

Copy of Master Attendant's Report dated 6th March 1956, to the Chairman.

Fire on m.v. TRICOLOR

I have the honour to forward the following report on the above subject.

At 1015 hrs. on Tuesday, 28th February 1956, I received a phone call from Mr. Clunie of Messrs. United Liners, the Agents of the m.v. TRICOLOR, to say that there was a fire in No. 3 Hold of the vessel lying at No. 3 Hastings Buoy.

I immediately despatched the Harbour Master who took the fire float FIREFLY to investigate.

At 1118 hrs. the following message was received from the Harbour Master -

"No. 3 Hatch 'tween deck jute cargo on fire stop Advisable send fire brigade personnel stop Maung Aung".

The Central Fire Station was contacted and a launch made ready to despatch Fire Brigade personnel and the following message sent to TRICOLOR -

"Your 281118 stop Fire Brigade personnel being despatched in CURLEW stop IWT Tug PANHLAING is despatched to standby stop all B.O.C. Tugs on standby".

At 1220 hrs. a further message was received from TRICOLOR.

"Ship getting listed stop cannot get at fire stop gas cutters necessary to cut hole on ship side".

The Workshops were immediately contacted to send gas cutting gear and a message sent at 1235 hrs.

"Your 281220 stop Gas cutting equipment being sent".

At 1238 hrs. a further message was received.

"Inform Central Fire Station stop Send more men and two sets of smoke helmets urgently".

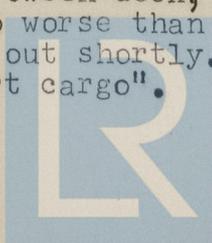
This was phoned at once.

At 1407 hrs. I sent the following to TRICOLOR -

"Report situation".

At 1420 hrs. I received the following from TRICOLOR -

"Fire confined to No. 3 tween deck, firemen going down. Getting no worse than before should be able to put out shortly. Stevedore going to discharge part cargo".



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At 1505 hrs. I sent another message to TRICOLOR -

"Report progress. Release any craft no longer required. Acknowledge and report craft released".

At 1522 hrs. I received the following from TRICOLOR -

"Fire now seems out of control. Believe spread down to lower tween deck. Your presence and Chief of Fire Brigade requested urgently".

I immediately reported this to you and asked that the Chief of the Fire Brigade be requested to come to the ship. I then went down to Judah Ezekiel Street Jetty, collected one Inner Pilots' boat's crew and towed them down to the TRICOLOR at No.3 Hastings Buoy.

When I got aboard, I contacted the Captain and the Agent and found the situation to be as follows -

The vessel had a list of 8° to starboard. Six hoses from FIREFLY and five hoses from TRUSTY were pumping water into No.3 Hatch, each side of the midship accommodation through holes cut in the deck and into No.2 Hatch as well as the vessel's own hoses.

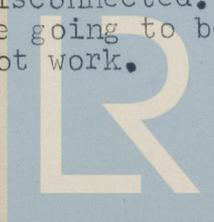
All the electrical cables from the Bridge House forward were cut so that there was no power on; the windlass or foredeck winches and the steering gear on the bridge out of action. The time would then be about 1700 hrs.

The problem now was if we continued to pump water into the ship she would capsize, and in doing so may have jammed the channel or run the fuel oil into the fire causing a dangerous situation in the harbour and at the Syriam Oil Moorings. Secondly if we stopped pumping, then the fire would rapidly spread through the cargo and been equally dangerous to both the harbour and Syriam Oil Moorings.

There appeared to be no alternative but to try and move the ship from the danger area and secondly to try to eliminate as far as possible the danger of capsizing so that we could continue to fight the fire.

I discussed this with the Agent and Captain and said that I would beach the vessel to prevent capsizing and we could then fight the fire, put it out and discharge sufficient cargo to refloat the vessel. The Chief Engineer was called and asked to make ready his engines and to try and trim the vessel upright for beaching. The Chief Engineer reported that because of the list only the Port engine could be worked.

I was then faced with taking the ship away from the buoy without the assistance of the windlass, the vessel having to be steered from aft by the emergency gear and only one engine working. I consulted the tide book and found it was high water at 1759 hrs. so I said I would wait for half an hour to let the tide ease off. In the meantime I had a slip wire run through the ring of the buoy and all the fire hoses from the FIREFLY and TRUSTY disconnected. I asked that a message be sent saying we were going to beach the vessel but was told the wireless would not work.



