

ORDINARY SEAMAN

HORACE ALFRED JONES

Service Number: J/32517(CH)

Regiment & Unit/Ship

Royal Navy

H.M.S. "Vanguard."

Date of Death

Died 09 July 1917

Buried or commemorated at

LYNESS ROYAL NAVAL CEMETERY

F. 145.

United Kingdom

Country of Service United Kingdom

Born 06-Mar-1899. Baptised 28-Apr-1899 at St John the Baptist, Halling. Parents - John and Letitia Grace

Explosion

The ship anchored in the northern part of Scapa Flow at about 18:30 on 9 July 1917 after having spent the morning exercising general evolutions concluding practising the routine for abandoning ship. The Captain made a speech to the ship's company in which he stated that under present conditions a ship would either blow up in a matter of seconds, or would take several hours to sink. Practically this meant that all would go down with the ship or that everybody would be saved. It is a remarkable coincidence that his words were to be so tragically proved in less than 12 hours. There is no record of anyone detecting anything amiss until the first detonation at 23:20. Vanguard sank almost instantly, with only three of the crew surviving, one of whom died soon afterwards. A total of 843 men were lost, including two Australian stokers from the light cruiser HMAS Sydney who were serving time in the battleship's brig. Another casualty was Captain Kyōsuke Eto, a military observer from the Imperial Japanese Navy, which was allied with the Royal Navy at the time through the Anglo-Japanese Alliance. The bodies of 17 of the 22 men recovered after the explosion, plus that of Lieutenant Commander Alan Duke, who died after being rescued, were buried at the Royal Naval Cemetery at Lyness, not far from the site of the explosion. The others are commemorated on the Chatham, Plymouth and Portsmouth Naval Memorials.

A Board of Inquiry heard accounts from many witnesses on nearby ships. They accepted the consensus that there had been a small explosion with a white glare between the foremast and 'A' turret, followed after a brief interval by two much larger explosions. The board decided, on the balance of the available evidence, that the main detonations were in either 'P' magazine, 'Q' magazine, or both. A great deal of debris thrown out by the explosions landed on nearby ships; a section of plating measuring approximately six by four feet (1.8 by 1.2 m) landed on board the battleship Bellerophon. It was found to be from the No. 2 Hydraulic Room abaft 'A' barbette.

Memorial: (WMR 88176) Halling, Kent

It showed no signs of a blast from 'A' magazine, which reinforced the visual evidence suggesting that the explosion took place in the central part of the ship.



Although the explosion was obviously a detonation of the cordite charges in a main magazine, the reason for it was less clear. There were several theories. The inquiry found that some of the cordite on board, which had been temporarily offloaded in December 1916 and catalogued at that time, was past its stated safe life. The possibility of spontaneous detonation was raised, but could not be proved. It was also noted that a number of ship's boilers were still in use, and some watertight doors, which should have been closed in wartime, were open as the ship was in port. It was suggested that this might have contributed to a dangerously high temperature in the magazines. The final conclusion of the board was that a fire started in a four-inch magazine, perhaps when a raised temperature caused spontaneous ignition of cordite, spreading to one or the other main magazines, which then exploded.

Memorial In Lyness