

Thomas George Jones

Born: 1921
Hometown: North Bergen, NJ
Class: 1944
Service: Merchant Marine
Position / Rank: Third Assistant Engineer
Date / Place of death: May 24, 1945 / Nakagusuku Bay, Okinawa
Date / Place of burial: May 24, 1945 / Lost at Sea – Nakagusuku Bay, Okinawa
Age: 21



Thomas G. Jones signed on as Third Assistant Engineer aboard the SS William B. Allison in late January, 1945 at the port of New York. This was probably his first job as a licensed officer after his graduation from Kings Point in 1944. He had previously sailed as Engine Cadet aboard the SS David G. Farragut on at least one voyage to the Mediterranean.

The William B. Allison sailed from New York on February 21, 1945 bound for the Panama Canal with Navy cargo for its bases on Espiritu Santo in the New Hebrides. Arriving at Espiritu Santo on March 26 the ship sailed on April 1 to deliver cargo to bases in the Russell and Solomon Islands, Eniwetok and Ulithi Atoll. In the Russell Islands the ship loaded Navy Construction Battalion equipment which was accompanied by 34 "SeaBees". The William B. Allison sailed from Ulithi on May 15, 1945 in a convoy with seventeen other ships bound for Okinawa. The ship was loaded with lumber, structural steel, vehicles, diesel fuel in drums and its SeaBee passengers.

On May 21 the William B. Allison anchored in Nakagusuku Wan (Bay) at Okinawa where it began discharging its cargo under the watchful eyes of its passengers. On the early morning of May 25, 1945 (Local Time) the ship was at anchor, "blackened out" with no lights showing and surrounded by a smoke screen. However, the anchorage was illuminated by a full moon. At 0305 a Japanese torpedo plane silently glided out of the smoke screen about 300 yards from the bow, dropped a torpedo and zoomed away. There was no time to alert the crew to the danger until after the torpedo hit the ship on the port side at the engine room. The explosion blew a hole 18 feet long and 30 feet wide, completely destroying the engine room. Two of the men on watch in the Engine Room, Third Assistant Engineer Thomas G. Jones and an unlicensed engineer, were killed instantly along with one of the Navy SeaBees. Four more members of the William B. Allison's crew died of their injuries the following day.



Former SS William B. Allison aground off Okinawa, 1945

Although its Engine Room was completely wrecked, neither its cargo holds nor the cargo they contained was damaged as the ship settled a little lower in the water. With the help of steam from its shipyard sister the USS Mintaka (AK 97) (ex-SS Ansell Briggs) which tied up alongside, all of the William B. Allison's cargo was safely discharged. That job done, the William B. Allison was towed to the fleet repair base at Kerama Retto.

There, although the William B. Allison was considered to be a constructive total loss, the hole in the Engine Room was plated over. After these basic repairs the hulk was turned over to the Navy for use as a floating storage facility. The former William B. Allison continued to serve the fleet in this capacity until it ran aground after dragging its anchor during a typhoon in October 1945. At this point the Navy considered that further repairs to the former William B. Allison were unwarranted and returned the ship to the War Shipping Administration for disposal. The hulk was finally sold for scrapping in 1948.

For his merchant marine service Thomas G. Jones was posthumously awarded the Mariners Medal, Combat Bar, Atlantic War Zone Bar, Middle East - Mediterranean War Zone Bar, Pacific War Zone Bar, the Victory Medal and Presidential Testimonial Letter.