill, 1914- 15*, The Stationary Office, Norwich 2000, ISBN 0-11-702423-6. (Oprindeligt udgivet i 1917.)
9. *The Dardanelles Commission, Part II: Defeat at Gallipoli, 1915-1916*, The Stationary Office, Norwich 2000, ISBN 0-11-702455-4. (Originally published in 1918.)
10. *The Royal Navy 1939-45* af Ian Sumner, Osprey, Elite Nr. 79, London 2001, ISBN 1-84176-195-8.
11. *Britain's Wonderful Fighting Forces*, Odhams Press Limited, London (no year), circa 1941.
12. *Marine and air force uniforms 1939-45* by Andrew Mollo, Danish Military Publishing House, Hvidovre (no year, but circa 1980), ISBN 87-87794-01-2.

Sources 8 and 9 are reprints of reports from an official commission of inquiry set up to clarify the circumstances surrounding the disastrous operations at the Dardanelles and the Gallipoli Peninsula.

Per Finsted



HMS IMPLACABLE, sister ship to HMS IRRESISTIBLE.

From Source 1.

Although the colorized photograph appears to date from the early 20th century, the scene is not unlike the Dardanelles, where *HMS IRRESISTIBLE* met its end.

To note:

1) The designation *Jack Tar* is the maritime analogy to *Tommy Atkins*, which was used as a collective term for land soldiers.

2) If e.g. my article Uniform Floors - Royal Naval Division, 1914 -