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At about 1750 hrs. we slacked down the cable on to the slip wire, knocked out the pin of the shackle and slipped from the buoy. There were no lights on the bridge and no compass to check so that navigation was not easy.

At about 1830 hrs. the vessel had been trimmed upright and the starboard engine started. I navigated down the ordinary channel till I was below the Upper Chokey buoy then I turned to starboard and came up behind the Liffey Shoal. At this time the NATHAMEE was sighted coming in from survey. She was called over and commenced to take soundings as we headed in to the shoal. The draft of the vessel before the fire had been 27'4" but with the weight of the water in her I estimated she would be about 28 ft. We ran in, in a northerly direction until the soundings given were 25 ft. The ship appeared to be stopped and so the anchor was let go and soundings made round the ship; this would be about 1915 hrs. Shortly afterwards the ship started to swing round and headed S.S.W.

How this came about I fail to understand because at this time the ebb tide should have been well established.

However, the vessel lay quiet and stayed dead upright throughout the ebb.

All hands now concentrated on fighting the fire. Both FIREFLY and TRUSTY were alongside and hoses connected.

A message was sent through NATHAMEE at 1930 hrs.

"TRICOLOR beached ~~beached~~ Liffey Sands. Endeavouring to put out fire".

Around midnight it seemed that the fire was out in No.3 Upper tween deck. Smoke was still coming from the fore end; the firemen led by the Harbour Master went down the hatch and started to try and get at the fire end but it was obvious that the fire had spread back to No.2 Hatch through the lower tween deck. Two hoses were kept going in No.3 and all hands turned to No.2 Hatch. The fire seemed to have a very strong hold here.

At low water 0142 hrs. on the 29th the draft was read and it showed 14 ft. forward and 14 ft. 6 ins. aft and the vessel still dead upright.

At 0400 hrs. the vessel took a swing to port of about 30 degrees. The Captain, Chief Officer and myself went up on the forecastle head and slacked down the cable but the chain just ran down into the water. The vessel did not appear to be moving.

Fire was still raging in No.2 Hatch and slight smoke again started at No.3 Hatch.

At 0640 hrs. a message was sent -

"Fire spread to No.2 Lower Hold".

At 0730 hrs. Inner Pilot Mr. Jones boarded to relieve the Harbour Master and myself who had been on duty since the outbreak of the fire.

At 1055 hrs. the following signal was sent from TRICOLOR -

"Fire raging in No.2 and No.3 Jute Cargo Hatch.

Bridge and foreship. Critical. Beached the ship on 25 ft. high water last night 1800 stop lower hold 2 and 3 21 ft. of water. Fire extinguishing assisted by Harbour Brigade stop Engine Room in working condition. Pumping Engine room and four hatch. Fire cut off from deep tanks, engine room and aft deck stop Cargo on board 8200 tons inclusive 6000 Jute. Draft 27'4" at 1115".

The Fire Officer on board sent the following -

"Send revolving nozzles and diffuser nozzle together with dividing beachings".

and at 1115 -

"Please expedite fresh water. PANHLAING and TRUSTY urgently require water".

At 1353 the following from TRICOLOR-

"Fire raging in Nos.2 and 3. Situation critical for No.3 bridge and foreship. Engine room in working condition. Pumping Engine Room and 4 holes stop 2 and 3 lower holds about 27 ft. water stop Cable required 120 MM 2"

At 1550 hrs. the following was sent to TRICOLOR -

"Can supply up to 300 yds rubber insulated braided single core cable size point two square inch. Also some point one square inch which could be doubled up. Is this suitable and what length required".

This was in reply to a request for cable to endeavour to get power on to the fore deck.

At 1555 hrs. the following was sent to TRICOLOR -

"In collaboration with Master and Mr.Lewis, Fire Chief request latest information regarding fire also any details of trim etc."

At 1811 hrs. the following was received from TRICOLOR -

"Fire in No.2 Hold under control stop Ship listing about seven degrees to starboard. Now hosing No.3 Hold".

At this stage the Harbour Master returned to the ship and relieved the Pilot Mr.Nathan.

At 2010 hrs. the following from TRICOLOR -

"Please send Police party to patrol TRICOLOR at Liffey Sands to stop unauthorised persons boarding ship. Urgent".

