

A FINE BENIN 1897 AND GREAT WAR GROUP TO A COMMANDER, ROYAL NAVY, 'WHO WAS ONE OF THE PIONEERS OF THE BRITISH SUBMARINE SERVICE' AND A TORPEDO EXPERT. DURING THE GREAT WAR HE WAS APPOINTED TO FIT OUT THE FIRST BRITISH 'Q' SHIPS AND, SAILING IN ONE OF THEM



EAST AND WEST AFRICA 1887-1900, 1 CLASP, BENIN 1897 'W. H. S. BALL, MID., H.M.S. FORTE.', 1914-15 STAR 'LT. COMM. W. H. S. BALL, R.N.', BRITISH WAR AND VICTORY MEDALS 'COMM. W. H. S. BALL, R.N.' mounted for wear.

William Henry Strickland Ball was born in Bristol in July 1879, and joined the Royal Navy as a cadet with H.M.S. Britannia in July 1893. He advanced to midshipman in 1895, and served with H.M.S. Forte from August 1896. During his time with Forte, Ball served punitive expedition against the Kingdom of Benin in 1897:

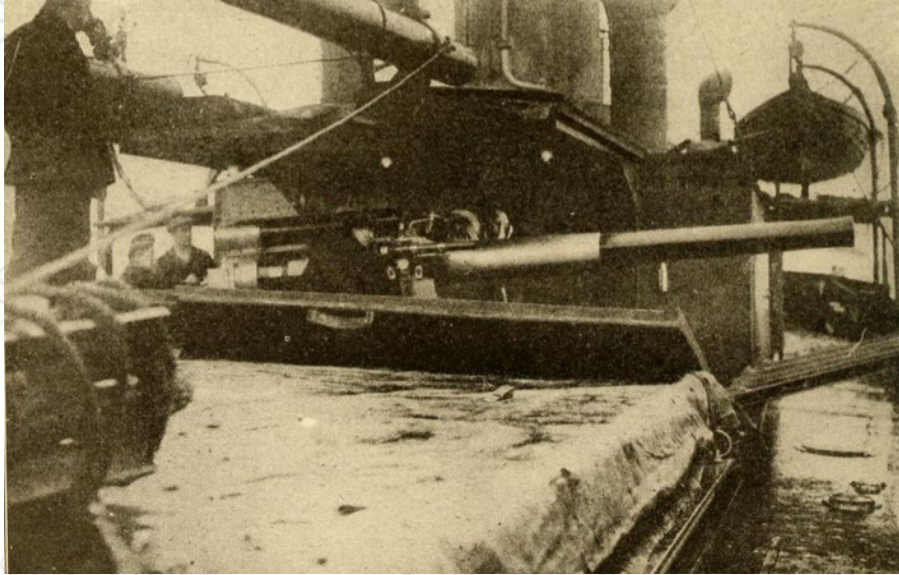
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Benin_Expedition_of_1897

Ball advanced to lieutenant in April 1901, attained his 1st Class Torpedo Certificate in 1903, and qualified as lieutenant (technical) 1st class the following year.

Ball advanced to lieutenant commander in April 1909, and was appointed to H.M.S. Columbine additional (Technical) for duty in connection with Trawlers, Firth of Forth from 13 October 1914 - November 1918. His service record at first sight appears to be that of a naval officer steering a perfectly normal progression through his career in the Technical Branch, albeit with some focus on torpedoes. However, the following mentions of him in At Sea with Joseph Conrad, written by Captain J. G. Sutherland, R.N., indicate that what is shown on his naval record for 1914-18 was cover for his true activities at the naval base of

Granton, Rosyth, Scotland. At the latter the Special Service (Decoy Duty) was begun as an offshoot of the Admiralty's Q-ship policy.

<https://www.westernfrontassociation.com/world-war-i-articles/pantomime-at-sea-q-ships-in-ww1/>



A Q-SHIPS NAVAL GUN HIDDEN BEHIND A PIVOTING PANEL

Joseph Conrad was fascinated by the idea of the use of decoy ships to attack German submarines and, using his influence as a world famous author, was able to secure a berth on H.M. Brigantine "Ready" which Sutherland was to command on her covert operations October - November 1916. Sutherland writes of Conrad:

'He was somewhat surprised when I told him that the idea was not conceived by the Admiralty, not even a professional seaman, but by a purely business man, head of one of the largest manufacturing industries in the country, who on the outbreak of war, surrendered everything, and accepted a junior commission in the R.N.V.R. onboard one of H.M. sea going vessels. Later on, this man, by sheer ability and powers of organisation, was promoted to the rank of Commander, and appointed as Senior Staff Officer at Granton, then one of the largest and most important bases on the East Coast.

Conrad was greatly interested, and wished to know more about him - how the idea came to him, and who he was. I was glad of this, as it gave me an opportunity of paying a tribute to the Royal Naval Volunteer Reserve, and to Commander Kenneth Walker, the originator of the idea. Commander Walker discussed the possibilities of fitting out such a vessel and sailing her under a neutral flag with Commander W. H. S. Ball, R.N., the technical expert of the base; the idea having received his blessing, they both approached the Commodore, who agreed to ask for Admiralty sanction....

Conrad enjoyed these stories greatly, and was somewhat sorry that at the time I could not recount more. He was amused with a story told to me by Commander W. H. S. Ball, R.N., who was one of the pioneers of the British Submarine Service, and who, with Admiral Sir Reginald Bacon, Vice-Admiral Sir Roger Keyes, Captain Percy Addison, R.N., Captain Algernon Candy, R.N. and others did much by taking incalculable risks to bring the Submarine Service to its present high state of perfection. Commander Ball's story was of what he described as the earliest ancestor of the "K" boat.'

Ball served as Assistant Superintendent R.N. at the Greenock Torpedo Factory, November 1918 - November 1923. He advanced to commander in September 1922, and his final appointment was as the Assistant Inspector of Naval Ordnance, Torpedo Range, Weymouth, from which he retired in November 1927. In later life he resided at 1 Ullswater Crescent, Weymouth, and was a member of Weymouth Town Council. Commander Ball died in Weymouth in November 1939.



Two obituaries for Ball confirm his service with Q-ships, the following from the Bristol Evening Post, 11 November 1939:

“SON OF BRISTOLIAN, HE HELPED DEVELOP FAMOUS Q-BOATS

The Evening Post regrets to announce the death of Commander W. H. S. Ball, R.N. of 4 Upper Belgrave Road, Clifton, Bristol. Commander Ball was associated with the planning and development of the Q-boats and during the 1914-18 war he was a motor-boat torpedo expert, later being stationed at Glasgow and Weymouth. After the he retired, he became an member of the Town Council...”

Another notes obituary:

“..In the last war, Commander Ball was appointed to fit out the first British ‘Q’ ships and he sailed in one of them..”

Condition generally GVF. Sold with copied research.

A most interesting group of medals and certainly worthy of more detailed research