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**William Henry Dawe**  
**Royal Naval Reserve Newfoundland**  
**Service No. 1174X**  
**World War I**

**Born:** 06 Mar 1895

**Place of Birth:** Darrell's Hole, Port de Grave

**Parents:** Abram and Rebecca Dawe

In late August 1914, William, then nineteen (19), travelled to St. John's and enlisted as seaman in the Royal Naval Reserve Newfoundland. His term of service would last for a year and a half from 25 Aug 1914 to 29 Feb 1916.

William's service record shows the following entries:

1. HMS Calypso: 25 Aug 1914 – 05 Nov 1914

2. HMS Calyx: 06 Nov 1914 – 27 Mar 1915
3. HMS Victory 1: 28 Mar 1915 – 14 Apr 1915
4. HMS Alcantara: 15 Apr 1915 – 29 Feb 1916.



**HMS Alcantara**

In April 1915 the British Admiralty requisitioned *Alcantara* and her "A-series" sisters *Avon*, *Arlanza* and *Andes* to be armed merchant cruisers. She was armed with eight 6-inch guns, two six-pounder anti-aircraft guns, and depth charges. On 17 April at Liverpool she was commissioned into the Royal Navy's 10th Cruiser Squadron as HMS *Alcantara* and commissioned into the 10th Cruiser Squadron, which joined the Northern Patrol that was part of the First World War Allied naval blockade of the Central Powers. The Squadron patrolled about 200,000 square miles (520,000 km<sup>2</sup>) of the North Sea, Norwegian Sea and Arctic Ocean to prevent German access to or from the North Atlantic.

In January 1916 *Alcantara* embarked on the 10th Cruiser Squadron's G patrol.<sup>[7]</sup> She was due to return to port on 1 March, but on the morning of 29 February 1916 she was northeast of Shetland *en route* to a

rendezvous with *Andes* she intercepted the German merchant raider *Greif* disguised as the Norwegian merchant ship *Rena* out of Tønsberg, Norway. At 0915 hrs at a range of 6,000 yards *Alcantara* ordered *Greif* to stop for inspection, which she did. *Alcantara's* company went to action stations, she trained her guns on *Greif*, closed to 2,000 yards and slowed to lower a cutter to put an armed guard aboard the suspect ship.

At 0940 hrs *Greif* increased speed and opened fire. One source claims she raised the Imperial German war ensign ("*Kriegsflagge*"). However, *Alcantara's* captain, Thomas Wardle, reported that after lowering the Norwegian ensign *Greif* fought under no flag. The first shell hit *Alcantara's* bridge, disabling her steering gear, engine order telegraph and all telephones and killing or wounding a number of men. Captain Wardle ordered full speed and open fire at a range of 2,000 yards. A messenger was sent aft and got her after emergency steering gear connected.

*Greif* turned to starboard<sup>[8]</sup> and closed range to 750 yards.<sup>[7]</sup> Several German shells hit *Alcantara* near her waterline, entering her stokehold bunkers and engine room. *Greif* tried to torpedo *Alcantara*. Captain Wardle reported that evasive action at 1002 hrs allowed the torpedo to pass clear under *Alcantara's* stern, but another source states that a torpedo detonated amidships against *Alcantara's* port side. A shell from *Alcantara's* port after 6-inch (150 mm) gun hit and detonated the ready ammunition for *Greif's* after gun, putting it out of action. By 1015 hrs *Greif* was badly afire by her bridge and seemed to have stopped. At 1022 hrs *Alcantara* saw boats leaving *Greif* and duly ceased fire.



An artist's impression of HMS *Alcantara* and SMS *Greif* engaging each other

*Greif* then fired one more shot, and *Alcantara* duly returned fire. The one shot was later attributed to a shell left in the breech of an abandoned gun being fired by the heat of the fire now raging aboard *Greif*.

By 1035 hrs *Alcantara* was reduced to about 3 knots (5.6 km/h) and her after steering gear was disabled. Her helm seemed to be jammed hard over to starboard but she was turning to starboard. Wardle ordered his company to cease fire, stop engines and go to boat stations. The order to stop engines was not received but flooding in the engine room stopped them. Several of *Alcantara's* lifeboat falls had been damaged by enemy fire, so that attempts to launch some boats caused men to be dropped into the sea. *Alcantara* rolled, capsized and sank<sup>[9]</sup> at 1102 hrs. At least 15 of her boats and a large life raft floated clear.

The C-class light cruiser HMS *Comus* and M-class destroyer HMS *Munster* then arrived. *Comus* proceeded to rendezvous with *Andes* about 8,000 yards away, while *Munster* started rescuing survivors. *Greif* was carrying a large amount of cork that at first kept her afloat. *Andes* and *Comus* reopened fire on *Greif*. Eventually a large explosion,

possibly of ammunition, sank the German ship.

The battle killed 230 men from *Greif* and 68 from *Alcantara*. 210 German survivors were rescued.

Seaman Dawe perished in this battle and was designated as "lost at sea". His name is inscribed on the Beaumont-Hamel (Newfoundland) Memorial in France.