

"SAM" SHIP'S LISTING AND ABANDONMENT

"Leicester" Inquiry Opened

EVIDENCE ON BALLAST DATA REVEALS "SAMKEY" ERROR

The formal investigation into the heavy listing and abandonment of the 266-ton Liberty-type steamer *Leicester* (ex *Samesk*), owned by the Federal Steam Navigation Company, Ltd., London, was opened in London yesterday. The vessel was abandoned in the Atlantic Ocean, on Sept. 16, 1948, with the loss of six lives. Mr. K. S. Carpmel, K.C., sitting as Wreck Commissioner, is conducting the inquiry, with Captain J. P. Thomson, Commander W. A. Williamson and Mr. E. F. Spanner as assessors. After Counsel for the Ministry had given details of the casualties, during which he stated that when the vessel was inspected at Bermuda (where she was towed) prior to her subsequent stranding, there did not appear to be anything the matter with her hull, evidence was given with regard to her ballast quantities. References were made to the case of the missing *Samkey*, and it was revealed that that vessel had been supplied with dry ballast taken from land pits, and not Thames ballast, which, it was indicated, made irrelevant certain assumptions reached then.

Mr. Waldo Porges appeared for the Minister of Transport; Mr. Roland Adams, K.C., and Mr. H. V. Brandon, for the owners, the Federal Steam Navigation Company, Ltd., London and the master; Mr. J. V. Naisby, K.C., and Mr. Guy N. Porges for R. & H. Green & Silley Weir, shiprepairers; Mr. P. F. Broadhead, Messrs. Ingledew, Brown, Bennison & Partners, for the Navigators' and Engineers' Union and the Radio Officers' Union, on behalf of the second and third officers and the dependants of a deceased officer; and Mr. Neil Maclean for the National Union of Seamen.

Mr. PORGES explained that the *Leicester* was one of the "Sam" ships. In weather of hurricane force she took a very substantial permanent list and was abandoned with the loss of six members of her crew of 45. The vessel was afterwards found and towed into anchorage and then subsequently she was driven ashore, salvaged and was now afloat. September 14 was the day that trouble began, and the morning of the 16th was the day the vessel was abandoned. Six men lost their lives, a radio officer, carpenter, third engineer, an able seaman, donkeyman-greaser and steward-in-charge.

Mr. Porges said the vessel was built in 1944 by the Bethlehem Fairfield Shipyard, Inc., at Baltimore. She had four lifeboats and one of these was a motor lifeboat. Her life-saving appliances were inspected by the Ministry of Transport in March, 1948, and were certified as being in a satisfactory condition. As far as could be ascertained there was no complaint as to her classification or life-saving appliances. The vessel sailed from Newbury on Sept. 4, 1948, for New York. She had in her certain quantities of fresh water and oil, and some lead ballast, which consisted mostly of heavy iron. The other ballast was 40 tons of pit ballast. She was fitted with shifting boards, which were not open. Her sailing draught was 11 ft. 6 in. forward and 19 ft. 2 in. aft, giving a mean sailing draught of 15 ft. 4 in. On Sept. 14, the draught was 10 ft. forward and 18 ft. 11 in. aft, giving a mean of 14 ft. 5 in.

HURRICANE WARNING

Mr. Porges went on to describe the details of the voyage. He said the evidence was that the vessel sailed with solid ballast trimmed level from side to side with a slight downward trend fore and aft at the ends. She was, generally speaking, on a course of 263 deg. or 264 deg. and making about 11 knots. On Sept. 9 and 10 she experienced some rather bad weather but behaved very well. On Sept. 14, at 11 a.m. ship's time—and ship's time was nearly four hours earlier than G.M.T.—she received a hurricane warning. The hurricane at that time was about 400 miles south-west of her. At noon the course of the vessel was altered to south, because the master did not think that she would be able to get across the track of the hurricane. He therefore decided to try to stay to the east of it. The weather deteriorated during the afternoon, and the wind became force eight or nine in the evening with a rough sea and sudden swell. The vessel was still behaving normally, although her speed was reduced at 19 00 hours and again at 20 00 hours. Between those times she did only four knots according to the log reading, and she had some difficulty in steering.

"About 20 minutes after midnight on the morning of the 15th, the vessel gave a very heavy roll," Mr. Porges said. "She then had the wind on her starboard side and was said to have trembled. As a result of this lurch the vessel did not recover, but remained listing about 30 deg. to port. No one appears to have heard anything to indicate a shift of ballast, but the master assumed that something of that kind might have happened. He gave orders to pump oil from the No. 3 deep tank, port, to No. 3, starboard, and to fill No. 3 double-bottom tank on the starboard side. Those orders were carried out by word of mouth and were begun to be operated.

"But shortly afterwards the vessel took what is described as another heavy lurch to port and she groaned violently; and the master thinks that her permanent list thereafter was about 50 degrees. It was then impossible to fill the tank on the starboard side with sea water; and, of course, the attempt to shift the oil had only just begun, and the chief officer will say that the operation would have taken some one and a half hours or so. Just about the time of the second lurch the master gave orders to cut the falls of the two port lifeboats, and the chief officer was told to carry out that order.

