



LORD ASHCROFT'S  
"HERO OF  
THE MONTH"

# Commander Loftus William Jones

VC

## LEADERSHIP

AGGRESSION • BOLDNESS  
INITIATIVE • SACRIFICE  
SKILL • ENDURANCE

The many Victoria Crosses and George Crosses in the Lord Ashcroft Gallery at the Imperial War Museum in London are displayed under one of seven different qualities of bravery. Commander Loftus William Jones' award is part of the collection, and Lord Ashcroft feels that it falls within the category of leadership:

"Charismatic, strong, inspirational, the natural leader not only takes command, but also infuses all those around them with confidence and hope. They exude calm and resolve. They are a tower of strength."



**TOP RIGHT:**  
*HMS Shark, the 4<sup>th</sup> Flotilla leader, pictured underway. The 950-ton destroyer was capable of a top speed of about thirty knots and boasted three 4-inch guns, a quick-firing 2-pounder gun and four 21-inch torpedo tubes in pairs. (ALL IMAGES COURTESY OF STEVE SNELLING UNLESS STATED OTHERWISE)*

**RIGHT:**  
*Commander Loftus William Jones, VC. "Willie" Jones, as he was known in his family, was the last of four men to be awarded the Victoria Cross for their actions in the Battle of Jutland.*

**W**ILLIAM LOFTUS JONES was born in Southsea, Hampshire, on 13 November 1879 into a family with a strong naval tradition. He was the second son of Admiral Loftus Jones and his wife Gertrude (née Gray). With his father being such a senior Royal Navy officer, it was not surprising that "Willie", as he was affectionately known in his family, followed him into the senior service.



After being educated at Eastman's Royal Naval Academy in Fareham, Hampshire, he rose quickly through the officer ranks and, at just 23, was in command of his own ship, the destroyer HMS *Sparrowhawk* in 1903. After further appointments, he was elevated to Commander in June 1914.

Following the outbreak of the Great War in August 1914, Jones initially commanded the destroyer *Linnet*, which, along with three other destroyers, sank the German minelayer *Königin Luise* as early as 5 August 1914 in the first British action of the war. From 9 October 1914, Jones commanded HMS *Shark*, a destroyer that, late in December 1914, clashed with the German High Seas Fleet, aggressively pursuing and helping to see off the superior force.

At 14.00 hours on 31 May 1916, HMS *Shark*, captained by Jones, was providing protection from enemy submarines, along with three other destroyers and two light cruisers, for the Third Battle-Cruiser Squadron as it headed south in the North Sea in advance of the British battle fleet. No enemy ships were known to be in the vicinity and the ninety-one-strong complement of officers and men on HMS *Shark* were as relaxed as they

could be two years into the First World War. Little did they know it, but the Battle of Jutland was about to begin.

At 14.20 hours, messages were received that an enemy force was at sea and the ships' companies were soon ordered to "action stations" as they proceeded, at full speed, to intercept the enemy. At 17.40 hours, German destroyers and light cruisers appeared out of the haze. When ten German destroyers launched a torpedo attack on the Third Battle-Cruiser Squadron, four British destroyers, including HMS *Shark*, broke up the offensive.

Soon after the four destroyers had returned to join their two light cruisers, three German battlecruisers appeared and started firing on the six British ships. Under a heavy fire, *Shark* was hit and a shell fragment destroyed her bridge helm.

The enemy, whose bombardment was murderous, was using shrapnel, some of which struck Commander Jones in the thigh and face, leaving him to stem the flow of blood with his hands. Meanwhile, the coxswain was hit a second time and lapsed into unconsciousness.