At 2015 hrs. the following from TRICOLOR -

"Relieved Mr.Nathan. Stop Pronounced heavy list soon after Mr.Nathan left Stop For safety against capsizing all personnel and craft ordered to leave ship at 1840 hrs. Ship not abandoned yet stop our craft and five men standing by to board again if everything in order. Stop Starboard deck awash

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at 1740 hrs. Stop Captain standing by with me
Stop Pass above message to Chairman and to my
wife that I am safe".

At 2110 hrs. the following was sent to TRICOLOR -
"Police partol arriving within one hour".

At 2130 hrs. received from TRICOLOR -

"All personnel safely off the ship stop Went
round ship twice and took in Captain and one
Officer Stop At 1940 hrs. starboard scuppers
awash stop FIREFLY TRUSTY NATHAMEE standing by
also Captain and part crew stop remaining crew
left for Rangoon on PANHLAING Stop Fire personnel
standing by on FIREFLY Stop Police patrol arriving
within one hour Stop Ship not abandoned by Captain
yet stop Intend boarding if all in order".

At 2345 hrs. the following from TRICOLOR -

"Ship did not capsize but list far too great and
considered unsafe to stay alongside. Leaving
ship in hurry all fire hoses left behind Stop
TRUSTY returned to town with remainder of crew
Stop FIREFLY NATHAMEE Police Launch and Nautical
Adviser with Captain standing by Stop Nautical
Adviser agrees with me regards risk of staying
alongside and requests your presence tomorrow
morning stop He will be here whole night Stop
Fire very strong at No.2 now stop Nothing much
can be done Nos.2 and 3 lower hold flooded".

At 0315 hrs. on the 1st March the following was
received from the Nautical Adviser -

"TRICOLOR suspect broke her back at 0200 fire still
raging No.2 stop starboard side corrugated and
deck in way of No.3 raised stop crew ashore
Master, Mate and Chief Engineer standing by" Waugh.

At 0320 hrs. the following from Harbour Master -

"Please refer to Nautical Adviser's signal stop
am now standing by the ship in case of oil fire
and will try water on burning part if possible".

At 0635 hrs. from Harbour Master -

"Nothing can be done stop fog cleared up at 0630
Found ship broken her back at No.3 Hatch stop No.3
well ablaze and starting on bridge stop starboard
gunwhales fore port awash at high water stop
Fuel on FIREFLY 400 gallons".

I left my house shortly after six and got a launch
out to the TRICOLOR to find all tugs and launches standing
off the ship. As the ebb tide was making I boarded
FIREFLY and closed the ship with the nozzles working,
endeavoured to confine the fire to No.2 Hatch by spraying
over No.3 Hatch, the bridge and No.1 Hatch. This we
continued to do until the Engineer on the FIREFLY reported
he was almost out of fuel. I returned to NATHAMEE and
despatched the FIREFLY with Harbour Master to refuel and
sent the following signal at 0950 hrs. -

"Firefly being despatched for fuel stop please.

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expedite Stop heavy oil fire No.2 Hatch cannot fight with water Stop can B.O.C. supply foam fighters".

At 1150 hrs. I received the following -

"TRUSTY with an available foam fighting equipment some snacks with five extra ratings despatched at 1045 stop fire brigade relief personnel and foam equipment from B.O.C. and Burma Navy will be despatched as soon as possible".

Meanwhile the FIREFLY returned and I transferred back to her and we went in again to spray No.3 and the bridge. At this stage several loud cracks were heard from No.3 Hatch and oil started to rise to the surface close to the FIREFLY. We continued with spraying till the flood tide made at about 1500 hrs. We then turned the FIREFLY round and anchored to the flood and dropped back on the cables until the two after nozzles would reach.

Oil was still seeping out of the starboard side of No.3 and I kept a very careful watch on it because it was all about the FIREFLY. Spraying continued until 1700 hrs. when the rise of tide had started to run into the fire raging in No.2 Hatch. At this stage I thought it prudent to heave up anchor and get clear as it was only a matter of time before the oil seeping from No.3 Hatch would run into No.2 Hatch and flash back to No.3 and we would have been in the middle of it. This was borne out, as shortly after we left flames started to come out of the break at No.3 Hatch. The FIREFLY was anchored close by and at about 1850 hrs. I transferred to the NATHAMEE and sent the following signal -

"Situation hopeless stop No.1 Hatch and deep tank now on fire stop alert Fire patrols Dunneedaw and Harbour in case of burning oil on surface of water Stop vessel has broken in two and oil leaking from bunkers".

