

Subject: Admiralty 10th July 1922 Loss of Drifter 'Blue Sky' ADMIN 1/8627/109
Court of Enquiry

Copies of telegrams

From Admiral Chatham to Admiralty 17.6.22 sent 23.55 received 23.58

Report of signal locker a 3g (flags) No 4 size have been washed ashore at Herne Bay and salvaged by Charles Warner – Fisherman also giving details of message received from Coastguard Margate 16.6.22 sent 06.45 received 06.55

No knowledge of Drifter Blue Sky but quantities of light wreckage are coming ashore along this locality. Items part of deck has canvas screen with Admiral's flag painted upon it, one boat with Admiral's flag painted on bows, two ditty boxes names F.R. STEVENS and H KIRK, one sextant box containing eye piece, no 2296, one lifebuoy marked HMS QUEEN ELIZABETH at Margate, one gang plank 16 ft long at Westgate, part of deck house with number 3867 painted on beam at Birtchington, frayed ropes were attached bears Admiralty marks

To Admiral Rosyth 17.6.22 sent 23.40

Urgent – request enquiries from W/T and Coastguard Stations for news of Drifter BLUE SKY attached to HMS QUEEN ELIZABETH.

BLUE SKY left Newhaven at 11.00 on Tuesday 13th June one passage to Invergordon.

No further news has been received.

From Admiral Chatham 18.6.22. sent 10.32 received 10.40

Coastguard Fairlight reports Drifter BLUE SKY passed Beach Head 12.15 Tuesday 13th June. Not seen from Dungeness Division.

Vessel was not sighted from Dover

From Admiral Chatham 18.6.22 sent 14.00

STARFISH proceeded to search for wreckage for signs of drifter BLUE SKY

Your enquiry – every enquiry is being made in the vicinity but no light can yet be thrown on cause of disaster. A body of a SEAMAN R.N. and a piece of planking with name BLUE SKY carved upon it has been washed up near Birchington.

Request report by telegram whether HMS VIMIERA sighted Drifter BLUE SKY while on passage to Portland 13th June BLUE SKY passed Beachy Head 12.15 13th June proceeding to Invergordon from Newhaven – this addressed to Captain (D) 5th Destroyer Flotilla.

From Admiral Chatham 18.6.22 to Invergordon sent 16.30

Body of man well developed, height 6 feet, blue eyes, brown hair, tattooed both arms and round neck has been recovered and is now in Birchington mortuary

To C-in-C Nore 18.6.22. sent 13.20

Request you will report as soon as possible whether any explosion was heard off Foreness on the night of the 13th June or if any circumstance is known which can shed light on the disappearance of BLUE SKY after she passed Beachy Head at Noon on 13th June or if any theory is held to account for it.

From Admiral Chatham 18.6.22 received 19.22

Nothing was heard on night of 13th June either at Foreness Signal Station or Kentish Knock or North Goodwin Light Vessel. Enquiries have so far failed to elicit any circumstances which could through (throw) light on the disappearance of this vessel. Margate fisherman however are of the opinion that she broke up on the Kentish Knock.

STARFISH is searching and has found a ladder belonging to a Drifter off Birchington.

Request I may be informed name of Officers who were in BLUE SKY.

From Admiral Chatham 19.6.22 sent 19.25 to Admiralty received 19.28

STARFISH returned to Harbour search completed

From Admiral Chatham to Admiralty 19.6.22. sent 17.24 received 17.27

Description of body washed up near Birchington

Begins well developed, 6 feet in height, blue eyes, brown hair going bald from forehead, one tooth missing left upper jaw,

Tattoo marked large butterfly on left forearm crossed ensign and jack with clasped hands and bird with letter in bill on right forearm, Bird and flowers around neck.

Clothing cotton drawers, flannel vest, blue overalls, combination suit, one blue waist belt all clothing of service pattern. C in C AF informed

From Admiralty Chatham to Admiralty 19.6.22 sent 16.20 received 16.21

Relating to drifter BLUE SKY following has been reported by KENTISH KNOCK begins

Weather on night of 13th – 14th June wind northerly gale force from midnight, squalls and misty rain.

Following has been found at Kingsgate

ONE BLACKING BRUSH MARKED G. GILCHRIST and
lid of tool chest marked H.A. JOHNSON C. SHIPT

From HMS GODETIA via Sheerness W/T to Admiralty 19.6.22 sent 11.44 received 12.22

Has Drifter BLUE SKY been located or should I make enquiries on passage south?

From Portland Harbour to Admiralty 19.6.22 sent 08.25 received 09.56

Nothing was seen of Drifter BLUE SKY by HMS VIMIERA

From C-IN-C A.F via Ipswich W/T to Admiralty 19.6.22

With reference to message of 18.6.22 from C-in-C, Nore to Admiralty regret to report that from description of wreckage stated to have been washed ashore it is feared that there is little doubt that Drifter BLUE SKY which left Portsmouth on Monday 12th June for Invergordon was seen in the vicinity of the North Foreland with all hands on the night of Tuesday 13th Wednesday 14th June.

