

# Maltese casualties in the Battle of Jutland – May 31 - June 1, 1916

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In the afternoon and evening of May 31, 1916, the Battle of Jutland (or Skagerrakschlacht as it is known to the Germans), was fought between the British Grand Fleet, under the command of Admiral Sir John Jellicoe, and the German High Seas Fleet commanded by Admiral Reinhold Scheer.

It was to be the largest naval battle and the only full-scale clash between battleships of the war.

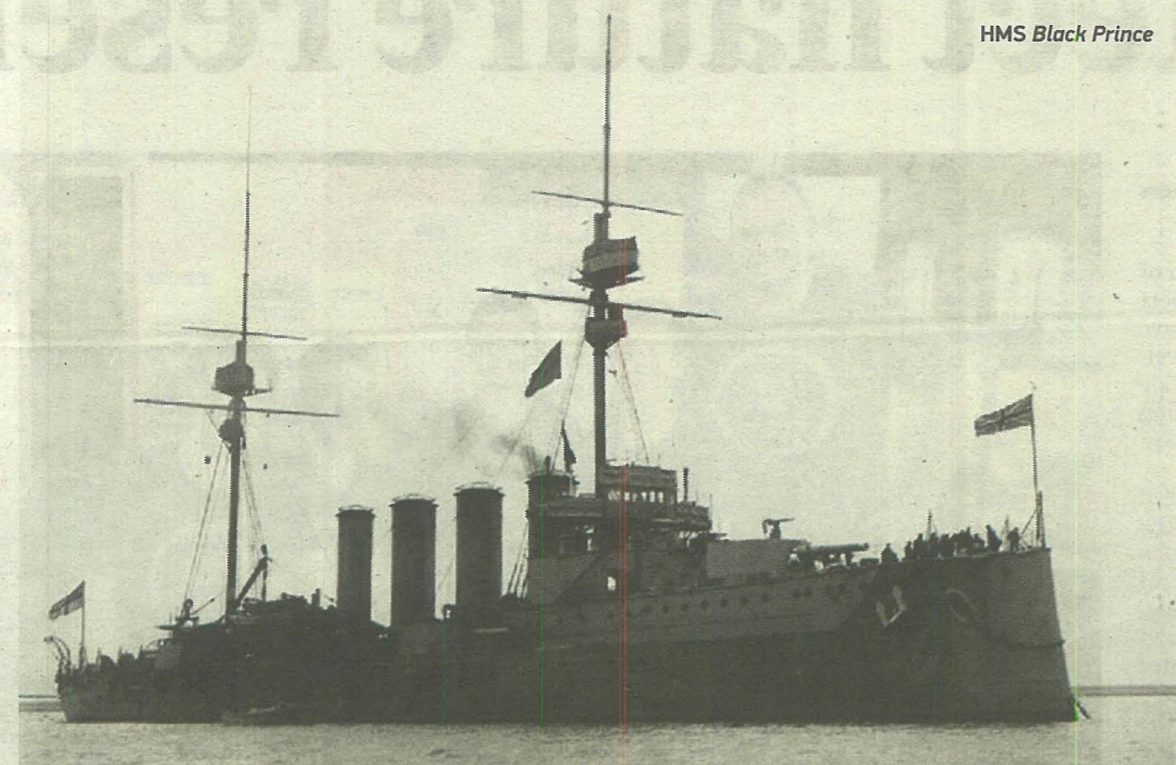
The British Grand Fleet was composed of 151 warships, among which were 28 battleships and nine battle cruisers, while the German High Seas Fleet consisted of 99 warships, including 16 battleships and 54 battle cruisers.

Contact between these mighty fleets was made shortly after 2pm, when HMS Galatea reported that she had sighted the enemy.

