

Dennis Payton Boag-Jones

FAA/FX 82212 Air Mechanic 1st Class
Royal Navy
1923 - 1943

Dennis was the son of John Henry and Gwladys Helen Boag-Jones of Langstone.

It is unclear when Dennis joined the Royal Navy. But in 1943 he died on H.M.S. Dasher 27 March 1943, lost at sea.

HMS Dasher

His ship was originally US mercantile Rio de Janeiro laid down 14 March 1940, acquired by the US Navy 22 November 1941 for conversion into an aircraft escort vessel. It was transferred to the Royal Navy on 1 July 1942 under US/UK Lend Lease Agreement and commissioned as HMS Dasher the following day. She participated in the British-American invasion of French North Africa which started on 8 November 1942 (Operation Torch), carrying Sea Hurricanes of 804 Naval Air Squadron. After doing some aircraft ferry operations in the Mediterranean, Dasher sailed to the Clyde in March 1943 for escort duty and escorted one convoy successfully, but soon after leaving with the second, suffered engine trouble and turned back.

Shortly after getting back to the Firth of Clyde, off Arran, at 4.40 pm on 27 March 1943, HMS Dasher suffered a massive accidental aviation fuel explosion and sank in only 3 minutes. Oil from the ship caught fire and spread across the water to the survivors. 379 men drowned and 149 men were picked up by rescue vessels. The wreck is an official War Grave, designated as a controlled site under the Protection of Military Remains Act. The explosion was deemed to be due to the inadequate protection provided for avgas tanks in this class. All subsequent CVEs (Escort Carriers) allocated to the Royal Navy were modified to British standards, with a consequent reduction of about 50% in the quantity of aviation fuel carried.

The loss of HMS Dasher remained undisclosed until 1945, when her loss received a brief mention in The Times. This loss is second only among British warship losses in World War II in home waters, to that of HMS Royal Oak.

Much has also been made of the secrecy that surrounded the loss of HMS Dasher, and criticism levelled at the authorities for it. The loss of HMS Dasher and so many lives in home waters to an accident would seem to be something that could have been seized on as a tremendous propaganda opportunity by the enemy. The secrecy associated with the event is not only understandable, but essential in time of war, something the later critics may have forgotten was taking place at the time.

Operation Mincemeat

JX 361352 John "Jack" Melville was an Ordinary Coder who served on HMS Dasher and was originally believed to have been buried with full military honours in Ardrossan, having lost his life in the disaster that sank the ship. It now appears that Mr Melville's body may have played the central role in Operation Mincemeat, an elaborate and top secret hoax intended to deceive the Germans into believing the Allies would invade southern Europe through Greece and Sardinia, rather than Sicily.

Previously, the story had centred on the belief that the corpse was that of a homeless Welsh alcoholic, Glyndwr Michael, who had either committed suicide by drinking rat poison, or been poisoned accidentally while sleeping in a barn. Although the story was widely circulated, many found it difficult to accept, as the physical condition of the body of an indigent alcoholic, and of someone who had been poisoned, would have been easy for the enemy to recognise as not belonging to someone on active service, or who had lost their life by drowning, and would have significantly, if not completely, damaged the credibility of the deception.

Memorials

On 27th March 1993 a memorial to the men who lost their lives was dedicated in the Sunken Gardens on South Beach Ardrossan Scotland, exactly fifty years after the tragedy.

The principal base of the Fleet Air Arm, Lee-on-the-Solent, Hampshire, was chosen as the site for the memorial to almost 2,000 men of that service who died during the Second World War and who have no known grave. All were buried at sea or were otherwise denied by the fortunes of war, a known and honoured grave.

Dennis's name is inscribed on the Royal Navy Air Service HMS Daedalus Memorial at Lee-on-Solent, Bay4 Panel 26.

Dennis Payton Boag-Jones's name is inscribed on a plaque in Langstone Village Hall together with the five other men from the villages that lost their lives in the Second World War.