Following officers and men were on board

Jennings, Francis H.C. Lieutenant,

Kator, Richard B. Midshipman,

Dundas, David midshipman,

Kirk, Henry O.J. 6149,
A.B. Leech, William T.D.J. 5989
A.B. Harrold, Arthur H.C.J. 65203
A.B. Brewer, William Ernest J. 41903
Telgraphist Douns, George H.S.J. 25714
Stocker 1st Class Gilchrest, John K.58766
Stocker 1st Class Gage, Walter K.10712
Leading Stoker, Gregson, John Robert, A.K. 31502
Acting Mechanician Hevens, Frank R.G. 88432
Signalman Nicholass, Adolphus, C.T.J. 33795,
Stocker 1st Class A.B. Smith, William H.H. 125710

Relatives are being informed by QUEEN ELIZABETH and court of enquiry has been ordered.

Submit that enquiries may be made along coast in vicinity of North Foreland and of ships that passed within ten miles of a position nine miles 090 degrees from North Foreland about midnight on 13th – 14th June inward bound with a view to ascertaining whether anything was seen of explosion or collision at that time.

From Admiralty to C-IN-C A.F. 19.6.22. sent 13.41

A considerable quantity of wreckage has been recovered including boat with Admiral's flag on bows, deck house with number 3867 painted on beam also two ditty boxes marked F.R. Stevens and H.Kirk. Vessel is believed to have been lost on Kentish Knock – no explosion was heard.

From Admiral, Chatham to Admiralty 20.6.22 sent 09.00 received 09.02

Inquest today on body of man found at Birchington, has his identity been traced and if so request information.

From C-in-C, Nore to Admiralty 21.6.22. sent 23.55 received 00.02

North Foreland W.T. Station reports that at 17.53 on 13th June BLUE SKY called Dover and Sheerness.

At 17.54 North Foreland informed Sheerness that BLUE SKY was calling to which Sheerness gave no reply. North Foreland has not heard from BLUE SKY since. Sheerness W.T. Station report no communication was heard from North Foreland.

MY QUESTION 'why did BLUE SKY call Dover and Sheerness was this normal protocol or were they calling because they were seeking help??????'

Copy of handwritten letter

From Cecil Jennings to Secretary of the Admiralty 20th June 1922

Dear Sir

I thank you for your letter telling me of the loss of my son Francis in HM Drifter 'Blue Sky' I see by the papers that one body has been found. No doubt you would hear at once if the body of the officer were found so I write to say that I would be greatly obliged if in the event of that happening instructions might at once be given which would secure his not being buried where found as we should like him brought here where I have a grave which I expected to be used for myself Notwithstanding a somewhat excessive difference in age my son and I were close 'chums' we have never once at any time fallen out with one another and he has never caused us a moments anxiety and he seems to have met with commendation on several occasions so that such an early termination of career in a profession he loved seems especially grievous.

Letter 28.6.22

The Commander in Chief, H.M. Ships & Vessels The Nore or
The Admiral Commanding Coastguard & Reserves, 58 Victoria Street.S.W.I.

Mr. Cecil F.J. Jennings father of the late Lieutenant F.H.C. Jennings R.N.
H.M. Drifter BLUE SKY (Brackley House, Beckenham, Kent) ask that if his son's
body is recovered that he may be allowed to bury it privately in his own churchyard,
presumably at Beckenham. Should his son's body be found and identified he should
be communicated with and given every facility. He has been informed of the
maximum Admiralty Grant of £14.0s.0d. toward such burial expenses

By Command of Their Lordships

Letter to Cecil F.J. Jennings Brackley House, Beckham, Kent 28.6.22

Sir,

In reply to your letter of the 20th June relative to the loss of your son Lieutenant
F.H.C. Jennings R.N. in HM. Drifter BLUE SKY. I am commanded by My Lords
Commissioners of the Admiralty to inform that the body of your son has not been
found.

A note has been made of your wish to bury your son's body, if found, in your own
churchyard and instructions will be given to Officers on the Coast to communicate
with you if occasion arises.

I am to add in this event it is presumed you would make your own arrangements for
the conveyance and burial of your son, but the Admiralty will be prepared to
reimburse you in respect of burial expenses up to a maximum of £14.0s.0d.

I am Sir your obedient Servant

SCOTLAND YARD 20th June 1922

Subject report of finding of a body at sea presumed to be stoker W. GAGE of
DRIFTER BLUE SKY

From the description furnished it appear that the body referred to is that of the late
WALTER GATE Leading Stoker official number K10712 whose relatives have been
informed

METROPOLITAN POLICE Division 'M' Rotherhithe 19th June 1922

Report for the information of the Admiralty Whitehall

Respecting the dead body of a man found at sea presumed to be Stoker W.Gage of
HM Drifter Blue Sky

Confidential Report

I beg to report that on 17.6.22 John T Burt (Bunt) of 165 Kelly Road Captain of
Hopper Number 9 owned by the Tilbury Contract and Dredging 36 Mark Lane
informed m that at about 10.30am 16 6/22 when passing through the Black Deeps in
the north sea in the above Hopper he picked up the dead body of a man of the
following description

Age about 35, length 5'9" complexion dark, hair black, eyes blue, clean shaven, dress
blue dungaree boiler suit, pants, blue socks, naval flannel vest, flannel body belt, W
Gage stamped thereon and wearing a cork life jacket.

