

Boy & Girl Soldiers of the First World War



Figure 1. Boy (First Class) John Travers Cornwell, was 16 years old in World War One.

On 31 May 1916, *HMS Chester* was scouting ahead of the 3rd Battlecruiser Squadron at the Battle of Jutland when the ship turned to investigate gunfire in the distance. At 17:30 hours, the Chester soon came under intense fire from four Kaiserliche Marine cruisers each her own size which had suddenly emerged from the haze and increasing funnel smoke of the battlefield. The shielded 5.5-inch gun mounting where Cornwell was serving as a sight-setter was affected by at least four nearby hits. The Chester's gun mountings were open-backed shields and did not reach down to the deck. Splinters were thus able to pass under them or enter the open back when shells exploded nearby or behind. All the gun's crew were killed or mortally injured except Cornwell, who, although severely wounded, managed to stand up again and remain at his post for more than 15 minutes, until Chester retired from the action with only one main gun still working. Chester had received a total of 18 hits, but partial hull armour meant that the interior of the ship suffered little serious damage and the ship itself was never in peril. Nevertheless, the situation on deck was dire. Many of the gun crews had lost lower limbs due to splinters passing under the gun shields. British ships report passing the Chester to cheers from limbless wounded gun crew laid out on her deck and smoking cigarettes, only to hear that the same crewmen had died a few hours later from blood loss and shock.

After the action, ship medics arrived on deck to find Cornwell the sole survivor at his gun, shards of steel penetrating his chest, looking at the gun sights and still waiting for orders. Being incapable of further action, *HMS Chester* was ordered to the port of Immingham. There Cornwell was transferred to Grimsby General Hospital, although he was clearly dying. He died on the morning of 2 June 1916 before his mother could arrive at the hospital.

The Admiralty eventually decided to recommend Cornwell for a posthumous Victoria Cross and King George V endorsed it.

- taken from Wikipedia (8 September 2016)



Figure 2. German boy soldiers of World War 1 prisoners at the Somme.



Figure 4. A. V. D. Wall aged 15 on 24 May 1915.



Figure 5. Canary Girls



Figure 6. The First Women's Battalion of Death.