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# Captain Griffiths Jones

by Herb Ford, Pitcairn Study Center, USA

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Captain Griffiths Jones was an exceptional doer of good on the earth, no question about it. I'm going to give a glimpse into his life, as to the good that came out of his life, and then quote his obituary – which is long and fraught with Adventist-ese, but still, I think, interesting:

From the *Adventist Review*, July 27, 1989

"In 1914 a Welsh Adventist missionary sea captain named Griffiths Jones accepted the challenge to take the gospel to the Solomons. He and his wife sailed their Adventist Herald ketch to Marovo Lagoon, purchased 40 acres of land, and built a leaf-covered house and a school.

"Thirty-four pupils, ages 6 to 60, enrolled, among them Chief Tatangu's sons Peo and Kata Rangoso.

"Kata Rangoso was among the first islanders baptized by Jones. ... At age 40, Kata Rangoso became director of the Solomon Islands Mission of Seventh-day Adventists. During the war (World War II) he trained first-aid parties and recruited rescue squads that saved the lives of 187 Australians and 27 Americans forced to parachute into the jungle or splash into the sea. (One

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of the Americans was named John F. Kennedy. For more on this story, see below.) For this outstanding service he received an Air Force Association plaque...”

Here is Griffiths F. Jones’ obituary, taken from the *Australasian Record of Seventh-day Adventists*, 7th October 1940.

“Griffiths Francis Jones was born May 11, 1864, at Hamefyl, Wales, and passed away at the Sydney Seventh-day Adventist Sanitarium Sabbath, September 14, 1940, in his 77th year.

“Early in life Brother Jones took to seafaring and subsequently qualified as a Master of the Mercantile Marine. At the age of twenty-three he was united in marriage to Marion Vallentine of Buckinghamshire, England, who fully shared the labors of his long and successful missionary life and predeceased him by a year and nine months.

“It was following his profession as Master Mariner that Captain Jones came upon a torn leaf of our English missionary paper ‘Present Truth.’ This created in his heart the desire to know more of the prophetic Word, and led him to investigate fully and accept in 1893 the teachings of the Seventh-day Adventist church. This truth he faithfully adhered to, and expounded until within a few days of his death.

“Soon after uniting with this body, Pastor and Mrs. Jones associated with the Drs. Kress in medical missionary work in England. In the year 1900 they sailed to the United States and entered Keene Academy (now Southwestern Adventist University), from which institution they were graduated from the Bible Worker’s course. The following year they were called to the Society Islands, where they commenced their long and fruitful foreign mission service which included some time spent on far-away Pitcairn. In the year 1904 these two pioneers were invited to work in Singapore, and subsequently they labored in Java, Sumatra, Borneo, and the Malay States.

“Just prior to the Great War of 1914-1918, Pastor and Mrs. Jones commenced their pioneering in the Western Solomon Islands, which has resulted in such a remarkable fruitage in souls won from heathenism. Among other South Sea islands where these devoted missionaries labored, might be mentioned Papua-New Guinea, New Caledonia, and Lord Howe Island.

“In addition to this, we find that for a time they were connected with city mission work in London, from whence

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they went to Algiers, Spain, Gibraltar, and South Africa. In all they visited and conducted meetings in some thirty-eight different countries and islands, representing approximately thirty-four languages.

“Pastor Jones was a man of deep piety and high culture. He was kind-hearted, humble, and yet very courageous. He possessed a wonderful faculty of dependence upon divine help and guidance, and could inspire others with his interesting experiences of providential openings into the darkest heathen islands. In the islands, where the name of ‘Jonese’ is known and revered, there are left to carry on the work scores of brown-skinned men and women who will hear of his passing with profound sorrow.

“Some three months ago Pastor Jones returned from his last visit to the New Caledonia islands with very definite plans to extend quickly the work in that field. His last illness overtook him just as the recent Annual Council was commencing at Wahroonga. His last days were spent in the Wahroonga (Sydney) Sanitarium, where he was tenderly cared for and visited by a number of his friends.

“On Sabbath afternoon, September 14, we laid him to rest in the Northern Suburbs cemetery, Sydney, in the same grave as his life-companion, there to await together ‘the crown of eternal life’ on the resurrection morn. As Pastor Watson said in his funeral address, it may truthfully be said of him: ‘Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord from henceforth: Yea, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labors; and their works do follow them.’ A large number of friends attended the services at the Wahroonga church and at the graveside, including a number of his fellow ministers. ... The words of the hymn sung as a double quartette fittingly expressed the prevailing feelings of all sympathizing hearts:

“There is sweet rest for feet now weary  
In the rugged, upward way;  
There is a morn when midnight dreary  
Shall be lost in perfect day.

