

Jacob Jones information from The National Archives, Kew

As part of the HLF Funded Forgotten Wrecks of the First World War project the wealth of records held at The National Archives have provided vital source evidence for researching vessel losses and discovering detailed information about their actions during the war. The records related to the USS *Jacob Jones* were photographed at TNA and information from them has been transcribed by project volunteer Andrew Daw. This information is being made available via the Maritime Archaeology Trust website to add those interested in researching the vessel further.

Document Reference: ADM137-1358

This document includes records of all activity within the South West Approaches related to German Submarines that took place between the 18th November and 7th December 1917. Within this document those records related to the USS *Jacob Jones* are outlined below.

Torpedoing of USS Jacob Jones 6/12/1917

The following information, obtained from survivors on board *Jacob Jones* is forwarded as a preliminary report. These survivors have just arrived and there has been no time to make any full enquiry.

Survivors

| | | |
|----------------------|------------|--------|
| From <i>Camellia</i> | 3 Officers | 28 men |
| At Falmouth | | 7 men |
| At Scillies | 2 Officers | 4 men |
| Submarine | | 1 man |
| TOTAL | 5 Officers | 40 men |

Lost

Lieutenant Kalk, Gunner Hood and 66 men

Torpedoed starboard side abreast No3 torpedo tube at 4.21 pm – mainmast carried away – settled by the stern – ship abandoned – depth charges exploded apparently blowing stern off – tried to right herself turned over bottom up and disappeared at 4.29. Could not get aft to set depth charges on ‘safe’ as deck was blown up – submarine not seen until about 5.00 when she came up threw a line to one man struggling in water, took him aboard and went down.

Onboard *Jacob Jones* were:

Officers: Lieut. Commander Bagley, Lieutenant Scott, Lieutenant Richards, Lieutenant Gates, Lieutenant Kalk, Ass. Surg. Adamskiewicz, Gunner Hood. Plus 103 men.

Probably lost were 2 Officers and 63 Men.

START OF LETTER

The *Camellia* arrived and survivors were transferred to *Melville* about 8.30pm yesterday, 7 December. None of these survivors were seriously injured but they were all more or less shaken, and everything possible was done to make them comfortable as soon as possible.

I had a short conversation with Lieutenant Richards in order to get the salient points of the occurrence but did not pursue the matter to any length as Lieutenant Richards was not in condition for a lengthy conversation.

The following represent the main points of the short story which Lieutenant Richards told me:

“The *Jacob Jones* had held target practice to the southward of the Scillies and was proceeding to Queenstown at a speed of about 15 knots and zig-zagging, at about 4.20pm 6 December, when the starboard waist lookout sighted a torpedo headed for the ship. The commanding Officer was on the bridge, rudder was put ‘hard right’ and engine set ahead full speed. The torpedo broached three times and finally struck the ship on the starboard side abreast of no. 3 torpedo tube. The torpedo tube and the torpedoes therein were blown about 200 feet into the air; the mainmast was brought down thus putting the radio out of commission. A gun was manned, but no submarine was seen, and as the ship commenced to settle by the stern, she was abandoned by order of the Commanding Officer. A whale-boat was gotten out but it capsized. The motor-sailor could not be gotten out. The motor-dory was gotten out. The wherry was gotten out. Two Carley Floats and one Balsa floated clear. The ship settled by the stern and the depth charges exploded (it has not been possible to set the depth charges on safe as no one could get aft after the explosion, due to the wreckage of the ship). This appeared to have the effect of blowing off the stern of the ship; she appeared to make an effort to right herself; turn through 180 degrees and disappeared at 4.29pm 6 December. The boats remaining afloat, the Carley floats and the Balsa searched the vicinity thoroughly for further survivors but were unable to find any. At about 5.00pm the submarine came to

the surface, threw a line to one man who was struggling in the water, took him onboard, and submerged. Lieutenant Richards states that he is absolutely positive as to the man's being taken on board by the submarine, but he does not know who the man was.

The survivors on board *Melville* were picked up by the *Camellia* from the two Carley floats and Balsa, after having been in the water for about 17 hours, those on the floats having been in the water to about the waist for the entire time.

Lieutenant Richards described the submarine as follow:

"Length about 150 feet, 1x 3" gun forward – two periscopes, the larger on forward – wire net cutter rigged, and peculiar 'horn shaped arrangement' on the bow".

