

M/T James Stove

Manager: Lorentzen's Rederi Co., Oslo

Tonnage: 8215 gt

Built in Dundee, Scotland 1931. Previous name: *Bralanta* until 1935.

Captain: Olaus Eliassen

Final Fate - 1940:

James Stove departed Singapore on May 29-1940 and was on a voyage to Aden with 10 800 tons aviation fuel when she encountered the Italian submarine *Galileo Galilei* (Corrado Nardi) on June 16-1940. The surfaced submarine had been observed about 4 miles off on the starboard beam by the the captain and the 1st mate who were on the bridge, but believing it to be either French or British, the voyage continued as per routing instructions from Naval Control in Singapore. The sub had a similar course to their own, but started to close in on the starboard side. At about 05:15, 25 minutes after the sub had first been seen, *James Stove* observed land and altered course in order to enter the swept channel south of Elephant Back, and as they turned the sub was on their port side, then it increased speed, and going astern of them, took up a position on their starboard quarter and hoisted a signal. They were still too far away to identify the signal, but the engine was stopped and the ship's number and national flag was hoisted. A few minutes later the signal was read as CGB, meaning "send boat for". Being as the sub had no national flag or markings, they thought it might have new orders regarding the mine fields, so the captain ordered the starboard lifeboat launched and sent over to the sub with the 1st mate and some crew. When within hailing distance, they were told that the sub was Italian and that their ship would be sunk since their destination Aden was a British port. The lifeboat then returned to the ship, whereupon the captain ordered her abandoned and at 06:15 *James Stove* received a torpedo in the engine room and started to sink (12 35N 45 03E). About 5 minutes later she was struck by another torpedo on the starboard beam, causing her to list heavily. A subsequent explosion set her on fire, with the flames spreading rapidly around her.

The 34 men in the lifeboats were picked up about an hour later by *HMS Moonstone* and landed in Aden that same day. In addition to the captain, Norwegians on board were: 1st Mate **Rolf G. Karlsen**, Able Seaman **Sverre Jensen**, 1st Engineer **Bjarne Lillebø**, 4th Engineer **Anders Bergquist**, Mechanic **Johannes Jacobsen**.

Hearings were held in Bombay on Jan. 23-1941 with all of the above appearing, except the mechanic.

Three days after *James Stove* had been sunk, Nardi and several of his men were killed when *Galilei* was captured by *Moonstone*. 10 Italian submarines were destroyed in the Red Sea and Mediterranean by the end of June that year.

Report - dated Navy Office Aden, June 17-1940:

Signed by Commander Anthony Coke, R.N. - Received from Roger Griffiths - His source: Public Records Office, Kew

"Norwegian ship under British charter to the Anglo Saxon Petroleum Company, this is the Marine side of the Shell Co."

From Singapore to Suez, with cargo of aviation petrol, a small portion of which was to have been discharged at Aden.

The Master, Chief Officer and certain other officers were interrogated as soon as they came ashore and the following information was collected.

The ship was routed at Singapore by the British Naval authorities and followed the route given as closely as possible throughout the voyage. She was spoken by a British man-of-war north of Sumatra.

Speed had been adjusted to allow of the ship's arriving outside Aden at dawn, and this she did. At about 05:00 B.T. on June 16th, while on a course of 260 a submarine was sighted 4 pts. on the St. bow about 2 1/2 miles distant. The Master's attention was first called to the submarine by the latter's very foul exhaust; a cloud of black smoke hung about her all the time she was visible. An engineer officer remarked "They are very bad engineers on board that submarine".

The ship then altered course to North to make harbour the Master thinking that the submarine was British. This brought the submarine on the port bow; she then circled under the stern and took station on the 8 beam, steering a slightly converging course, apparently in diving trim, and continued on this course for some considerable time, closing the ship continually. The ship did not at any time use her wireless after having sighted the enemy and the reason for this was, according to the Master, because he was convinced that she was British, but in view of the Chief Officer because they feared that they would be sunk without warning if they did so.

Some time before 06:00 (no one is certain of the time) the submarine having closed to about 3/4 mile signalled the *James Stove* in International Code to send a boat. She accordingly stopped and sent over the Chief Officer. He was hailed by an Italian wearing a black shirt and told to lie off; the Black Shirt then said: - 'Aden is an English port. Your ship is going to be sunk and you will have a quarter of an hour to get away.' He spoke courteously and behaved in the Chief Officer's words as a "Perfect Gentleman".

The boat returned, and the other boat was lowered and the crew abandoned ship; this was done with perfect order and discipline except for one or two Chinamen who were inclined to panic. The boats then pulled away from the ship and the submarine fired a torpedo from about 500 yards.

The Master said that he saw foam from the submarine and then again near the ship, which led him to believe that the torpedo had missed astern. After a short interval another torpedo was fired, which hit aft in the engine room. The submarine then submerged and all the officers remarked on the speed with which this was achieved.

(The following sentence is crossed out: 'It seems certain that all the torpedoes were fired from bow tubes although at first the Master said that the first torpedo was from a beam tube and the second from the bows').

The ship at once began to sink by the stern but after two or three minutes the submarine appeared in about the same position and fired another torpedo from a bow tube which struck amidships. *James Stove* almost immediately burst into flames. Both explosions of the torpedoes were accompanied by a cloud of black smoke.

After having fired this third torpedo the submarine submerged and was not seen again from the ship's boats. The burning oil spread quickly over the sea, going up wind, and the boats had some difficulty in pulling safely away. They were picked up, 34 in all, by the trawler *HMS Moonstone* and eventually towed ashore in their own boats (*the following has been crossed out: 'by a boat from the Examination Vessel'*).

There were no C.B.'s of any sort on board the *James Stove* and in any case it would have been impossible for the submarine to have saved anything from out of the sea of burning oil. The Master brought ashore all the usual Ship's books and papers.

The submarine appears to have been one of the Archimede type. She was painted a very dark greenish grey and bore no distinguishing marks. At no time did she fly any colours."