

WILKINSON, CHARLES ROY - Died 9th January 1942 aged 19

C/SKX 1525 Stoker 2nd Class, Royal Navy, H.M.S. Vimiera



Photograph courtesy of Belle Thompson, his sister.

He was a bachelor, born on 12th November 1922, the eleventh of thirteen children of William and Annie Wilkinson who lived at 14 The Green, Scotter.

The family called him Charlie and to friends he was known as Channy. His brothers and sisters were Joseph, Alice, Annie, John William, Robert, Mary, Leonard, Rose, Jessie, Herbert and Isobel (Belle).

He was baptised at St. Peter's Church on 15th January 1924 and attended the local school and Wesleyan Chapel.

Charlie became a lorry drivers mate and seems to have been a likeable young man who was quite popular with the ladies.

At the outbreak of the Second World War he had a reserved occupation but chose to serve his King and Country by joining the Royal Navy.

HMS Vimiera was a fast escort destroyer built by Swan Hunter and launched in June 1917. She took part in several actions in the Great War with the 2nd Light Cruiser Section.

During peace time she was mostly laid up at Rosyth and when the Second World War began she was undergoing a refit which was completed in January 1940. She began duty escorting convoys along the East coast.

By May 1940 the blitzkrieg had swept the British Army back to the channel ports.



HMS Vimiera underway following conversion to a W class destroyer.

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Source: <https://www.iwm.org.uk/collections/item/object/205120469>

On 22nd May, in an effort to hold the port of Boulogne, two battalions of the Guards were sent escorted by HMS Whitshed and Vimiera. It soon became evident that the port was doomed and the next day she and four other vessels brought out a thousand men each, under close range of enemy fire.

The Vimiera returned back across the Channel and, in darkness, crept back into the harbour and laid alongside a jetty. Everything was silent and after a time a mob of civilian refugees and French and Belgian troops appeared and rushed on board. A messenger was sent to collect the thousand guards still around the town and by 2:45am some one thousand five hundred people were packed on board. The ship left the jetty leaving three hundred Welsh Guardsmen to wait for another ship, which sadly never came. Under heavy shellfire she returned to Dover.

The Vimiera was ordered back and with the HMS Wessex, another destroyer, was shelling a German armoured column proceeding along a seaside road near Calais. They were joined by the Polish destroyer Burza. In the late afternoon, as they fired at tanks, twenty seven enemy planes appeared above them. The first round of bombs hit the Wessex, which soon sank. The Vimiera was badly damaged and had to stay behind a smoke screen unable to take further part in the fighting. The air attack concentrated on the Burza and after the planes had dropped all their bombs the Vimiera managed to limp back to Sheerness.

After repairs were made she returned to her mundane duties of convoy escort up and down the East coast from the Humber to the Thames.

On 9th January 1942 the Vimiera was escorting a southbound convoy when she struck a mine and sank in the Thames Estuary, off the Nore light, three miles from the Isle of Sheppey. The ship disintegrated forward of the aft funnel and ninety three members of the crew perished with the ship, with thirty eight others picked up. Four of these were dead, or died in hospital.

The wreck is an official War Grave.

Charlie is remembered on the Chatham Naval Memorial, Kent. PLOT – Panel 63 1.