When Lieutenant Commander Bagley and the other survivors arrive on-board *Sterett* and *Burrows*, I will take them on-board *Melville* and provide for them, pending further instruction from you as to their disposition.

The telegram from Falmouth reporting that the SS *Catalina* had landed 7 survivors there stated that John J. Mulvane, seaman and Myron Flood, seaman, were injured and unfit to travel. No further news on this head has been received, otherwise all survivors, so far as my present information is concerned, appear to be in as good condition as could be expected after such an experience.

There are forwarded herewith, as being of interest at this time, three copies of a resume of the activities of the *Jacob Jones* during her service in the war zone.

Very Sincerely yours

J R P Pringle

Activities of the USS Jacob Jones in European Waters – 1917

USS JACOB JONES (Lieutenant- Commander David W Bagley), arrived at Queenstown May 17, in company with ROWN, TUCKER, ERICSSON, CASSIN and WINSLOW. On May 23, she left for sea on patrol duty off the southwest coast of Ireland. This she continued, with intervals for rest and routine up-keep at Queenstown, and at Berehaven until that base for United States destroyers was abandoned, until mid-July. Thereafter she was used chiefly as one of the escorts for inbound and outbound convoys, and for United States Troopships bound for French ports. Up to November 24, she had steamed a total of 37,134 miles in European waters, where she had been on duty for 203 days until she was sunk. During this time she made a record of sighting at least six different submarines, one of which – on September 5 – she probably damaged and possibly destroyed. On July 21, when SS DAFILA was torpedoed in her company, a torpedo was fired at her, and she opened fire upon the periscope of a submarine, delivering three shots. The JACOB JONES, of all United States destroyers in European waters, has to her credit the rescue of the greatest number of survivors from torpedoed ships (374).

Following is a resume of her principal military activities during the above period, compiled from her War Dairy and from oral information given by her officers.

MAY 16 (approaching Queenstown): At about 8-50am, the USS ERICSSON reported by radio that a torpedo had been fired at her, and later reported that the torpedo had been fired at the JACOB JONES instead; and that the torpedo broached before reaching the ERICSSON.

JUNE 6: At 12-29 pm joined USS ERICSSON and British steamers BURGUNDY and TROPIC bound for Liverpool. At 6-45pm sighted submarine on surface in Lat 52-05N, Long 12-19W. Left convoy and started to pursue. Submarine submerged.

JUNE 7: At 9-20am an oil slick about two miles long was found in Lat 52-35N, Long 12-11W. The direction of the streak was about 30° from that of wind and sea. At the windward end of the streak there was a large quantity of oil on the surface of the water. The odour of oil was plainly noticeable. A small depth charge (US Bureau of Ordnance type) was let go over this spot, but nothing further was seen.

JUNE 28: (underway from St Nazaire to Queenstown) A fairly heavy oil streak was found seven miles (118° true) off Old Head Kinsale, Ireland. Bubbles were coming up at the windward end of the oil streak. A large depth charge (British type) was dropped over this spot. This vessel circled in the vicinity of where the charge was let go, but nothing further was seen.

JULY 8: About 6-38pm, while escorting SS REDBRIDGE of London, in Lat 51-42N, Long 12-18W, a large explosion was observed on the horizon, bearing about 310° (true) from the JACOB JONES. This ship at once headed for the place of the explosion, increasing to full speed, leaving convoy. At the same time the USS PERKINS, also engaged in escort duty, was observed to head for the scene of the explosion. About the time it became possible to make out a steamer, an SOS message was received, stating that a steamer had been torpedoed, position 51-00N, 12-00W, and that all hands had taken to the boats. On approaching, about 7pm, the steamer, British ship VALETTA, was found to be settling badly by the stern, and listed to port. Life boats were well clear; USS PERKINS was searching for submarine. This ship picked up the survivors, consisting of eight officers and thirty-six men. There were no casualties in the personnel aboard the VALETTA. Both destroyers searched until about 8-45pm, the PERKINS sinking the lifeboats belonging to the sinking ship. The VALETTA sank at 8-40pm. The search for submarine was then abandoned, to go to the assistance of the SS CUTHBERT, then being chased by a submarine. This ship searched for the SS CUTHBERT until 10-15 pm, when a radio message was received from her stating that she was safe.