Captain Bunt had the body which had apparently been in the water two or three days stripped and the clothing carefully searched for any marks which would lead up to identification. None however could be traced except as shown.

The captain then buried the body at sea.

In the '????? Night special copy of ????? Standard dated 19.6.22 there appears an account of HM. Drifter Blue Sky being wrecked and the name Walter Gage leading stoker is amongst the names of the missing.

It is possible that the body found by the Captain is identical with the leading stoker mentioned.

On the body found by Captain Bunt was the sum of 5s.6 and half pence and this together with the body belt mentioned the Captain deposited at this station.

Should the body found be that of Leading Stoker W.Gate the money and belt will be forwarded to Admiralty in due course.

SO WE NOW KNOW THAT WALTER GAGE WAS BURIED AT SEA AFTER HIS BODY WAS FOUND

20TH JUNE 1922 Commander-in-Chief's office The Nore

Sir,

Be pleased to inform Their Lordships of the result of enquiries into the circumstances attending the loss of drifter 'BLUE SKY' on or about the night of 13th/14th June 1922.

2. BLUE SKY sailed from Portsmouth at 14.10 on Monday 12th June for Invergordon, a copy of her sailing orders was not received by Commander-in-chief The Nore.
3. She was Newhaven on the night of 12th/13th June, proceeding again at 11.00 being last sighted from Beachy Head at 12.15. The fact that she was not observed passing Dungeness or Dover is probably accounted for by the bad visibility
4. At 19.15 on Thursday 15th June, A Kisbie lifebuoy marked QUEEN ELIZABETH was picked up on the beach off Foreness Point, it was presumed to have been lost from the QUEEN ELIZABETH on passage north and it's recovery was reported in Nore message 1200 of 16th June to the Commander-in-Chief, Atlantic Fleet
5. On receipt of Atlantic Fleet message 2009 on 17th June, reporting that BLUE SKY had not arrived at Invergordon and the life buoy recovered had not been lost from QUEEN ELIZABETH enquiries were made from all coastguard stations in the Nore Command but no information as to the whereabouts of BLUE SKY was forthcoming: reports of the following wreckage was however received.
6. HERNE BAY signal locker and 39 flags No 4 size.
7. MARGATE quantities of light wreckage, part of deck house, canvas screen with Admiral's flag painted on it, boat with Admiral's flag on bows, two ditty boxes (F.R. STEVENS and H. KIRK), Sexton box with eye piece number 2296, lifebuoy marked QUEEN ELIZABETH.

8. WESTGATE gang-plank 15 ft.long
9. BIRCHINGTON part of deck house with number 3867 on beam
10. H.M.S. STARFISH proceeded from Chatham at 13.30 on Sunday 18th June to search the area bounded by Herne Bay, Foreness, South Knock buoy and Tongue Lightship for any wreckage or signs of drifter BLUE SKY. Search was continued on Monday 19th June and abandoned at nightfall on that day when STARFISH returned to harbour.
11. TONGUE LIGHT VESSEL was spoken, but had seen nothing: reported that the weather on the night of 13th/14th June was wind N (gale force from midnight) misty rain.
12. Two drifter's or small ship's ladders were picked up in position 51 degrees 27' N, 1 degree 17' E and 51 degrees 31' N, 1 degree 30' E
13. A copy of STARFISH letter of proceedings is attached
14. On Sunday 18th June, a body was washed ashore between Epple and Minnis Bays Description Well developed – height 6 ft. eyes – blue, hair – brown going bald from forehead – one tooth missing left upper jaw. Tattoo marks – left forearm large butterfly, clasped hands and bird with letter in bill, neck bird and flowers around the neck. Clothing – cotton drawers, flannel vest, blue overall combination suit, one blue waist belt. All clothing of service pattern. Lifebelt on body made of four cork squares in blue canvas material, marked STANDARD in white block letters
15. The body was placed in Birchington Mortuary
16. Reports of the recovery of wreckage continue to be received@
17. RECULVERS – broken part of steering wheel
18. MARGATE – piece of planking with BLUE SKY carved on it.
19. KINGSGATE – blacking brush marked J. GILCHRIST, lid of tool chest marked H.A. JOHNSON C.Shipwright
20. The cause of the loss of this vessel can be only conjecture but it is the opinion of local fishermen based on the position where wreckage has been washed ashore, that she grounded and broke up on the Kentish Knock' which seems a possible explanation, as very little error in her course from ELBOW LIGHTBUOY or non-allowance for tide might put her on shore there, if the visibility was insufficient to sight Kentish Knock Light.
21. The District Intelligence Officer, The Nore, has been sent to Margate to endeavour to piece together all the evidence obtainable.
22. A copy of this letter is being sent to Commander-in-chief Atlantic Fleet