*Dear Mr and Mrs Jackson,*

*Your letter reached me this afternoon, having been forwarded from Fort Wallington, and I know you will appreciate an immediate answer.*

*First of all allow me to say that if I can be of any assistance to you by writing, then I am only too pleased to be able to do so. As Harry Brown has already told you, I am the sole survivor of the wireless staff, and a finer bunch of lads would be hard to find.*

*Yes, I knew your son very well because I come from Essex – a little place called Grays – and your lad and I were quite ‘chummy’ over the fact that we were both East Anglians.*

*Your boy ‘Jacks’ as we called him - was liked by everyone on the staff. He was quite unassuming and of a generous nature. He often spoke of Downham Market. He had the making of a good operator, and was held in high esteem of the Chief Telegraphist, who had marked him down for future reference.*

*Naturally enough as to the sinking of the ship, I can only give my own version of it. We were struck without warning shortly after 1pm on Monday afternoon, November  24th, and I was on watch at the time in the wireless office. Your son was not on watch at the time and I can only assume that, in common with the remainder of the boys, he was sleeping on the upper deck. We in the wireless office stuck there doing our best to get out an SOS, but unfortunately a second torpedo struck the magazine just aft of the office, blew the receivers, transmitters and the wireless staff all over the place. After that it was every man for himself and I reached the upper deck and went into the water by running down the ship’s side. That was all in about six minutes. Soon after the ship quickly listed and then sank, approximately 25 minutes past 1 pm.*

*There were lots of people in the water but only one boat could be lowered in the short time and that smashed against the side and floundered.*

*I kept afloat, found a large piece of wreckage to which I clung until a carley raft ( an egg-shaped flat bottomed raft) picked me up. After that it was just a case of floating around picking up any other fortunate chap. Doubtless Harry Brown has told you his story, so I have no wish to harp upon that, except that it was plain hell for four days, watching people die, one of whom was our own Chief P.O. Telegraphist. Your son was not in my raft and I never saw him.*

*You know the worst now, and much as I realise how futile condolences are, I would like to offer mine to you. It doesn’t seem fair, it is not fair, that men like these should die at an age when the world is opening out for them.*

*Thank you for you solitude, and I am glad to say that my health is back to normal, thanks to my wife’s tender care and patience. My legs, arms and body are badly scarred and will ever remain so, I regret to add. This is my second mishap since the war started as I was previously on board the ‘Royal Oak’ when she sank in Scapa Flow.*

*At present I am serving on a Shore Wireless Station, and it is grand. If I never see a ship again, it won’t worry me – and that is honest anyway.*

*There you are. I’ve given you the truth, maybe a little blunt, but nevertheless, the truth. If there is any more I can do, please write again and you will find a ready answer - Thank you and Good Luck.*

*Yours very sincerely*

*Fred K. Hawks.*