JULY 15: At 4-56pm received an SOS by radio and went to assistance of SS ABINSI, which was being chased by a submarine. At about 7-45pm while taking over the above vessel as convoy, the two vessels touched and thus caused the wrecking of our whaleboat, and slight structural damage to hull fittings. It is believed that the ABINSI made a wide yaw, or otherwise sheered to starboard when the two vessels were abreast (to give hail as to inshore navigation), and this, combined with suction, caused the ships to touch.

JULY 20: At 1-18pm a submarine was sighted in Lat 51-01N, Long 11-21W distant about six miles from ship. Submarine submerged, and two British type depth charges were dropped at each end of an oil slick. There was no evidence of damage to the submarine noticeable after either explosion.

JULY 21: Investigated SS DAFILIA (British) about 4-20pm, and then headed south six miles to westward and investigated SS DAYTON (US). Began escorting DAYTON at 4-45pm. A moderate fog set in soon after this, and it was decided to take advantage of this protection to DAYTON, and proceed back to DAFILIA. When we arrived at DAFILIA'S starboard quarter, the fog lifted, and we signalled her to join the DAYTON astern. We were turning right to return to DAYTON, making 17 knots' speed when a periscope was sighted about 500 yards distant, three points abaft port beam, headed parallel to DAFILIA and this vessel, DAFILIA being at approximately two points abaft our beam, 900 yards distant. A few seconds after periscope was sighted, DAFILIA was torpedoed amidships in engine space, starboard side. The explosion was apparently not very heavy, debris and spray flying not higher than the masts. This ship continued to turn to the right, made full speed, and began searching for signs of the submarine. Guns could not be got to bear on the periscope before it submerged, which it did about one to two minutes after being sighted. A wake, apparently that of a torpedo, was observed to pass about 25 yards under our stern, as the ship swung to the right. The submarine was running parallel to this ship at the time the DAFILIA was struck, and then headed slightly across our course at about 8 knots.

The survivors of the DAFILIA, 25 in number, got clear promptly in two boats. The DAFILIA sank about 6-10 pm. This ship searched for about half an hour, with no results. We had sent a radio message to the DAYTON warning her of a submarine dead ahead, but she evidently did not get it, as she came up about 6-12 pm. We ordered her to go due north at utmost speed for one hour, and then resume course and speed. At 6-45 pm. this ship stopped to pick up the survivors. As the ship lay dead in the water taking them aboard the port gangway, a periscope was reported about 200 yards on the starboard quarter. We opened fire immediately, getting off three shots, and went ahead full speed, getting survivors aboard while gaining headway. We then went ahead at 19 knots to search for submarine, and keep it submerged for protection of DAYTON.

DAYTON passed safely through area. After 2½ hours, search was abandoned, and patrol resumed.

The periscope first sighted was light grey, finely tapered at top; shown about 3 feet above water, and made a small but distinct wave and wake. The DAFILIA sank about 20 minutes after being torpedoed. Her cargo was iron ore and general. Sailed from Gibraltar, July 13, bound for Birkenhead. Her complement was 27, of whom two, the second engineer and a stoker, were killed by the explosion.

The Commanding Officer stated orally that the first periscope sighted was too far aft, and his own turning circle was too great, for the JACOB JONES to attempt to ram it successfully.

JULY 29: Escorting convoy (of 19 merchant ships and 8 destroyers). At about 5-21pm the WADSWORTH sighted a submarine and dropped a depth charge where submarine had been seen. At about 9-00pm sighted what appeared to be two submarines on the surface, and went ahead full speed to investigate same. The objects sighted were small tugs. At 11-00 p.m. felt 2 distinct shocks, as of submerged wreckage striking hull about amidships. No apparent damage could be found after an investigation.

August 19 (in escort US Troop convoy #6): At 11-45 am. The British destroyer UNITY joined our convoy, and gave submarine warning, and left force at 11-59 am. At 1-08 pm a periscope of a submarine was sighted about 1000 yards distant, three points on starboard bow. The periscope disappeared; a search was made with no results.

AUGUST 20: At 8-09 am. Belle Ile, France, was sighted on starboard bow. At 8-31 the USS ROWAN dropped a depth charge and hoisted a submarine warning signal. This vessel went full speed, and manoeuvred to protect convoy, and searched for submarine. Convoy dispersed to southward. The SS FINLAND and SAN JACINTO fired several shots. The USS TRIPPE dropped a depth charge. The USS SHAW and the five transports fired several shots at different intervals. Convoy frequently changed course and did not remain in a body, but each vessel acted individually. At 8-50 am. a French torpedo boat and two aeroplanes joined convoy and assisted in search for submarine. This vessel did not sight a submarine, but saw several schools of porpoises running in various directions.

