

C/1764 Seaman James W. Linklater



James was born at Stove, Cross Parish on Sanday on 31st July 1878, the second child (and eldest son) of ploughman James Linklater and Catherine Linklater (née Tait). His father became the Farm Grieve on the 439 acre (277 arable) Warsetter Farm, but the family moved to Balfour village on Shapinsay, where young James completed his schooling.

James started a long career at sea aged seventeen, working out of Kirkwall in a smack. For many years he worked on steamships which traded between Orkney and the Scottish east coast ports.

Many Mercantile Marine sailors enrolled into the Royal Naval Reserve, formed by Acts of Parliament in 1859 (for seamen) and 1861 (for officers) to provide the Royal Navy with experienced reservists in time of war. James spent six months training on board the battleship HMS *Rodney*, a port drillship, then enrolled into the RNR on 15th August 1900. The RNR retainers paid a couple of times a year were a useful supplement to James's Merchant Service pay, although he had attained the rank of Mate when he married Charlotte Ann Taylor on 15th January 1903 in Aberdeen. They had a daughter, also called Charlotte.

When the Great War started in August 1914, the Royal Navy was by far the most powerful fleet in the world, with 20 modern dreadnought and 40 older battleships, 9 battlecruisers, 46 cruisers, 62 modern light cruisers and hundreds of smaller ships. Its manpower of just under 150,000 was taken to over 200,000 by mobilizing reserves that included over 16,000 of the RNR (3,130 in its Trawler Section). James reached the Portsmouth Depot on 27th August, left on 16th October to travel out to the Far East on the requisitioned P & O liner SS *Malwa*.

James joined the 729 crew of the battleship HMS *Triumph*, undergoing refit in Hong Kong. The battleships *Swiftsure* and *Triumph* were built for Chile, but were bought by the Royal Navy before completed in 1903 to prevent their sale to Russia. They had 10in main and 7.5in secondary armament and were capable of 20 knots, but had limited armour protection. Both battleships joined the Royal and French Navy Dardanelles Squadron in February 1915.

HMS *Triumph* took part in the opening attack on the entrance forts of the Dardanelles on 18th and 19th February. She used her secondary battery against the fort at Sedd el Bahr on the 25th, then entered the straits with the battleships *Albion* and *Majestic* to bombard the inner forts next day.

Triumph and *Swiftsure* detached to attack forts at Smyrna (now Izmir) on 5th March, but returned to the Dardanelles on the 9th to take part in the failed attempt to force the Narrows on the 18th. HMS *Triumph* carried out experimental firing against Turkish trenches on Achi Baba on 15th April. Picket boats from *Triumph* and *Majestic* destroyed the grounded British submarine E15 near Fort Dardanos on the 18th, to prevent its capture by the Turks.



HMS *Triumph* showed a light to mark the rendezvous for the battleships providing tows for the Anzac landing force in the early hours of 25th April. She then joined the naval bombarding force to provide vital supporting fire for the troops ashore, while they fought desperately to defend the beach-head at Gaba Tepe against sustained Turkish attacks during the next few days.

By the middle of May 1915 German submarines were known to be on their way to the eastern Mediterranean. HMS *Triumph* was underway with torpedo nets out, watertight doors closed and light guns manned while bombarding Turkish positions from off Gaba Tepe on 25th May. About 12.30pm she spotted a periscope about 300 yards off her starboard beam and opened fire on it. U-21 had already launched a torpedo fitted with net cutters which hit her starboard side. The resulting explosion caused HMS *Triumph* to list about ten degrees, increased to 30 degrees five minutes later. The attending destroyer, HMS *Chelmer*, came under her stern walk and evacuated most of the battleship's crew before she turned over ten minutes after hit.

James spent an hour in the water before he was rescued. With two other Orcadians, Thomas Wylie of Burray and John Kirkpatrick of Longhope, he was among over 500 survivors of *Triumph*'s sinking, but three officers and seventy ratings lost their lives. James returned to Portsmouth, reached on 2nd June. He had some leave before on 19th August he joined the crew of HMS *Barham*, a battleship of the Royal Navy's most powerful dreadnought class.



During the Grand Fleet's only major encounter with the German High Seas Fleet, the Battle of Jutland, HMS *Barham* and other battleships of 5th Battle Squadron were based at Rosyth and temporarily attached to Admiral Beatty's Battlecruiser Force. *Barham* was therefore involved in the heaviest fighting on 31st May 1916: when she fired 337 shells and was hit six times, losing 26 killed and 37 wounded.

James Linklater survived the Battle of Jutland unscathed. He remained on HMS *Barham* until the war ended and was demobilized on 23rd January 1919. James was paid a war gratuity of £22: 17/6 five weeks later, also RN prize money payments totalling £33: 15/- in the 1920s.

James was working as a gardener when his wife, Charlotte, died aged 45 in their home at Lynnside, Kirkwall on 24th February 1925, of pneumonia and tuberculosis. James married again on 3rd March 1927. His new wife was also called Charlotte, but known as Lottie. Her two young sons, born Gordon and Norman Keldie, took on their stepfather's surname. James and Lottie had another son, Brian, born on 26th March 1937.

In 1937 James joined the about 200-strong (mostly local Orcadian) workforce toiling in difficult, and at times dangerous, conditions to raise the sunken ships of the German High Seas Fleet from the waters of Scapa Flow. The original salvage firm of Cox and Danks stopped work in 1932 because of depressed scrapped metal prices, but its chief salvage officer, Glaswegian Thomas Mackenzie, continued operations for the company Metal Industries Ltd.

Salvage on German ships stopped when World War 2 started, but Metal Industries with two salvage ships and a base at Lyness was ideally placed to take over salvage work in the Royal Navy's main base in Scapa Flow. James was an able seaman member of the tug *Imperious*.

On 14th December 1939, James was acting as mate of *Imperious*, and looking after the tow rope, while the tug towed a lighter from Scapa Pier to Lyness. When soon after the tow began about 3pm, the tug stopped engines about 150 yards from the pier to let the tow rope "bite", it swung and hit James, knocking him over the rail into the water. A desperate search by the crews of the tug and lighter located James about two minutes later and he was brought back onto the tug. Despite applying artificial respiration on the tug and taking James to a nearby hospital ship, he was eventually declared dead by doctors on board it.

James was buried in Kirkwall St. Olaf's Cemetery. Metal Industries paid £147 compensation to James's widow, while the same sum was invested by the Clerk of the Sheriff Court in 3½% War Stock and the interest paid to James's daughter Charlotte. £188: 2/2 was invested by the Clerk of Court in war stock on behalf of his son Brian and the interest was paid to his mother on his behalf.