

Information sheet no 090

Loftus Jones VC

Loftus William Jones was born on 13 November 1879 into a family steeped with naval tradition. He was the second son of Admiral Loftus Jones who resided in Petersfield, Hampshire. He attended the Eastman's Royal Naval Academy at Fareham and in 1894 went to the training ship HMS *Britannia*.

His first appointment as Midshipman was in HMS *Flora*, a cruiser, in 1897. Between then and his last appointment to HMS *Shark* in 1914, he had twenty eight appointments. He appeared uncomfortable in cruisers and battleships and his appointments in these vessels were of short duration. He joined HMS *Spiteful* as Sub-Lieutenant in 1901, and later, after promotion to Lieutenant in April 1902, took his first command in HMS *Sparrowhawk*, a torpedo boat destroyer (TBD) in 1903. After a spell in the gunboat HMS *Sandpiper* on the China station, he held a succession of TBD commands - HMS *Success* (1905-08), HMS *Chelmer* (1908-10) and HMS *Ghurka* (1910-13) during which he was promoted to Lieutenant-Commander on 1 April 1910. He married Margaret Dampney in 1910. He took command of a new destroyer HMS *Linnet* in 1913 and his only daughter was named Linnette after the ship.

On 30 June 1914, he was promoted to Commander and appointed to HMS *Shark*. His ship led a small flotilla of four ships against a superior force of German light cruisers and destroyers in the opening action on the east coast of England, which culminated in the Scarborough Raid in December 1914. His actions were commended by Admiral Beatty.

At the end of May 1916, the two enemy fleets met at Jutland - the one big engagement that had been eagerly anticipated since the outbreak of war. Jones was leading the 4th Destroyer Flotilla in HMS *Shark*, as part of a larger force, when they met with a detachment of German destroyers on their way to attack a squadron of British battlecruisers. During the engagement, HMS *Shark* was badly damaged - her forecastle was wrecked with the forward 4" gun blown away, including all but one of the gun crew. Another shell wrecked the bridge. One of the other destroyers signalled to offer assistance but Jones declined. As he left the bridge area, he received a bad wound to his leg and as the ship's medical officer had already been killed, it had to be patched up by the Chief Stoker.

While on the way to an emergency control position with the Coxswain, Petty Officer William Griffin, Jones was told of more shell damage to the main engines and steam pipes in the boiler room. All the while, the ship was under heavy enemy gunfire. Jones ordered the remaining crew to the deck to start getting out the boats. Because they were sandwiched in the middle of the two fleets, the boats were destroyed by gunfire as soon as they were out. As the situation looked more hopeless, Jones took the decision to start destroying confidential documents and ordered the life-rafts to be prepared. As the after gun had also been lost, Jones went to the midships gun and with three surviving seamen, Charles Hope, Charles Smith and Joseph Howell, they maintained firing at the enemy which led to the sinking of the German destroyer *V48*. However, the enemy destroyers came close into range with the *Shark* and subjected the ailing vessel to a storm of heavy gunfire. Jones' leg was shot off above the knee. While two of the seaman tried to stem the bleeding, he noticed that the ship's ensign had been shot away and ordered a new one to be hoisted. After this, he gave the order to abandon the ship. At 7pm the ship was sunk by a German torpedo.

© National Museum of the Royal Navy, 2014

The information contained in this sheet is correct as far as we are able to ascertain from our sources. It is not intended to be an exhaustive or complete history of the subject. Please contact the library for a list of further reading materials, if available



Information sheet no 090

Jones was last seen clinging to a life-raft encouraging those who had survived to sing. However, like many others, he succumbed to the loss of blood and exhaustion. Of the seven ship's survivors picked up by a Danish steamer later that night, six were landed at Hull while the other had died en route.

On 23 October 1916, his widow received a letter from the Admiralty to tell her that his body had been washed up off the coast of Sweden and had been buried Fiskebakskil churchyard on 24 June. The funeral had been attended by many local people and a monument had been erected through subscription from the local fishermen. The ceremony had been marked with due sympathy and reverence.

The story of Jones' dedication to duty and his bravery came out a while after the battle and award of the VC was not gazetted until 6 March 1917. PO Griffin and Able Seamen Hope, Smith and Howell were awarded the Distinguished Service Medal for their conduct along with other survivors of the ship, PO Charles Filleul and Stoker 1st Class Thomas Swan.