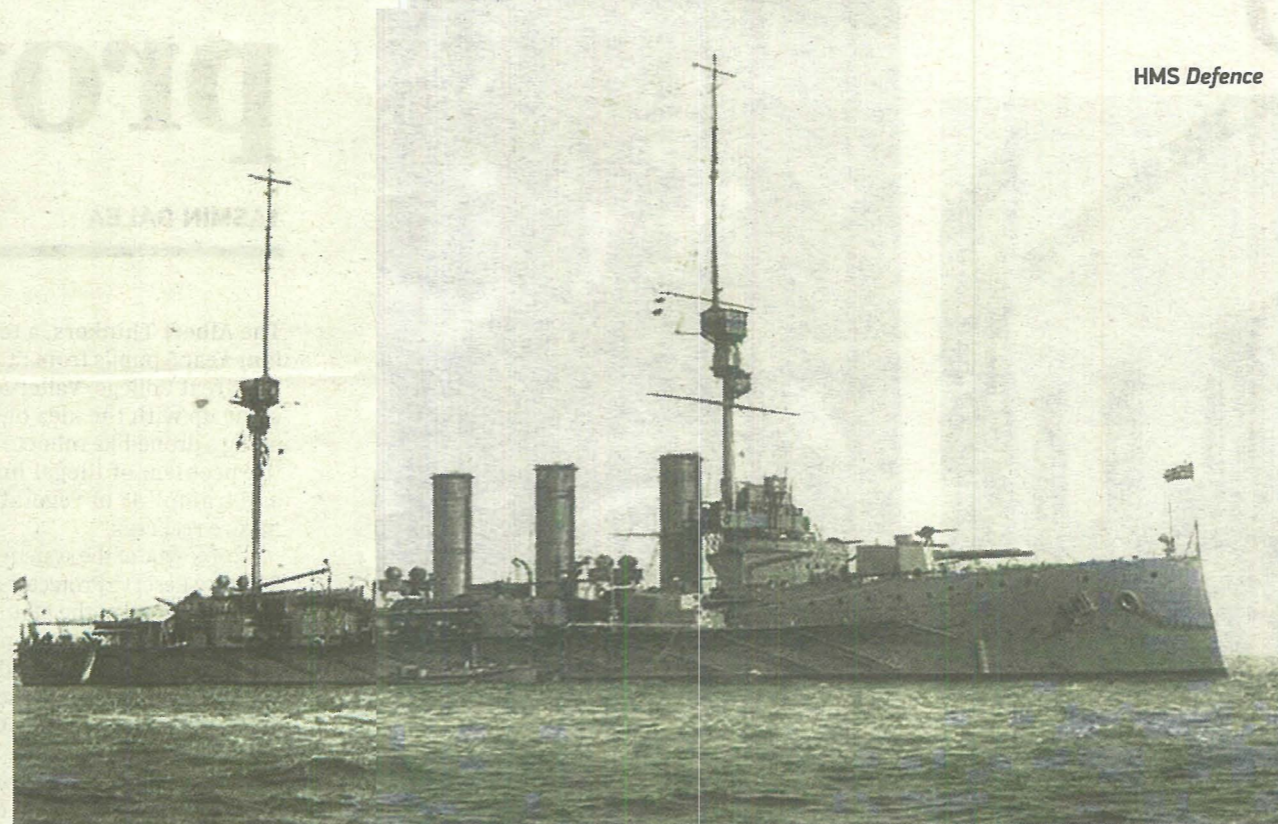
The first British disaster occurred at 4pm, when, while engaging SMS Von der Tann, HMS *Indefatigable* was hit by a salvo on her upper deck. The missiles apparently penetrated her 'X' magazine, for she was suddenly hidden in a cloud of smoke and flames. Mortally stricken, she was sinking by the stern, when another salvo struck her 'A' turret. A blinding flash and a huge volume of smoke appeared, and in a moment she turned over and sank, taking with her 1,019 officers and men, leaving only two survivors.

Among the men who lost their lives in this disaster were Emmanuele Chircop, Francis Mamo, Carmelo Micallef, Carmelo Munrho, John Rogers and Giovanni Spiteri, residents of Valletta. Three were residents of Cospicua – Joseph Darmanin, Giuseppe Farrugia and Salvatore Micallef. Antonio Borda and George Vella resided in Kalkara, while Salvatore Cachia and James Long resided in Senglea. Carmelo Camilleri, Giuseppe Storace and Publius Viscoso resided in Hamrun, Floriana and Msida respectively.