At about 2030 hrs. the Engine Room caught fire and there were several explosions. The following broadcast was sent at 2040 hrs.

"IWTB(R), BOC, C.O. Burma Navy. Danger of fire owing to oil leaking from TRICOLOR exists in Liffey Reach, Pegu River, Pazundaung Creek and Inner Harbour Stop Please take all precautions by avoiding all naked lights and lighted material being thrown into river".

At 2114 hrs. the following signal was sent -

"Water now ignited Stop Important Tanker must not enter harbour Repeat Tanker must not enter harbour Stop Pilot Vessel and Senior Pilot please acknowledge as understood Stop Tanker to stay on station until further instructions from Harbour Master or M.A. Stop Please inform all shipping".

At 2125 hrs. the following message was broadcast -

"Water is now ignited due to oil spreading out from ship Stop pass message to B.O.C., Chief Fire Officer, Burma Navy, I.W.T., A.O.F., Port Police and Central Fire Brigade for necessary precautions Stop Secretary to be informed who will also contact all

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above authorities Stop XYU to confirm having passed message to above authorities".

At 2225 hrs. the following was received from the Pilot Vessel -

"Your 012114 Stop acknowledged by Senior Pilot British Tenacity and all Pilots on board Stop am proceeding to pick up Pilots from British Tenacity to return to town".

At 2311 hrs. the following from Chairman -

"Your 012125 stop all authorities informed.

From 2100 hrs. onwards the oil had been spreading out all along the starboard side of the ship and after igniting was fanned by the Southerly wind all over the vessel. From our position to the south there was just a curtain of flame going over the ship. Several explosions were coming from the engine room and the ship's whistle started to blow in a most eerie way.

A continuous watch was kept on the ship from the NATHAMEE and the FIREFLY; at about 0200 hrs. on the 2nd the funnel was seen to fall over amongst the flames.

At about 0430 hrs. heavy fog shut down and only the sound of the fire was heard and at 0620 hrs. a very violent explosion was heard in the fog followed by several hissing sounds as if red hot material was falling into the water.

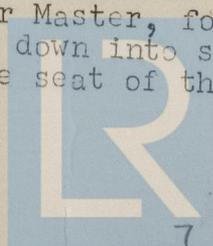
When the fog lifted a bit at 0700 hrs. we moved in close to the vessel to find the fire still raging mainly at No.4 Hatch and the after deck. Oil was still alight in the crack at No.3 while smoke was coming from No.1, No.2 and No.5 Hatches.

The bridge structure was burnt out as was the accommodation round the engine room and boat deck. We stayed in the vicinity until the ebb tide made about 0900 hrs. and I then decided to call off the tugs and return to town. No further firefighting was possible and the crew of the Tugs had been on continuous duty for over seventy hours. I brought the Master, Chief Officer and Chief Engineer ashore and arranged for the Third Officer to go down in the TRUSTY to keep watch.

The Third Officer and Second Officer have alternatively kept watch and at the time of writing this report on Monday, 5th March, the vessel was still burning fore and aft.

I greatly regret having to report that I consider the vessel to be a total loss and wish to record the very loyal service rendered by all who assisted in trying to put out this fire. The men from the Central Fire Brigade, the B.O.C. and the I.W.T. are to be commended for their assistance.

From our own Board I would like to make special mention of U Maung Aung, Harbour Master, for courage and devotion to duty in leading men down into smoke filled holds in an effort to get at the seat of the fire.



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Mr. Samuels, Assistant Officer, Flotilla, for his unflagging efforts driving the men in manning hoses and arranging for supplies of food, etc. so that the fire-fighting could be kept up continuously.

The Inland Masters of the FIREFLY, TRUSTY and NATHAMEE for the way in which they handled their vessels under severe strain over long hours.

In conclusion I would like to state that this Port is ill-equipped to fight fires of this nature and has no means at all of dealing with an oil fire. Once the vessel broke her back and the oil from the bunkers joined in with the jute fire our task was hopeless. Why the ship broke her back is difficult to explain as from all surveys, the ground appears to be as nearly flat as anywhere in the river and with all the extra weight of water on board, the vessel should not have moved. I can only assume that she was on a hard ridge under No. 3 which caused her to pivot and then to break her back as the tide went down.

JMM



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