

# FORGOTTEN WRECKS CORNWALL

The vessels that became the **Forgotten Wrecks** were of many nationalities that had travelled from ports all around the world.

The western approaches to the English Channel, being the confluence of the numerous trade routes that these vessels followed, became an ideal hunting ground during the **First World War**, where **German U-boats** lay in wait for merchant ships. The seabed off **Cornwall**, therefore, holds many of the **Great War's Forgotten Wrecks**.

## SS *Ballarat*

Loaded with Australian troops, the sinking of this liner on the newly constituted **Anzac Day** was especially poignant.

### The Final Voyage

SS *Ballarat* was a passenger liner built in 1911 in Scotland by Caird & Company. Prior to the war she was used to transport emigrants from the UK to Australia but in 1914 the British government requisitioned her for war service. *Ballarat* initially served as an Indian transport vessel before becoming a troopship, carrying Australian troops. In February 1917, *Ballarat* left Melbourne on passage to Devonport with 1,602 Australian troops (reinforcements from Victoria for the 2nd and 4th Australian Brigades) and a general cargo which included copper and bullion. This was the ship's thirteenth voyage, which caused concern amongst some of the troops.

### Loss

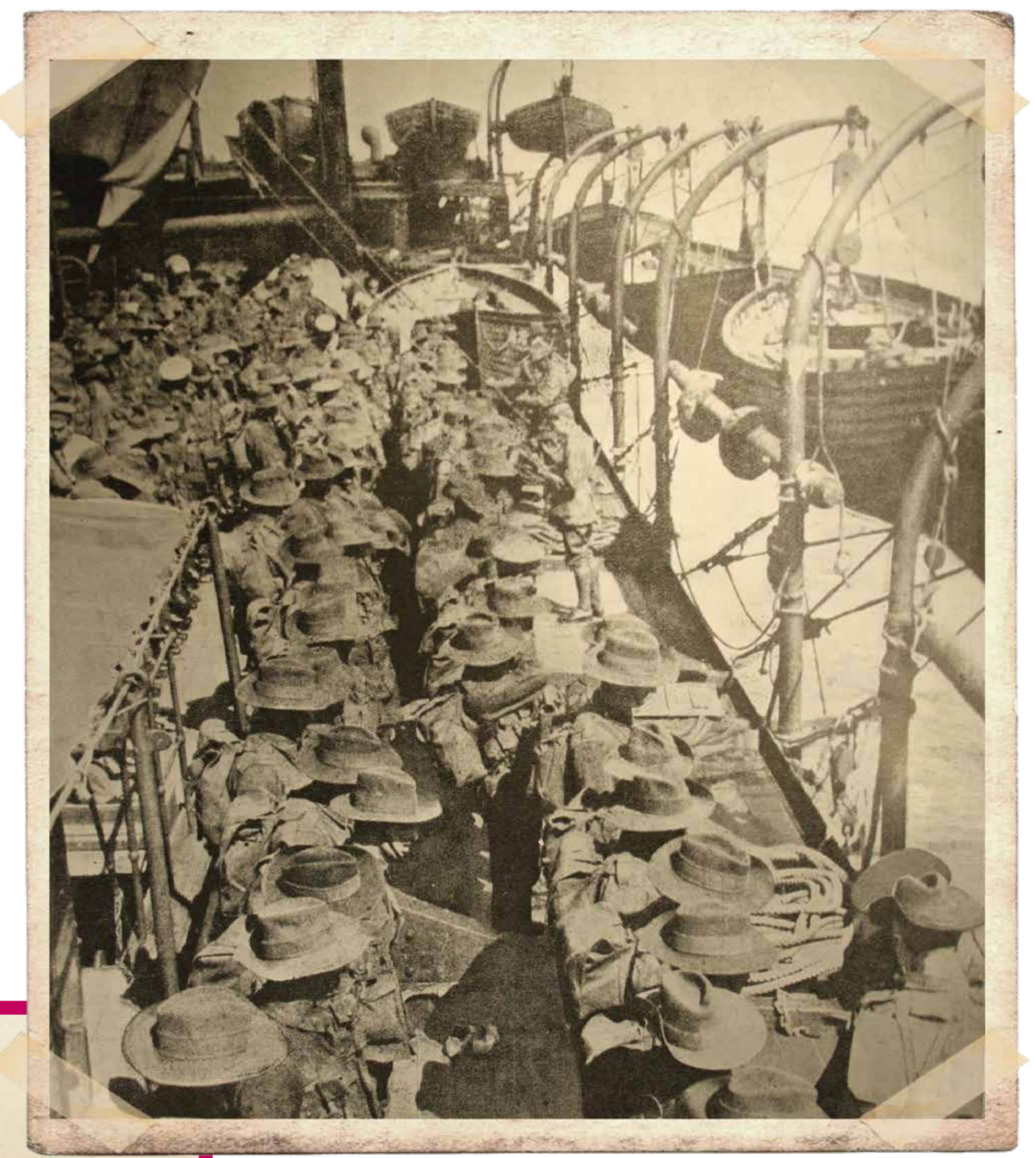
By April, the ship was approaching the end of its voyage. On the 25th, as *Ballarat* steamed into the English Channel, the Australian officers arranged a memorial service to commemorate Anzac Day. At 2pm, as preparations were underway, a massive explosion tore a hole in the starboard side of the ship and *Ballarat* started taking water instantly. Despite a number of lookouts and an escorting destroyer, nobody had seen the U-boat *UB-32* approach and fire a torpedo.