“Soon to that city, bright, eternal,  
Weary pilgrims all shall go;  
Soon we shall rest in pastures vernal,  
Where life’s waters ceaseless flow.”

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## More on that John F. Kennedy connection

by Herb Ford

Lately I've been researching the background of a sea-captain-turned-missionary, and the reason I've been researching him is that he was such a productive and helpful friend while he served on Pitcairn Island in a relatively short period of time – from 1901 to 1903.

He was Griffiths Francis Jones, who along with his wife, Marion Vallentine, brought many helpful talents that did Pitcairn nothing but good during the few years they were on our favorite island.

Then, just early last week I read an article from the *Adventist Review* that gives another little glimpse into Jones' life: that he was the teacher, of the two Solomon Islands students who saved the life of later to be U.S. President John F. Kennedy and members of his crew when his PT boat was rammed by a Japanese destroyer during World War II.

Some may be interested in reading the *Review* article below.

Noted in the article is the name of another Jones' student, Kata Rangoso. He also played a part in World War II rescue. Here is the note of it from the Seventh-day Adventist Encyclopedia:

“RANGOSO, KATA (1902-1954) ... When European leaders were evacuated during World War II, he was left in charge of the SDA work in the Solomon Islands. In spite of difficulties and even persecution, he discharged his responsibilities with distinction. Even before the war overtook the Solomons he laid plans for the preservation of mission property, including ships and personal effects. He also organized operations for rescuing allied servicemen, and according to records, some 200 men owed their lives to his help during that time...”

Griffiths Francis Jones had a remarkable grasp of foreign languages. He served as a missionary in 38 countries and used 34 different languages in his missionary work in those countries.

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# As World Remembers Kennedy, Few Know How Adventists Saved Him in World War II

**Posted November 21, 2013**

**By Richard De Lisser, British Union Conference**

November 22 is the 50th anniversary of the assassination of, John Fitzgerald Kennedy (JFK), the 34th President of the United States of America. At just 43, Kennedy was the youngest person to be elected president, was the first Roman Catholic elected to the office, and was the first president born in the 20th century!

However his 1036-day presidency might not have happened had it not been for a group of British-trained Seventh-day Adventists who saved his life in 1943.

Kennedy and members of his crew were patrolling on board a PT-109 (Patrol Torpedo boat) off the coast of Kolombangara, one of the Solomon Islands, during World War II when their torpedo boat was rammed by a Japanese destroyer, killing two crew members. JFK, a junior lieutenant and 10 other crew members survived in the water as their boat sank but were rescued by Biuku Gasa and Eroni Kumana, former Seventh-day Adventist students from the Solomon Islands Mission School.

As the rescue ensued Kennedy, his crew, and their rescuers sang the familiar song, 'Yes, Jesus Loves Me' a song Kumana and Gasa had learnt at the feet of Griffith Francis Jones, (1864-1940).

Griffith Jones was a British missionary, born in Wales. He was captain of a British merchant vessel until 1893 when he read a tract fragment. Accepting the Seventh-day Adventist faith, he left seafaring and began a quest to become a medical missionary worker.

Captain Jones and his wife Marion Vallentine began searching for a mission preparatory school. Since there were no such school in England, they wrote for information about those in America. They eventually chose the industrial institution in Keene, Texas, known as Keene Industrial Academy.

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According to a story in *The Youth's Instructor*, January 11, 1949, "In the year 1900 they arrived in Texas to find the school of their choice out in a desolate, windswept area among small scrub oaks. There were only a few partially completed buildings; and teachers and students alike then lived in tiny, weather-beaten houses that were a far cry from the homes they had both left in England. However; they had purposed to make the best of whatever came, and they soon made themselves as comfortable as possible in one of the rural dwellings.

"When school opened, they both enrolled in the Bible instructor's course, but it was probably here that they obtained an even more important foundation for the work that lay ahead of them. Captain Jones and his wife learned to labor with their hands as perhaps they had never done before."

In Keene, Captain and Mrs. Jones prepared for the Lord's work, willing to sacrifice the mariner life that he loved. Little did they know that he was destined to become captain of his own vessel, the *Advent Herald*, in the South Pacific. Their initial mission service was in the Society Islands and, in 1903, the Captain was ordained so he could baptize his many converts. In 1904 the Joneses pioneered in Singapore, then in Java, Sumatra, Borneo, and the Malay States.