(By oral information: when the FINLAND began firing, the convoy scattered. Three ships proceeded to the left, two to the right. The ERICSSON was the only destroyer with the former, which would have been exposed to serious danger had submarines been present in any number. The WAINWRIGHT stayed with the FINLAND, the JACOB JONES with the SAN JACINTO. The ROWAN kept course about 1000 yards ahead, the TRIPPE in the rear, of convoy. WAINWRIGHT finally collected and lead 3 of the ships back to formation. She signalled, as the FINLAND opened fire, "We will take care of you. You are firing at fish." The 'engagement' lasted upward of an hour.

The JACOB JONES is not positive that she sighted a periscope on the 19th. The report was made by the helmsman and the junior officer of the deck – both reliable men; but the periscope was seen by no others. The ERICSSON, however, 15 minutes later in the same direction sighted a moving wake upon which she dropped a depth charge. But this wake zigzagged, and the destroyer found difficulty in following it, owing to her large turning circle. A troopship signalled "Torpedo missed bow". WAINWRIGHT signalled convoy not to become scattered, but it did scatter. The possible presence of a submarine is nevertheless confirmed by the loss of a ship in the adjacent British convoy 10 – 12 miles to the northward at about this time.

SEPTEMBER 5: (on special escort duty with USS PAULDING). About 10-30pm in Lat 51-10N, Long 6-35W, sighted submarine apparently running light, about 3 points on port bow, distant about 1500 yards. This vessel was steaming at 13½ knots speed, on course 90° (true), and the submarine was headed about the same and making 10 knots speed. Went full speed (about 20 knots). Sounded to general quarters and headed towards submarine. The sea was smooth, the moon was under clouds but it was fairly bright and the visibility was good. When certain that object was submarine, order was given to open fire with forward gun; but gun miss-fired. Submarine submerged about 10-37 pm, at which time it was about 400 yards distant on starboard bow.

The ripples of wake were plainly visible, and this vessel was headed to cross the wake slightly ahead of where it ended. When about abreast of the point of the submarine's submergence, and slightly to the left of the wake, rudder was put left, to throw our stern towards the submarine. Just beyond this point the officer of the deck saw the wake of the submarine on the starboard side, passing under the ship just abaft the bridge and at a fairly sharp angle to our keel.

This showed that the submarine had changed course to left immediately after submerging. One depth charge was dropped about the time this wake was under our stern. It functioned properly. This vessel was swinging to the left at the time, and the wake of the submarine was not seen on the port side, so, as the submarine had had a very short time in which to turn, it is thought possible that it was directly under the ship when the depth charge was dropped. The ship then began circling to search for submarine or debris, and a large pool of oil appeared near the spot where depth charge was dropped. This was seen by an officer and a number of men, and appeared to be at least a ship's length in diameter.

Three men, one a first class petty officer, who were on the fo'castle looking over the side, also reported that the body of a man was passed close aboard near the oil spot. Search was made on repeated circles for the body, but nothing more was seen. It is considered possible that the submarine submerged in great haste and left man on deck. The submarine appeared to be of fairly large size, and no masts or gun were seen. After about one hour search was abandoned, owing to orders for this vessel to proceed to Milford Haven, Wales.

(By oral information; The fact that the submarine's wake was very clear as it passed under ship on starboard side, and that no wake whatever appeared to port, is regarded as strongly supporting that the submarine was at least badly damaged. The mine was dropped at the instant that the wake reached the ship's stern. Many members of the crew were aft, eagerly watching for the reappearance of the wake, and all were unanimous that no wake thereafter was seen to port. The track of the sub seemed to end abruptly upon the explosion of the depth charge.

Only the head and shoulders of the body mentioned were seen. The ship was going at too great a speed to observe whether or not it had undergone recent damage.)

OCTOBER 19: (at the time of torpedoing of HMS ORAMA, convoy HD7 CONYNGHAM flagboat of escort). BURROWS made contact with eastbound convoy from Dakar, Africa, consisting of HMS ORAMA and 18 merchantmen, at 5-00 am CONYNGHAM rejoined force at 6-45 am and took position on forward left flank of convoy; speed 10 knots; of convoy, 6 knots. At 10-18 am NICHOLSON and HMS AUBRETIA left convoy and headed to NE to the assistance of American SS LUCKENBACH, which was being shelled by a submarine. At 11-12 am PARKER joined convoy with SS BENEFACOR. NICHOLSON with SS LUCKENBACH joined convoy and 4-15pm.