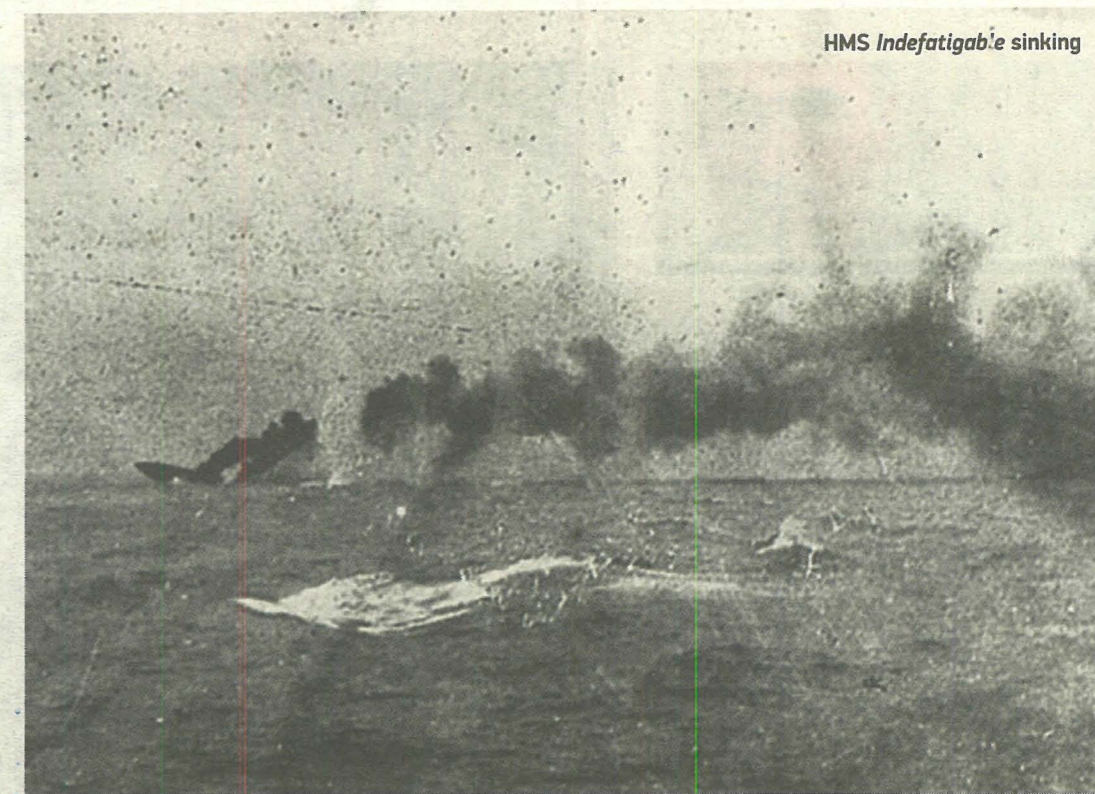
At about 4.25pm, the second disaster hit the British fleet. SMS *Derfflinger* and SMS *Seydlitz* were heavily engaging HMS *Queen Mary*, when a salvo crashed on her forward magazine, and a moment later a heavy explosion rent her



HMS Black Prince



HMS Defence



HMS Indefatigable sinking

amidships. A huge pillar of smoke ascended to the sky, and she sank bow first. Out of a crew of 1,275, 1,266 officers and men lost their lives, including Carmelo Conti, Albert Coster, Antonio Frenzo, Benjamin Gale and Carmelo Nays, who were all born in Valletta. Carmelo Bruce was born in Senglea, while Frank Miller was a resident of Senglea. Laurence Gatt, husband of Matilda, resided in Portsmouth.

The next loss occurred at around 6pm. The destroyers HMS *Shark*, HMS *Ophelia*, HMS *Acasta* and HMS *Christopher* were attacking the German cruisers when they were quickly smothered by fire from the German squadron. HMS *Shark* was disabled, and although HMS *Acasta* rushed in to take her in tow, she was ordered away. A number of German destroyers dispatched by Hipper sent HMS *Shark* to the bottom of the sea with the loss of 82 men out of a crew of 92. The only Maltese man who lost his life in the sinking of this ship was Paolo Attard, son of Saverio and Katerina Attard of 33, Strada Xandriku, Nadur.

Ships of the 1st Light Cruiser Squadron, among them HMS *Defence* and HMS *Warrior* were attacking the disabled SMS *Wies-*

baden when they soon came under attack of the approaching battlecruiser SMS *Derfflinger* and four battleships. Two salvos crashed almost immediately on HMS *Defence*, detonating her magazines, and with a flash she blew up and sank, taking with her 903 officers and men, among them Joseph Bonnici, residing in Cospicua, Giosue Gaffiero from Sliema, Abele Giglio from Senglea and John Triccas from St Julian's. Gaetano Chircop and Angelo Magri from Valletta as well as Paolo Patignott and Charles Rodgers from Vittoriosa also lost their lives.

## “The Battle of Jutland may be considered as a German victory”

The following, who were members of the band and were residing in Malta, perished too – Alberto Baldacchino, William Minardi and Carmelo Montesin lived in Valletta; Alfredo Ronnisvalle hailed from Senglea, while Enrico Portelli was from Floriana; Nunzio Carmando, Agostino Cavallazzi,

Giovanni Consiglio, Nicolo Fondacaro, Emmanuele Ligrestischiros, Virgilio di Mauro, Antonio Polato and Roberto Venturi were all born in Italy but had settled in Malta.