The enemy closed in on *Shark*, its after gun was put out of action almost immediately, and its crew killed or



## VICTORIA CROSS HEROES II

Lord Ashcroft KCMG PC is a businessman, philanthropist, author and pollster. His sixth book on gallantry, *Victoria Cross Heroes Volume II*, was published in November. For more information, please visit: [www.victoriacrossheroes2.com](http://www.victoriacrossheroes2.com)

Lord Ashcroft's VC and GC collection is on public display at Imperial War Museum, London. For more information visit: [www.iwm.org.uk/heroes](http://www.iwm.org.uk/heroes). For details about his VC collection, visit: [www.lordashcroftmedals.com](http://www.lordashcroftmedals.com)

For more information on Lord Ashcroft's work, visit: [www.lordashcroft.com](http://www.lordashcroft.com). Follow him on Twitter: @LordAshcroft



### TOP RIGHT:

Another view of HMS Shark. She was launched at Swan, Hunter's Wallsend Yard on 30 July 1912, joining the 4th Flotilla on her completion.

### RIGHT:

A contemporary wartime illustration depicting HMS Shark's final moments.



### FAR RIGHT:

Commander Loftus Jones' body, kept afloat by a cork lifebelt, was washed ashore on the small Swedish island of Fiskebackskil where he was buried with full military honours on 24 June 1916. After the war his widow, Margaret, and daughter, Linnette, who was named after her father's first wartime command, HMS Linnet, visited the grave and memorial erected in his honour.

### BOTTOM:

Commander Jones' grave was later moved and is now situated in a Commonwealth War Graves plot in Kviberg Cemetery near Gothenburg. Most of the burials there are naval casualties from the Battle of Jutland whose bodies were recovered in Sweden. (COURTESY OF THE COMMONWEALTH WAR GRAVES COMMISSION)

wounded, while the forward gun had already been blown away. The situation was worsening by the minute as dead and dying crew lay everywhere. Unsurprisingly, the one surgeon on board was overwhelmed by his task.

By now, the enemy was at close range and preparing for the "kill". Commander Jones ordered the collision mats be placed over the shot holes as desperate attempts were made to keep the ship afloat. When the crew of the last gun – amidships – was reduced to two men, Shark's bloodied captain stood beside it, calling the range. As one of the two men fell, weakened by the loss of blood, the captain took his place.

Then, moments later, Commander Jones was struck by a shell which blew

off his right leg above the knee. As his men tied an improvised tourniquet – made from pieces of rope and wood – on his leg, Jones continued to direct the firing.

The bows of HMS Shark were soon disappearing below the waves and other parts were awash with water as two German destroyers closed in to only a few hundred feet in order to finish off the stricken ship. "Save yourselves, was Commander Jones's final orders to his men.

Some twenty survivors clambered on to two rafts and pieces of wreckage as two more torpedoes hit Shark, blasting the dead and wounded into the water. Her stern rose up and she sank. Commander Jones, who had been placed on one of the rafts and propped in a sitting position, smiled and said: "It's no good, lads. Minutes later his head fell forward as he gave his final breath. He was aged 36 when he died.

Some of those who had made it on to the rafts also died from their injuries, or fell into the water and either drowned or succumbed to the cold. Shortly after midnight, however, a flare fired from the other raft was spotted and six survivors from the ship's company were eventually rescued by a Danish steamer, the SS Vidar.

Shortly after his death, Commander Jones's body was washed ashore off the coast of Sweden still in the life-belt that he had donned after being forced to leave his ship. On 24 June 1916 he was buried in Fiskebäckskil Churchyard, Vastra, Götaland.

Margaret Jones, Commander Jones's widow and mother of their daughter Linnette, made extensive enquiries into how her husband had perished and, partly as a result of her investigation, Jones's posthumous VC was announced on 6 March 1917. The six survivors from the ship were awarded the Distinguished Service Medal. Mrs Jones received her husband's VC from King George V at Buckingham Palace on 31 March 1917. Three years later, Mrs Jones, accompanied by Linnette, visited her husband's grave in Sweden.

I purchased Commander Jones's VC and service medals in 2012 in a private sale, along with a number of personal effects. Perhaps the greatest compliment to his courage came from Admiral Beatty, the Commander-in-Chief of the Grand Fleet, during the war and later the first Earl Beatty. He said: "No finer act had been produced in the annals of Her Majesty's Navy. ☺"