At 5-53pm HMS ORAMA was torpedoed on port side forward, and sank at 9-55pm. CONYNGHAM dropped depth charge. JACOB JONES stood by HMS ORAMA, and picked up 305 survivors, including 30 sick and 23 RNR officers. No casualties. At 9-43pm headed for port with survivors. Position of torpedoing of ORAMA, Lat 48-00N, Long 9-20W.

(From separate report; At 5-53pm ORAMA was seen to be torpedoed. At the time mentioned, the following conditions prevailed: This vessel was covering the left flank of convoy, and was the only vessel on left flank. The McDUGAL was covering the left and front, however, and her zigzags extended well to the left of the left-hand column of the convoy. This ship was taking a left zigzag, headed away from the course of the convoy about 50°, and was about 1500 yards on the portbeam of the second ship of the left column. The ORAMA was slightly abaft our starboard beam and, I believed, was a little behind the line of the other column leaders. The STERETT, which had been stationed astern of the convoy, had gradually come up to a position inside of the left column and near the head of the column. Believing it to be a precarious time for the convoy, owing to previous warnings of a submarine in the locality, I had previously doubled all lookouts, and had had each one especially cautioned of the danger. Immediately before the torpedo struck, I was leaving the chart house to return to bridge, when W F Hughes, C.M.Ic, who was standing just abaft the chart house looking to starboard, said – “Torpedo Captain”, and I stepped through the door and saw the explosion.

Hughes states that he saw the wake of the torpedo just ahead of the leading ship of the left column, and inside the left column, and astern of the STERETT: and that that was where the wake began. C Charlesworth, B.M. Ic., also states that he saw the wake of the torpedo just before the explosion. His impression is that the wake was astern of the leading ship of the left column, and inside the column. No one on board saw a periscope. It appears probable to me, after questioning the above-named men and survivors, that the torpedo was fired from a point slightly ahead of the left column leader, and inside the left column. The view of the ORAMA from this vessel at the time of torpedoing was unobstructed by other vessels. A large amount of what appeared to be coal-dust rose to about the height of the ORAMA'S masts, and she listed at once to port, and trimmed down by her head. After torpedoing this vessel was directed to stand by ORAMA. The ship was abandoned, and this vessel picked up 306 survivors, and brought them into port.

NOVEMBER 3: (of CONYNGHAM'S escort to convoy HS 14). At 8-45 am made standard speed of 20 knots, left convoy in company with PARKER, and commenced escorting HMS CUMBERLAND. Took position on left flank. PARKER on right flank. At 5-22pm parted company with CUMBERLAND at entrance of Devonport harbour, and headed for Queenstown. At 10-25 this vessel was fired upon by PARKER. At 11-02 the periscope of a submarine was reported 40 yards on starboard beam and this vessel commenced circling to investigate. In company with PARKER searched for reported submarine. At 1-00 am (Nov 4) headed towards Queenstown.

NOVEMBER 17: (of NICHOLSON'S escort to outbound convoy OQ 20). At 11-22 am proceeded to sea and began patrolling off coast near entrance to Queenstown Harbour. At 3-15pm joined convoy of 8 merchantmen which came out of Queenstown Harbour, and headed to southward. Took a station on forward left flank of convoy. At 4-12pm FANNING dropped depth charge; at 4-19pm NICHOLSON dropped depth charge and opened fire. At 4-30pm German submarine (U-58) surrendered to USS FANNING, and she took 40 prisoners, including 4 officers and one dead man – destroyed submarine and returned to Queenstown. This vessel took FANNING'S position on left flank of convoy.

(JACOB JONES, on her last trip from Base Six, leaving Queenstown November 29, was one of the 7 ships (2 British) of NICHOLSON'S escort to convoys OQ 23 and HS 18. At the time of her loss, she was returning after having escorted certain in-bound ships to Brest, France).

CONFIRMATION OF TELEGRAM

[ADDITIONAL NOTE (not from TNA record) – SIMSADUS is the cable address of the American Navy in Europe – the London headquarters of Rear Admiral William Snowdon Sims. It represents ‘Sims – Admiral – US’]

SIMSADUS.