Vessels were summoned to take the Australian soldiers and crew off the sinking liner and within an hour all of them had been safely rescued. *Ballarat* was taken in tow and hopes were high that she might be saved, but in the early hours of the next morning she sank approximately 9 miles south of the Lizard Point.

The captain of *Ballarat*, Commander G.W. Cockman, R.N.R., D.S.O., received the congratulations of the Admiralty and the Australian troops were congratulated by the King.

### The Wreck Site

Today the remains of the *Ballarat* lie in approximately 80 metres of water off the Cornish coast.



**Above:** Australian troops line up on deck preparing to abandon ship. They were praised for their calm discipline during the evacuation.

**Right:** lifeboats pick up men who had jumped into the sea.

Both images taken from *The Graphic* magazine (1917).



## SS *Thisbe*

Surprised by a U-boat in broad daylight, this vessel's loss was especially tragic.

### Loss

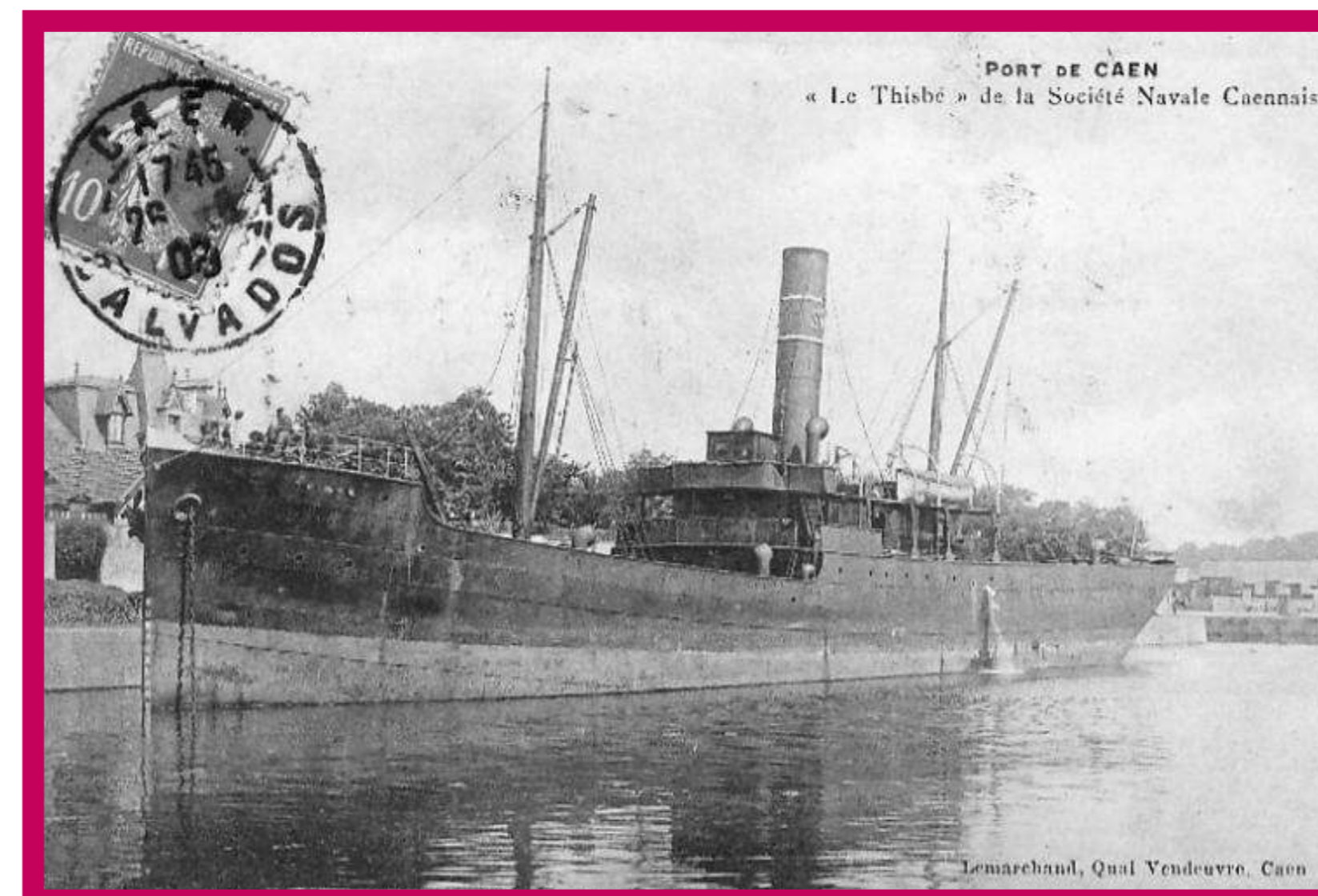
*Thisbe* was a British built, French owned cargo vessel travelling to Caen from Swansea. At 12.15pm on the 6th September a lookout spotted a torpedo seconds before it slammed into the side of the vessel, which started to sink immediately. The crew took to the lifeboats and picked up survivors from the water, but as they looked back at the doomed vessel, they saw the tragic sight of the young ship's boy at a porthole. Although stretching his arms out of the hole, he couldn't get out and there was nothing the survivors could do as the ship slipped beneath the waves.

Eight people were lost when the *Thisbe* sank. The eight survivors were picked up shortly afterwards by a nearby Royal Navy motor launch that had witnessed the sinking. The motor launch attempted to locate the U-boat that had fired the torpedo and dropped several depth charges, but to no avail. *UB-35* escaped on this occasion and sank a further 20 vessels in 1917, but in January 1918 she was lost when Admiralty drifters depth charged her as she passed through the Dover Straits.

Of *Thisbe's* loss, the Admiralty suggested "this instance of what can be termed as foul murder might be published" to draw attention to the horror of the losses caused by U-boats.

