

## Information sheet no 006

### Edward Fegen VC

Edward Fegen was born on 8th October 1891 at Southsea, Hampshire. At the age of 12, he entered Osborne Royal Naval College and in 1909, he was appointed Midshipman on HMS *Dreadnought*. Just two days after the outbreak of WWI, on the 5th August 1914, his ship HMS *Amphion* was mined and sunk. Surviving this, he spent the remainder of the war serving in destroyers and in command of Torpedo Boat 26. During the inter-war years he served in training establishments for young officers and men. He was Divisional Officer at the boys' training ship HMS *Colossus* at Devonport and Dartmouth. He was promoted to Commander on 30th June 1926, and served in Australia as Commander of the Royal Australian Navy's College at Jervis Bay.

During the inter-war years, Fegen won the Lloyd's Medal for lifesaving at sea when he was able to bring his ship alongside a burning oiler and rescue its crew. Whilst commanding HMS *Suffolk* on the China Station in 1930-2, he won a Dutch lifesaving medal and an Admiralty commendation for his handling of the rescue of the crew of the Dutch steamer *Hedwig*, which had run aground on the Patras Reef in the South China Sea. For the remainder of the decade, he commanded the cruisers HMSs *Dauntless*, *Dragon* and *Curlew* serving in the Reserve Fleet, held an appointment in the Anti-Submarine Division of the Admiralty, and at Chatham, before becoming Executive Officer in the cruiser HMS *Emerald* in 1939.

In March 1940, he was promoted Captain, and given command of Armed Merchant Cruiser HMS *Jervis Bay*. On the 5th November 1940, the ship was escorting 37 merchantmen in convoy HX84 in the Atlantic Ocean, making its way from Halifax, Nova Scotia, to the UK. The German pocket battleship *Admiral Scheer* was sighted and began to attack the convoy. Fegen knew that his ship's guns would not be able to reach the *Admiral Scheer*, so he broke out of line and headed straight for the German ship, opening fire once clear of the convoy, allowing the convoy time to scatter and escape. The *Admiral Scheer* directly hit the *Jervis Bay*, setting the bridge on fire, and shattering Fegen's right arm. The *Jervis Bay's* fire control, range-finder, steering gear and wireless were put out of action. The ship was hit repeatedly on her superstructure and her hull was holed in several places. Major fires started down below. The ship's White Ensign was shot from the flagstaff, but out of sheer bravado, a member of the crew, nailed it to another. Outgunned and on fire, the *Jervis Bay* continued the hopeless fight against the *Admiral Scheer* for three hours. The *Jervis Bay* was last seen by convoy HX84 at 7pm burning, but still afloat. The ship eventually sank an hour later, with the White Ensign still nailed to its temporary staff. Fegen went down with his ship, but it was due to him that 31 ships of the convoy escaped. Of the *Jervis Bay's* crew of 254 only 68 survived, three of whom subsequently died after being rescued.

Fegen was awarded a posthumous Victoria Cross, for his brave actions on the 17th November 1940, which was gazetted on the 22nd. Memorials to Fegen have been set up all over the world: Chatham Naval Memorial; a sundial in Hamilton, Bermuda; a 12 foot column in the grounds of a hospital at St. John's, New Brunswick, and a wreath of copper and gold laurel leaves in the Seaman's Institute, Wellington, New Zealand.