#245. Scilly reports – quote – Captain First Lieutenant and four men of JACOB JONES picked up seven miles southeast of St. Mary's Scilly at noon 7 December – unquote – Captain of JACOB JONES is Lieutenant Commander Bagley and first lieutenant is Lieutenant N. Scott.
18507 Pringle

SIMSADUS

#246. Following survivors JACOB JONES landed Falmouth Stop
Charles PIERCE, Fireman First
Timothy E TWOMEY, Seaman
John C JOHNSON, Seaman Second
Harry A STUTZE, Chief Machinist Mate
Edward F GRADY, Fireman Second
John J MULVANEY, Seaman
Myron N FLOOD, Seaman Second stop
The last two are reported as injured and unfit to travel stop C-in-C Queenstown had directed BURROWS and STERETT to bring the above men from Falmouth here.
20007 Pringle

SIMSADUS

#248. Following survivors from JACOB JONES brought in by HMS CAMELLIA now aboard MELVILLE stop Lieutenant J K RICHARDS Jr Lieutenant N N GATES Asst Surgeon L L ADAMKIEWICZ

| | |
|-----------------------|------------|
| Aagaard, Harold W | Sea |
| Burger, Phillip J | Sea 2c |
| Carter, Davis R | Fir 1c |
| Charlesworth, Charles | BM1c |
| Chase, Howard U | QM3c |
| Chilton, Charles | GM1c |
| Cossairt, Joseph A | C Yeo |
| Cranford, Clifton | Elec 2c(r) |
| Deforest, Clifford V | Elec 1c(r) |
| Echon, Restituto | M.Att 1c |
| Eulits, Gustavo Jr | Sea |
| Everroad, Albert L | Sea 2c |
| Fenton, Edward W | Sea |
| Gibson, Harry L | CBW |
| Gilson, Lester J | Sea 2c |
| Hamp, Boyd M | Elec 2c(r) |
| Hansen, Lawrence | Sea 2c |
| Hughes, William P | CM1c |
| Judge, Patrick H | WT |
| Lane, Chester B | Sea |
| Maletz, Henry J | Sea |
| Marchand, Donat | Cox |
| Mason, Charles A | Fir 2c |
| Meier, Edward | WT |
| Noyer, Roward A | Fir 3c |
| Pennington, Ernest H | CPM |
| Strech, Conrad | GM 2c |
| Wood, Terrell R | Elec 2c |

None of the above seriously injured Stop. BURROWS and STERETT have been ordered to bring survivors from Falmouth and Scillies to Queenstown Stop. Total known survivors five officers, thirty nine men as given in this message and in my #245 and 246 and one man taken by submarine Stop. It is not believed that there are any other survivors. Lieutenant S F Kalk died of exposure, next of kin mother Flora S Kalk, The Balfour, Washington DC Stop. Gunner (T) R R Hood killed by explosion torpedo, next of kin mother Belle Hood, 57 Pennsylvania Avenue, Atlanta, Georgia. Stop. JACOB JONES torpedoed 4:21 pm on 6 December, submarine not seen at that time but came to surface about 5:00pm and picked up one man whose name is not known Stop.

Torpedo struck starboard side abreast number three torpedo tube destroying mainmast and putting radio out of commission – ship settled by stern, depth charges exploded and ship disappeared at 4:29
00008 Pringle

SIMSADUS

#249 Following survivors landed at Scillies – Lieutenant Commnader Bagley, Lieutenant Norman Scott, Chief Boatswain's mate Clarence E McBride, Chief Electrician Lawrence G Kelley, Coxswain Ben Nunnery, Fireman First Joseph Korzeniecky Stop. None of the above are injured.
00308 Pringle

Copy of Letter from Commander Bagley to Force Commander

Enclosure No / in Queenstown
Letter No /W.77/M of 12 December 1917
USS MELVILLE
Base No Six
10 December 1917

From: Lieutenant-Commander D W Bagley US Navy
(Commanding USS JACOB JONES)
To: Force Commander
Subject: Torpedoing and sinking of USS JACOB JONES, by enemy submarine, 6 December 1917

1. At 4:21pm, GMT, 6 December 1917, in Lat 49-23 N, Long 6-13W, clear weather, smooth sea, course 329° true, speed 13 knots, zigzagging, the JACOB JONES was struck on the starboard side by a torpedo from an enemy submarine. The ship was one of six of an escorting group which were returning independently from off Brest, to Queenstown. All other ships of the group were out of sight ahead.