In this same engagement, HMS *Warrior* was also badly stricken and sank later on, the whole surviving crew being taken off by HMS *Engadine*. Anthony Alford, brother of Elena, residing at Floriana, and Roberto Tanti from Hamrun, both died on board HMS *Warrior* during the engagement.

At around this time too, HMS *Black Prince* was engaging the German battleship SMS *Rheinland*, when she was caught in the searchlights and fire of up to five other battleships. She was hit by several heavy shells and sent to the bottom with the loss of all hands (857 officers and men).

Giuseppe Abela, Giuseppe Chetcuti and Lewis Vassallo from Cospicua, Carmelo Baldacchino and Edgar Borg from Senglea, and John Cauchi and John Micallef, both from Floriana, were killed in this tragedy. Robert Scott, born in Liverpool but residing in Valletta, John Vella from Valletta, as well as Joseph Magarity from Vittoriosa and Emanuel Cachia from Kalkara perished too.

Giuseppe Cuomo and Achille Polizzi, residing in Valletta, also lost their lives. They were bandsmen serving on HMS *Black Prince*, as were Angelo Formosa, Constantino Giunta, Luigi Grasso, Enrico Portoghese, Archimede Priori, Matteo Rosmondo, Domenico Strano, Luigi Ungaro and Giovanni Urso. These were all Italian born but residing in Malta. There was also Giuseppe Portoghese, who was born in Malta but resided in Syracuse.

At 7.21pm, HMS *Invincible*, flagship of Admiral Horace Hood, HMS *Inflexible* and HMS *Lion* were engaging SMS *Lutzow*, Admiral Hipper's flagship, SMS *Seydlitz* and SMS *Derfflinger*. Two of the German battlecruisers concentrated their fire on HMS *Invincible* when a 12-inch shell struck her 'Q' turret, detonating the magazines below, causing her to blow up and sink. All but six of her crew of 1,032 officers and men, including the admiral, were killed. Only one man with a Malta connection died on board this ship. This was William George Downer, son of Uriah and Louisa Downer of Amesbury, Wiltshire. William Downer was born in Malta.

In this action, HMS *Malaya* sustained severe damage, resulting in 63 dead and 33 wounded. One of

the wounded men was Spiro Borg, son of Lorenzo and Lorenza Borg of 33 Strada San Lorenzo, Vittoriosa. He died in hospital on June 6 and is interned in grave 1422, in Queensferry Cemetery, Scotland.

The Battle of Jutland has provided an inexhaustible fund of controversy. It must be stated that whether right or wrong, Jellicoe was carrying out the policy deliberately decided upon by the naval authorities – that of not risking unduly his capital ships. Winston Churchill was reported to have said that Jellicoe was “the only man on either side who could lose the war in an afternoon”.

From a material point of view, the Battle of Jutland may be considered as a German victory. On the British side the following ships were sunk: three battle cruisers – *Invincible*, *Indefatigable* and *Queen Mary*; three cruisers – *Black Prince*, *Defence* and *Warrior*; and eight destroyers – *Ardent*, *Fortune*, *Nestor*, *Nomad*, *Shark*, *Sparrowhawk*, *Tipperary* and *Turbulent*.

The Germans lost one battleship, *Pommern*; one battle cruiser, *Lutzow*; four light cruisers – *Elbing*, *Frauenlob*, *Rostock* and *Wiesbaden*, and five destroyers, *S35*, *V4*, *V27*, *V29* and *V48*.

In terms of personnel the British casualties amounted to 328 officers

and 5,769 men killed, among them 72 men with a Malta connection; 25 officers and 485 men wounded; and 10 officers and 167 men taken prisoners. On the German side, 160 officers and 2,385 men were killed, and 41 officers and 454 men wounded.

After this battle, the High Seas Fleet never sought contact with the British Grand Fleet. Indeed, so low did its morale become that the men threatened mutiny rather than face the peril of the Royal Navy.

In my collection I have a souvenir of this great naval battle – a Christmas card for the year 1916, measuring 15.25 by 10.8cm. The National Museum of the Royal Navy also has a similar item in its collection. It seems this was produced by the ship's photographer, and was sold to the crew.