### The Wreck Site

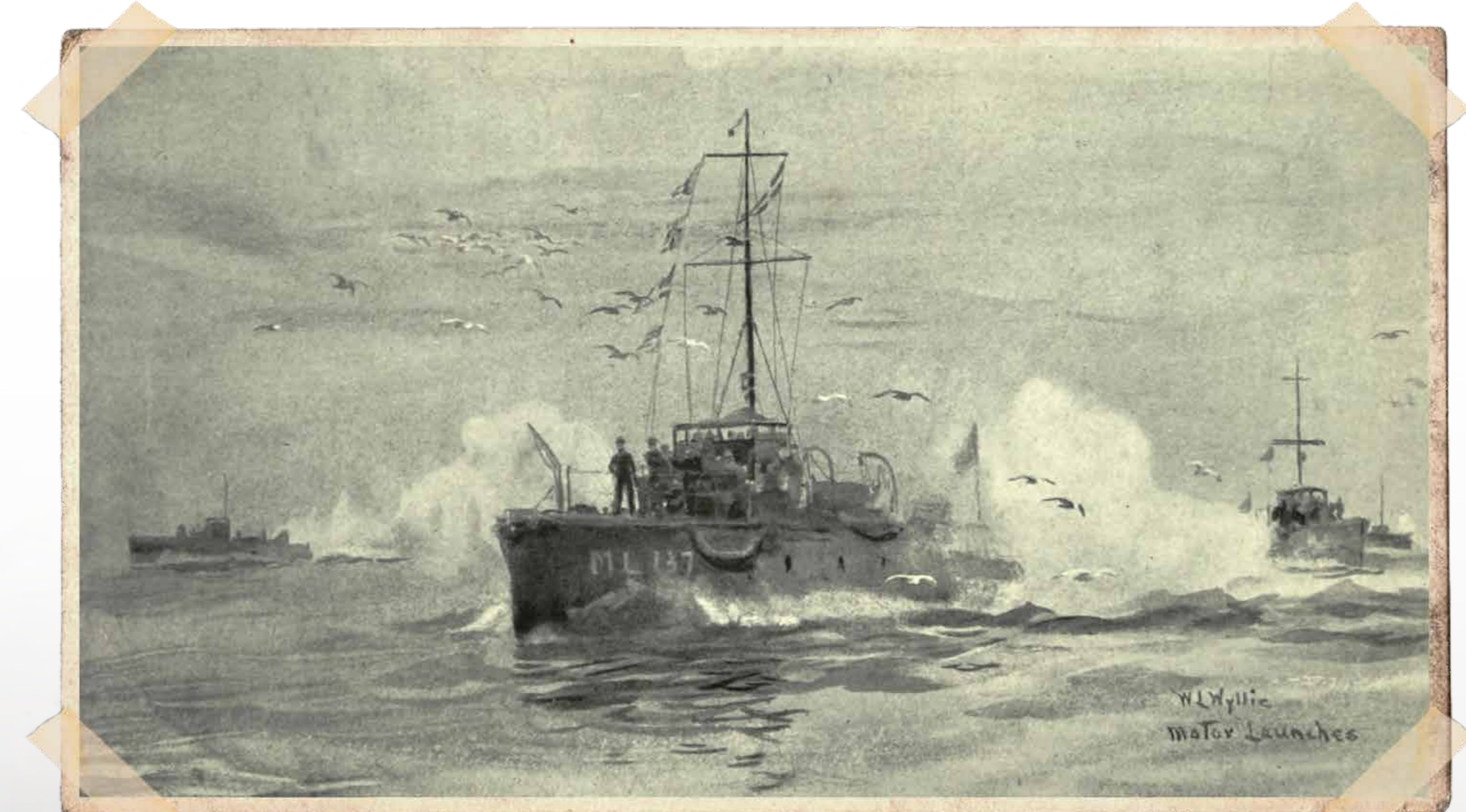
Today the *Thisbe* lies approximately 6 miles west of Lizard Point in approximately 45 metres of water.



**Left:** a postcard of *Thisbe* before the war. Image originally supplied by Guy Arzul, of Cotes-d'Armor, France.

**Below:** Motor Launches of the Royal Navy. Lieutenant Bartlett took ML 334 amongst the wreckage of *Thisbe* to pick up survivors, but as he did so a lookout saw a periscope. The gunners opened fire and Bartlett manoeuvred to drop depth charges, but to no avail. Afterwards, he landed *Thisbe's* survivors at Penzance.

Original artwork by W. Wyllie, taken from *More Sea Fights of the Great War* (1919).



Background image: L.A. Shafer, 1918



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