In 1914, when the Adventist Church entered the still-primitive Solomon Islands, the Joneses volunteered for the job. For some time their only home would be the small mission launch. They began at once to master the local language, work out an alphabet, and win the confidence of the local populace.

Thirty-three days after picking his mission site, Jones opened his school with 34 pupils including Gasa and Kumana. That Sabbath he held services for 50 carefully instructed islanders, demonstrating his facility with languages by addressing them twice in their native tongue. Afterwards he convinced a prominent local chieftain to send his sons to the school. One son, a future chief named Kata Rangoso, eventually directed all Seventh-day Adventist work in the Solomon Islands.

John Fitzgerald Kennedy's presidency might not have been were it not for the heroism of two Adventist-schooled students, Biuku Gasa and Eroni Kumana, who received their training for life from British born missionaries Captain and Mrs. Griffith Jones.

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*The following is taken from the excellent website of the Pitcairn Study Center: <http://library.puc.edu/pitcairn/pitcairn/sea-tales3.shtml> and also Herb Ford's amazingly useful book, *Pitcairn - Port of Call*.*

### *Pitcairn II: Battered, Buffeted for 30 Days*

With a loan of \$436 from the British Consul in Tahiti, the Pitcairners purchased a 15-ton cutter which they name *Pitcairn II*. The ship was to be used for missionary and trading purposes.

Griffiths F. Jones, a former seaman, along with five Pitcairners were selected to sail the vessel from Papeete to Pitcairn Island. Of the ship and the voyage Jones writes:

"Our ship was an old wreck taken from the Papeete reef, a cutter (one-mast boat) thirty feet long, patched up, and offered as a tempting bait to the Pitcairners. But who would navigate such an old craft 1,250 miles as the crow flies to Pitcairn Island? Somehow I felt it was my duty to do so. It was a fearful undertaking and an awful trip, as likewise were other trips that followed.

"We struck such a storm, with head wind and high seas, that it buffeted and battered us for thirty days. The elements defied our ever getting to our destination. When we were in the lee of the Tuamotu Islands, a tidal wave swept over them. It was reported that thirty vessels were wrecked, and that ours was among them. Homes and trees, with people astride, were floated to sea and lost.

"The rain continued day and night, and we had not a stitch of dry clothes into which to change. We wrung out our garments and put them on again; our teeth chattered. Now and again we would drop the sails, and the crew would jump into the mountainous seas to get warm for the sea water was warmer than the air. Then those painful boils came on our knee joints, and there was no rest.

"Food and water ran short, and since the sun did not shine, we could not get our position. Our chronometer was an old secondhand one, bought at Papeete, which I found later to be in great error. I dared not show the crew my fears, for the use of dead reckoning alone to navigate in a storm is not assuring. The fact was that we could never find Pitcairn or any other place with a bad chronometer, and truly, under those unfortunate circumstances we were lost. But we plodded on,

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and I said nothing and prayed much, depending also upon my nautical judgment.

"Thirty days of this kind of sailing was wearing us all out. ... One evening on the thirtieth day, I noticed a flight of sea birds winging their way somewhere, and I took a compass bearing on their flight and decided they were making for Oeno reef for the night, and would soon be there for the night was coming on; so I judged that my distance off and set my course to Pitcairn.

"Immediately the wind changed to fair. This was my last hope. But what if the judgment of my position should be wrong? What if Pitcairn was not in sight in the morning? I slept little that night, and dropped the sails before daylight, lest we should overrun the island.

"It was a clear morning with a clear horizon. I had exceptionally keen eyes, and my crew was as keen as myself. I can never forget my hopeless and lost feeling as I slowly came down from aloft and gave orders to hoist the sails again.

"You may not believe in God's miracles and wonders as in olden days, but I do, for I have experienced a few.

"They that go down to the sea in ships, that do business in great waters; these see the works of the Lord, and His wonders in the deep. ... They reel to and fro, ... and are at their wit's end. Then they cry unto the Lord in their distresses. ... Then are they glad; ... so He brings them unto their desired haven. Oh that men would praise the Lord for His goodness, and for His wonderful works to the children of men!"

"The cry of the soul reached heaven. To our wonderful surprise Pitcairn Island loomed in sight only a few miles dead ahead at that instant.

For the next twelve months Jones would sail the cutter between Pitcairn and Mangareva, trying without notable success to teach the Pitcairners navigation skills. The vessel carried cargoes of bananas, coconuts, and poultry among other products. At last Jones handed the boat over to George Warren, one of the Island's leaders.