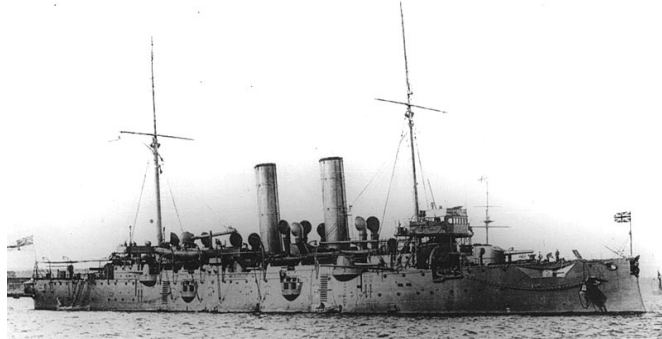


WILLIAM H HARLAND

William H Harland is remembered on the headstone of Plot No 1489 in New Section E of the New Cemetery in Ryde. He is recorded as having drowned at Chemulpo (sic) on the 13th November 1895.

On the 13th November 1895 the British Cruiser, HMS Edgar, was in Chemulpo (Incheon) in the Yellow Sea in South Korea. There were several other warships in the harbour from Japan, America, France and Russia. They were to provide protection for the foreign community in the event of unrest after the murder of Queen Min but it was thought there was very little chance of a revolt and that HMS Edgar was there more for the dignity of Her British Majesty's government than for protection but, as the Russians and Americans had a guard, the British had to have one.



HMS Edgar

The threat to the foreign community had not materialised but the warships had to remain there until they were ordered to leave. The British and Russian Captains decided against giving their crews the freedom of the bars of Chemulpo and utilised the time for training. They intended to use a nearby firing range on an island in the outer harbour for small arms training.

Seventy-one British sailors and Marines, heavily laden with arms and ammunition boarded an eighteen-oared pinnace, and slowly sailed and rowed to the island. The Russians, fewer in number and less heavily laden, used a faster steam launch. The Russians made their way quickly to the range, conducted their training and left. While the British were training the wind speed increased considerably but, because they were in a sheltered location, the Officer was apparently unaware of how dangerous their situation had become.

Sheltered by the island they were able to make their way slowly back but, when they cleared the island, they were exposed to the full blast of the wind and were unable to make any progress. The Officer in charge ordered the sail to be raised but, allegedly, was asked not to as it might topple the vessel and drown the occupants. The Officer ignored this and ordered the sail to be raised after ordering the sailors to remove their heavy ammunition belts and boots. As soon as the sail went up the vessel was overwhelmed by the wind and waves and immediately sank. The shore was clearly visible about four hundred yards away but nobody managed to swim to it.

The disaster was witnessed by the crews of nearby warships who sent help as soon as possible. The Russian steam launch managed to pull fourteen sailors from the water but was then nearly sunk as it was overloaded with the survivors. The Officer in charge made for the Japanese ship and was able to unload the sailors who were immediately rushed to the warmth of the engine room. The launch could not be hauled aboard the Russian warship and had to anchor until the following day. Unfortunately it was too late for forty-six of the sailors who drowned.

One of the young men who had been rescued died shortly afterwards and was buried in Chemulpo's Foreigners' Cemetery the following day with full military honours. On Sunday 17th November 1895 a funeral service was held on board HMS Edgar when the bodies of those drowned were solemnly committed to the deep with full naval honours. The French, American and Russian warships all sent representatives to this service to express their sympathy.

The Russian officer in charge of the steam launch was commended for his prompt and decisive action. Despite the tensions between Britain and Russia at that time nationality had been forgotten and only humanity and the desire to help fellow sailors were apparent.

Source: Ohmynews - a Korean International News Service - Researched by David Earle