2. I was in the chart-house and heard someone call out "Torpedo"! I jumped at once to the bridge and on the way up, saw the torpedo about 800 yards from the ship approaching from about one point abaft the starboard beam headed for a point about midships, making a perfectly straight surface run (alternately broaching and submerging to apparently four or five feet), at very high speed, which I estimate at, at least 40 knots. No periscope was sighted. When I reached the bridge, I found that the officer-of-the-deck had already put the rudder hard left and rung up emergency speed on the engine room telegraph. The ship had already begun to swing to the left. I personally rang up emergency speed again and then turned to watch the torpedo. The Executive Officer, Lieutenant Norman Scott, left the chart-house just ahead of me, saw the torpedo immediately on getting outside the door and estimates that the torpedo when he sighted it, was 1000yards away, approaching from one point, or slightly less, abaft the beam, and making exceedingly high speed.

3. After seeing the torpedo and realizing that straight run, line of approach, and high speed it was making, I was convinced that it was impossible to manoeuvre to avoid it. Lieutenant (jg) S F Kalk, was officer-of-the-deck at the time and I consider that he took correct and especially prompt measures in manoeuvring to avoid the torpedo. Lieutenant Kalk was a very able officer, calm and collected in emergency. He had been attached to the ship for about two months and had shown especial aptitude. His action in this emergency entirely justified my confidence in him. I deeply regret to state that he was lost as a result of the torpedoing of the ship, dying of exposure on one of the rafts about 11:00pm.

4. The torpedo broached and jumped clear of the water at a short distance from the ship, submerged about fifty or sixty feet from the ship and struck approximately three feet below the waterline in the fuel oil tank between the auxiliary room and the after crew space. The after compartment, fuel oil tank and the auxiliary room were flooded immediately and the engine room flooded thru the door between the auxiliary room and the engine room, the ship settling aft immediately after being torpedoed, to a point which the deck just forward of the after deck house was awash, and then more gradually until the deck abreast the engine room hatch was awash. A man on watch in the engine room, D R Carter, Oiler, attempted to close the water-tight door between the auxiliary room and the engine room, but was unable to do so against the pressure of water from the auxiliary room.

5. The deck over the forward part of the after crew space and over the fuel oil tank just forward of it, was blown clear for a space athwartships of about twenty feet from starboard to port, and the auxiliary room wrecked. The starboard after torpedo tube was blown into the air. No fuel oil ignited and apparently no ammunition exploded. The depth charges in the chutes aft were set on ready and exploded after the stern sank. It was impossible to get to them to set them on safe as they were under water. Immediately the ship was torpedoed, Lieutenant J K Richards, the gunnery officer, rushed aft to attempt to set the charges on "safe", but was unable to get further aft than the after deck-house.

6. As soon as the torpedo struck, I attempted to send out an "SOS" message by radio, but the mainmast was carried away, antennae (falling) and all electric power had failed. I then tried to have the gun-sight-lighting batteries connected up in an effort to send out a low power message with them, but it was at once evident that this would not be practicable before the ship sank. There was no other vessel in sight and it was therefore impossible to get through a distress signal of any kind.

7. Immediately after the ship was torpedoed, every effort was made to get rafts and boats launched. Also the circular life-belts from the bridge and several splinter mats from the outside of the bridge were cut adrift and afterwards proved very useful in holding men up until they could be got to the rafts.

8. Weighted confidential publications were thrown over the side. There was no time to destroy other confidential matter, but it went down with the ship.

9. The ship sank about 4:29pm (about eight minutes after being torpedoed). As I saw her settling rapidly, I ran along the deck and ordered everybody I saw to jump overboard. At this time, most of those not killed by the explosion had got clear of the ship and were on rafts or wreckage. Some however were swimming and a few appeared to be about a ship's length astern of the ship, at some distance from the rafts, probably having jumped overboard very soon after the ship was struck.

10. Before the ship sank, two shots were fired from No.4 gun with the hope of attracting attention of some nearby ship. As the ship began sinking, I jumped overboard. The ship sank stern first and twisted slowly through nearly 180 degrees as she swung upright. From this nearly vertical position, bow in the air to about the forward funnel, she went straight down. Before the ship reached the vertical position, the depth charges exploded, and I believe them to have caused the death of a number of men. They also partially paralyzed, stunned or dazed a number of others including Lieutenant Kalk and myself and several men, some of whom are still disabled, but recovering.

