

Captain James Gunn Norquay

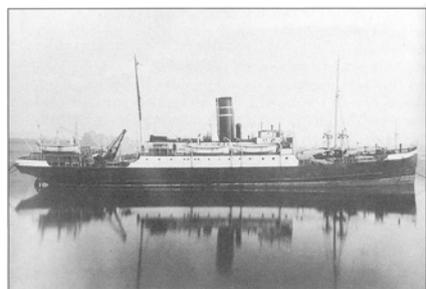


James was born at Quoyness House, Flotta on 17th January 1885, the first son of James Gunn Norquay, a fisherman, and Catherine Norquay (née Isbister). James was a fisherman who served as a member of the Royal Naval Reserve. He was commissioned as a Temporary Skipper on 17th February 1915. He was in command of the Hull trawler *Mino*, on patrol duty in the North Sea, when photos of James and younger brothers William and Adam appeared in *The Orcadian's* "OUR ROLL OF HONOUR" section as "Flotta Family's Record" in early 1916.

James served on the Hull trawler *Restrivo* in the Mediterranean in 1917. He was mentioned in dispatches (London Gazette 22 February 1918) "for gallant conduct and good seamanship under fire" rescuing the Italian caique *St Nicholas* in the Kos Channel on 25th October.

Adam Norquay died on 27th October 1917 in hospital on Malta from injuries received at sea, while serving on the sloop HMS *Penstemon* in the Mediterranean. William Norquay survived being wounded twice while serving in France and Flanders with the Australians, before he was killed in action by shell fire in the 1916 Somme battlefield in May 1918. James Norquay survived his service during the Great War and remained at sea in the Merchant Navy, in which duty he was eventually to lose his life.

In early World War 2, James served as a Captain with the North of Scotland, Orkney & Shetland Steam Navigation Company. One of the North Company's ships, *Highlander*, was attacked near Aberdeen on 2nd August 1940 by three German Heinkel 115 bombers. Although the ship was armed with only an old Lewis gun and a Holman projector (gas propelled grenade launcher), her crew managed to shoot down two of the German planes. Only two seamen manning the Holman projector were slightly injured and *Highlander* sailed into Leith harbour with most of the wreckage of one plane lying on her poop deck.



Highlander's Master, William Gifford was awarded the OBE, while one of the Lewis gunners, George Anderson, and one of the crewmen manning the Holman projector, Bert Whyman, were awarded the BEM. The incident was widely reported in the press and on the radio, so the Luftwaffe was determined to take revenge on the ship. *Highlander* was attacked again on the 13th and 18th–19th September, but she escaped significant damage on both occasions.

Highlander's name had been changed to *St. Catherine II*, when German aircraft attacked again in the early evening of 14th November and her luck finally ran out. Captain James G. Norquay was then in command of the ship, waiting stopped outside Aberdeen harbour to join a coastal convoy. A German plane launched a torpedo which hit *St. Catherine II* on her starboard side. The ship listed quickly and a lifeboat launched there overturned, trapping most of those onboard underneath. Fourteen of *St. Catherine II's* crew and three passengers were eventually rescued, by a small collier that steamed out of Aberdeen harbour.

One of the crew who survived saw James roll down the steeply listing deck and fall into the water, but his body was not found (only one was). Thirteen of his crew (including five Shetlanders, one George Anderson BEM) and a passenger were lost with the ship. Captain James Gunn Norquay is commemorated on Panel 90 of the Tower Hill Memorial, London, also since 2012 inside the Flotta Kirk with Adam and William.

