

Hongkong, Friday, February 20, 1959.

Board Finds Ian Crouch Lost With All On Board Casualty Occurred During Storm

The Ian Crouch was lost with all persons on board sometime between Sept. 27 and 29, the Marine Board inquiring into the disappearance of the vessel, found yesterday.

The Board held that there was sufficient evidence to indicate on the balance of probability that the Ian Crouch was lost, and that the casualty occurred during a tropical storm about 100 to 150 nautical miles southeast of Hongkong.

The board further held that no blame for the vessel's loss could be attached to any person concerned in her construction, manning and operation or to the authorities in Hongkong responsible for her clearance.

The board consisted of Mr. Justice J. R. Gregg, as president; and Capt. J. Perks, DSC, R.N., Capt. James Wood, Extra Master; Capt. C. W. Ostenfeld, Extra Master; and Mr. O. E. Fingelsen, naval architect.

The Ian Crouch, an auxiliary schooner built locally, was on her maiden and delivery voyage to Port Adelaide, South Australia. She sailed from Hongkong on Sept. 26, 1958.

The findings of the board were:

"1. That while there is no direct evidence as to the precise cause of the casualty, there is sufficient evidence to indicate on the balance of probability, that the vessel Ian Crouch was lost, with all persons on board, some time between Sept. 27 and Sept. 29, 1958 and we find accordingly.

"2. That this casualty occurred during a tropical storm about 100-150 nautical miles southeast of Hongkong.

"3. That the stability of the vessel on her departure from Hongkong, was adequate; and that her construction was up to standard strength.

"4. That the vessel was seaworthy.

"5. That the vessel was manned by competent officers and crew.

"6. That the vessel carried adequate life saving, fire fighting, radio and navigation equipment; and also carried sufficient food and fuel for a non-stop voyage to Port Adelaide.

"7. That the ballast in the hold and in the fore-castle of the vessel would not be likely to shift except under very severe storm conditions.

"8. That the Marine Department were justified in granting the vessel port clearance.

Presumed To Be Dead

"9. That Mr. John Greig, owner's representative, was on board the vessel as a passenger at the time she became a casualty; and is now presumed by us to be dead with the others on board.

"10. That, in view of our finding under paragraph 1 above, it is unnecessary to consider the possibility of the vessel's seizure or destruction by a foreign power or by pirates. In any event there is sufficient evidence to show that it would be unlikely that either could have occurred.

"11. That, taking all existing circumstances into consideration, the owners started search operations as promptly as they could reasonably be expected to do.

"12. That the search conducted under the direction of Captain Bull, Director of Navigation, Commonwealth of Australia, was thorough and sufficient.

"13. That, on the evidence adduced, no blame or responsibility for the vessel's loss can attach to any person concerned in her construction, manning and operation, or to the authorities in Hongkong responsible for her clearance.

"14. That the vessel was not registered in Hongkong; but had been issued with a pass under section 23 of the Merchant Shipping Act 1894 which had the same effect as a certificate of registry."

The board remarked that the installation of the two 10-ton cranes and of the counterbalancing ballast in the fore-castle created a total extra top weight of 40 tons. (Continued on Page 11 Col. 5)

Ian Crouch

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"It is possible that the extra top weight of some 40 tons could, alone or together with a possible shifting of the hold ballast during a severe tropical storm, have caused the vessel to capsize; but, while there is room for speculation on this score, there is no evidence as to the extent that these factors operated, if at all," the board held.

Tropical Storm

The board also pointed out a "further possible cause of the vessel's loss." It said that "would be the carrying of sails at the time she entered the area of what was apparently an unexpected tropical storm of considerable violence. The vessel had sails on board for use and sails had apparently been hoisted and tried out by her master before she left Hongkong."

The storm which unexpectedly occurred late on Sept. 27 or Sept. 28 lay directly in the path of the Ian Crouch, and the board found that she "entered this storm area probably unaware of its existence.

Mr. Simon Li, Crown Counsel assisted the board in the enquiry.

Mr. G. R. Sneath represented the Director of Marine; Mr. H. Caine represented the owners of the schooner, Ian Crouch Ltd.; Mr. R. Dennis appeared for the dependents of Capt. Berry, the master of the Ian Crouch, and Mr. P. Remedios represented the Cheoy Lee Shipyard.

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