

## **Cecil John Torode**

**By Brian Torode**

This is another reminder of the many men from the Channel Islands who would enlist to serve in and survive the Great War, only to give their lives in the next War. In the case of Cecil Torode the ship on which he lost his life, HMS Barham, was also a veteran of the Great War.

Abraham Torode was born on the 28<sup>th</sup> December, 1862 at Longue Maison in St Saviour, Guernsey, the son of Abraham Torode and Marie Sarre. He met and married Marie Allain and they set up home together in Les Domaines in St Saviour. They were to produce four children as follows.

- Cecil John Torode was born on the 20<sup>th</sup> February, 1900.
- Elise Mary Torode was born on the 12<sup>th</sup> April, 1903. She married Frederick Kitchenham.
- Norman Torode was born on the 24<sup>th</sup> September, 1914. He married Marian Stores from Stockport in Lancashire and they lived in the Liverpool area. Norman died in 1991.
- Nella Alice Torode was born on the 15<sup>th</sup> October, 1915. She was married on the 29<sup>th</sup> April, 1936 to Daniel George Dorey, the son of Daniel George Dorey and Florence Vaudin. Nella died on the 14<sup>th</sup> May, 2002.

It was Cecil John who was the first to leave the family by joining the Royal Navy during the Great War. His Official Service number was J45543 and he became a Telegraphist. A Telegraphist was part of the Communications branch of the navy and involved him learning how to communicate by using flag hoists and semaphore. This method of passing messages had been in use since the Napoleonic Wars when Admiral Nelson had used ordered a hoist to great effect on HMS Victory prior to going into battle at Trafalgar with the message: '*England Expects that every man will do his duty*'. Even during the Great War this method of communication was still being used to great effect to control the manoeuvring and tactical formation of the Grand Fleet. Cecil liked the life so much that he stayed in the service after the Great War had ended.

Being based mainly at Portsmouth, Cecil was to meet and marry Emily Sullivan and they set up home together at Plumstead near London. Between the wars they had three children. They were Myrtle Torode, and the twins Bernice Torode and Barry Torode who were born in 1936. Cecil was drafted to the aged battleship HMS Barham as the Chief Petty Officer Telegraphist. He had risen through the ranks to become the head of his branch. Under him were all the young Telegraphists, and he was responsible only to the Communications Officer.



**HMS Barham**

Cecil's main role was to stand at the back of the bridge and await orders from the Captain. He would then order his men to connect the correct sequence of flags to the hoists and then pass the message. In 1935, after a major refit in Portsmouth, HMS Barham was sent to join the Mediterranean Fleet based at Valetta in Malta, but after the outbreak of the Second World War, she returned home to join the Home Fleet. In 1939 Barham was hit by a torpedo fired from the U-Boat U-30 and sustained some damage which caused her to go in to Liverpool for repairs. Those repairs were completed in April, 1940 and she was then sent as part of a task force to attack the Vichy French forces at Dakar in West Africa. The attack was abandoned after a fierce battle in which the battleship HMS Resolution was badly damaged. Barham towed the Resolution back to Gibraltar.

In November, 1940 Barham was assigned to the Mediterranean Fleet once more. She was involved in several actions, including the Battle of Cape Matapan, and the attacks on Taranto harbour in Italy and Tripoli in Libya. On the 25<sup>th</sup> November, 1941 she was with the battleships HMS Queen Elizabeth and HMS Valiant, along with an escort of eight destroyers when at 4.25 in the afternoon she was hit by three torpedoes fired from the German U-boat U-331. The captain of U-331 was Lieutenant Hans-Deitrich von Tiesenhausen, who had managed to manoeuvre his boat to just 750 yards range before firing. This allowed no time for Barham to take evasive action. Mortally wounded, the great ship rolled slowly over on to her port side when suddenly her magazines exploded killing 841 of her 1184 man crew. Along with the others who died that day was CPO Cecil John Torode. He was forty one years old. The sinking was captured on film from HMS Valiant who had been ahead in the line.