11. Immediate efforts were made to get all survivors on the rafts and then get rafts and boats together. Three rafts were launched before the ship sank and one floated off when she sank. The motor dory, hull undamaged but engine out of commission, also floated off, and the punt and wherry also floated clear. The punt was wrecked beyond usefulness, and the wherry was damaged and leaking badly, but was of considerable use in getting men to the rafts. The whaleboat was launched but capsized soon afterwards having been damaged by the explosion of the depth charges. The motor sailor did not float clear, but went down with the ship.

12. About fifteen or twenty minutes after the ship sank, the submarine appeared on the surface about two or three miles to the Westward of the rafts, and gradually approached until about 800 to 1000 yards from them, where it stopped and was seen to pick up one unidentified man from the water. The submarine then submerged and was not seen again.

13. The submarine appeared to be 150 to 200 feet long, had one gun of about 3" (possibly slightly larger) forward of conning tower and had periscopes housed. The general appearance of the hull and position of the gun was like that of the U-51-56 class in Pamphlet ID 1163 ("German Submarines, Oct. 1917") and the conning tower like that of the UB 49 in same pamphlet.

14. I was picked up by the motor dory and at once began to make arrangements to try to reach the Scillys in that boat in order to get assistance to those on the rafts. All the survivors then in sight were collected and I gave orders to Lieutenant Richards to keep them together. Lieutenant Scott, the navigating officer, had fixed the ship's position a few minutes before the explosion and both he and I knew accurately the course to be steered. I kept Lieutenant Scott to assist me and four men who were in good condition, in the boat to man the oars – the engine being out of commission. With the exception of some emergency rations and half a bucket of water, all provisions including medical kit were taken from the dory and left on the rafts. There was no apparatus of any kind which could be used for night signalling.

15. After a very trying trip, during which it was necessary to steer by stars and by the direction of the wind, the dory was picked up about 1:00 pm, 7 December, by a small patrol vessel about six miles South of St Marys. Commander Randall, RNR, SNO, Scilly Isles informed me that the other survivors had been rescued.

16. One small raft (which had been separated from the others from the first) was picked up by the SS "Catalina" at 8:00pm, 6 December. After a most trying experience through the night, the remaining survivors were picked up by the HMS CAMELLIA, at 8:30am, 7 December.

17. I deeply regret to state that out of a total of 7 officers and 103 men on board at the time of the torpedoing, two officers and 64 men died in the performance of duty. A tabulated list of casualties showing where and by whom each one who can be accounted for was last seen, is attached.

18. The behaviour of officers and men under the exceptionally hard conditions is worthy of the highest praise.

19. Lieutenant Norman Scott, Executive Officer, accomplished a great deal towards getting boats and rafts in the water, turning off steam from the fireroom to the engine room, getting life-belts and splinter mats from the bridge into the water, in person firing signal guns, encouraging and assisting the men, and in general, doing everything possible in the short time available. He was of invaluable assistance during the trip in the dory.

Lieutenant J K Richards, was left in charge of all the rafts and his coolness and cheerfulness under exceedingly hard conditions was highly commendable, and undoubtedly served to put heart into the men to stand the strain.

Lieutenant (junior grade) S F Kalk, during the early part of the evening, but already in a weakened condition, swam from one raft to another in the effort to equalise weight on the rafts. The man who were on the raft with him state, in their own words, that "He was game to the last".

Lieutenant (junior grade) N N Gates, was calm and efficient in the performance of duty.

During the night, Charlesworth C BM1c removed parts of his own clothing (when all realised that their lives depended on keeping warm) to try to keep alive men more thinly clad than himself. This sacrifice shows his calibre and I recommend that he be commended for his action.

At the risk of almost certain death, Burger P J , Seaman second class, remained in the motor sailor and endeavoured to get it clear for floating from the ship. While he did not succeed in accomplishing this work (which would undoubtedly have saved 20 or 30 lives), I desire to call attention to his sticking to duty until the very last and recommend him as being of most worthy of commendation. He was drawn under the water with the boat, but later came to the surface and was rescued.

Kelly L J, Chief Electrician, and Chase E U, Quartermaster third class, remained on board until the last, greatly endangering their lives thereby, to cut adrift splinter mats and life preservers. Kelly's stamina and spirit were especially valuable during the motor dory's trip.

Gibson H L, Chief Boatswains Mate and Meier E, Water Tender, were of great assistance to the men on their rafts in advising and cheering them up under most adverse conditions.

20. The foregoing report is made from my own observations and after questioning all surviving officers and men.