The card is enclosed by a cover, on the front of which is a golden coloured ribbon with the words ‘Souvenir of The Great War’. Below, also in gold, are the following words: ‘The Great British Naval Victory of Jutland Bank. May 31, 1916. With Best Wishes from HMS *Indomitable*’. The ribbon is around a shackled anchor with two branches of laurels and topped with the King's crown. The ribbon also features on the card



Admiral Reinhard Scheer



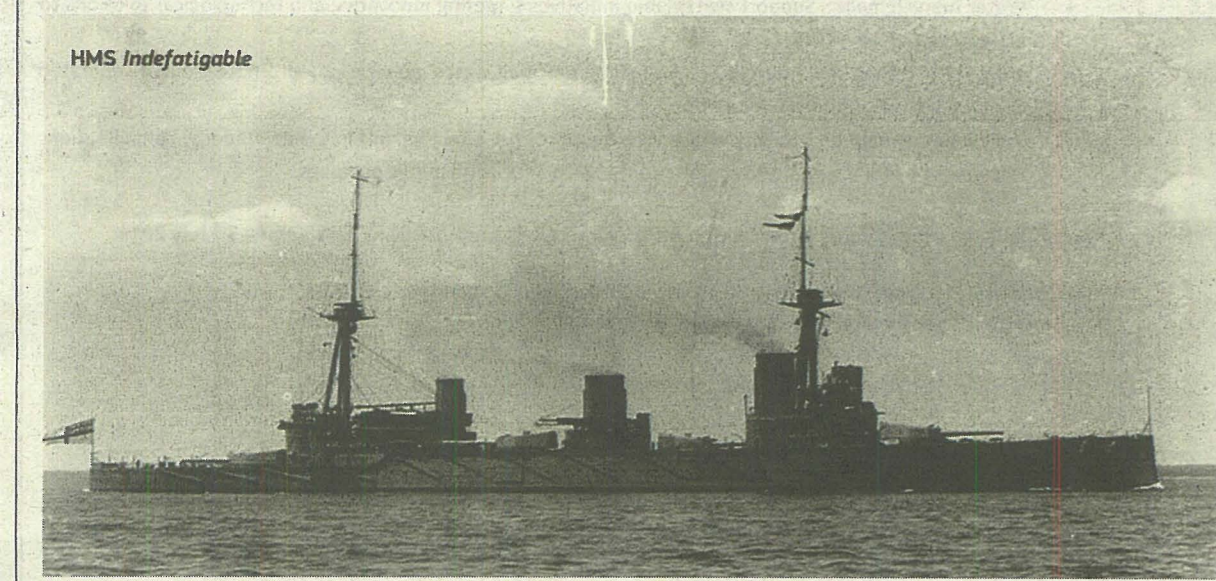
Admiral Sir John Jellicoe

itself. There is also an insert with a short narrative of the battle.

This card was brought by my mother's uncle, George Vella (360833), who was an officer's cook with the Royal Navy, and served on HMS *Indomitable* during the Battle of Jutland. He perished on January 21, 1918, in the sinking of HMS *Louvain*.



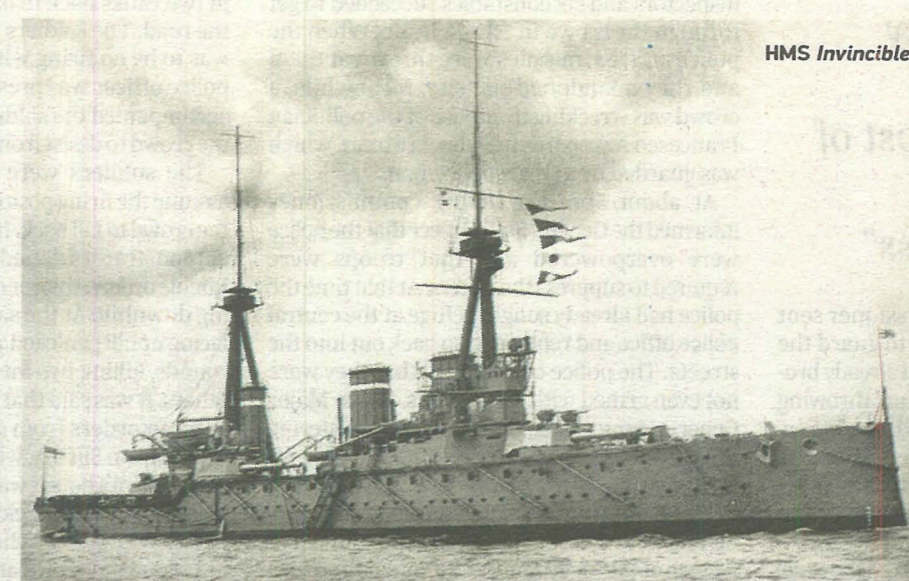
Admiral Sir David Beatty



HMS Indefatigable



HMS Queen Mary



HMS Invincible