LIFEBOAT MISUNDERSTANDING

"Owing to some misunderstanding—I will put it that way for the moment—certain members of the crew appeared to have got into No. 4 lifeboat, and when operations were being carried out on that lifeboat, I think the evidence will be that some got out; but before the radio officer and third engineer had done so, the boat was released in some way and they were lost. Very shortly after that another member of the crew was seen to hurtle across the deck and failed to stop, and he was also lost."

Mr. Porges said that at about 4 a.m. the engines of the vessel were stopped because it was impossible to get water to the boilers. Subsequently, the weather began to improve. The wind went down, although it appeared that at all times there was considerable swell. During the day of the 15th, the after-starboard lifeboat was brought some distance across the after-deck so as to be ready for launching on the port side, and No. 1, on the forward part of the starboard side, was

lowered over the starboard side. Towards evening it was decided that nothing could be done to remedy the vessel's listing and that it would therefore be necessary to take to the boats.

While the two starboard boats were being launched, and as it became dusk, two vessels, the *Cecil N. Bean* (American) and the *Tropero* (Argentine) came on the scene. Between them they rescued the 39 survivors. The *Tropero* took on board 19 and the other vessel 20 men. As the rescue operations were going on, three more members of the crew lost their lives, one of them while attempting to swim towards the lifeboat of the *Cecil N. Bean*, and another in attempting to swim towards a lifeboat of the *Tropero*. The other man was lost—we are unable to say exactly how—on the night of Sept. 15-16. The vessel was abandoned, and everyone was off her on the morning of the 16th. It is not suggested that there is anything improper about the abandonment, Mr. Porges added.

INSPECTION AT BERMUDA

On Sept. 16 two tugs, the *Foundation Josephine* and *Foundation Lillian*, went out, but failed to find the *Leicester*. She was later found and on the 27th the two tugs took her in tow for an anchorage just off Bermuda, arriving on Oct. 3. Mr. Porges said that on Oct. 3 Mr. W. J. E. Hawkins, a naval architect, arrived in Bermuda, having flown out, and with the owners' representative made an inspection. He made a general inspection of the hull, and so far as could be seen there did not appear to be anything the matter. He found that there was a considerable quantity of water in the machinery space.

On Oct. 7, unfortunately, a hurricane hit Bermuda, and the *Leicester* and the *Foundation Josephine*, which was still standing by, were blown ashore. After that, as the *Leicester* sustained very considerable damage, it became very difficult to make any further examination which would be of use. The vessel was subsequently refloated and taken to the United States, where she was repaired.

Mr. Porges commented that there was no record of any distress signal having been picked up, but there was evidence that some distress signals were sent out at some time on the morning of the 15th. There was evidence that at 19 00 hours on the 14th a wireless message was sent out giving the vessel's position, saying that she was steering with the greatest difficulty, and asking vessels in the vicinity to keep clear.

Mr. Porges added that at a rough estimate 20 witnesses would be called including eight members of the crew. He did not anticipate that the evidence of most of the witnesses would be of such great length, as in the *Samkey* inquiry. (LLOYD'S LIST July 23-27 and Sept. 7, 1948.)

Captain DANIEL WYNN JONES, senior nautical surveyor, Ministry of Transport, in evidence, estimated that the nearest the ship came to the path of the hurricane was 100-120 miles on the morning of the 15th. At the time she took the vital list, the centre of the hurricane was considerably farther away. The *Leicester* had received four hurricane warnings from Washington on Sept. 14 and 15.

Mr. LLEWELLYN WEST, senior clerk of William Cory & Son, Ltd., said the vessel was ballasted with 1498 tons of ballast, 1238 tons of which was Thames ballast, supplied direct by his firm. Normally, Thames ballast was 50 per cent. sand and 50 per cent. stone. The remaining 250 tons was dry-pit ballast.

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Cross-examined, Mr. West surprised the Court by stating that it was not Thames ballast which was supplied by his firm to the *Samkey*.

One COUNSEL observed that all through the *Samkey* inquiry the ballast was said to be Thames ballast, and that no representative of Messrs. Cory was called to give evidence.

The CHAIRMAN remarked, "We had a sample of the Thames ballast brought here."

Mr. Porges to Mr. West: "Can you tell us what ballast was put into the *Samkey*?"—Yes. We had instructions from the New Zealand Shipping Company that the *Samkey* was to be supplied with 1500 tons of dry sand ballast, and we loaded seven barges with special dry ballast, all taken from land pits. There was no Thames ballast put in the *Samkey* at all. I saw some of these barges loaded myself for the *Samkey* and it was pit ballast. It was dry material.

The CHAIRMAN said he could not understand how evidence came to be given in the *Samkey* inquiry that Thames ballast was used in the *Samkey*. There was a great deal of discussion as to what happened to Thames ballast, and that inquiry would have been quite irrelevant to the dry sand ballast which was ordered. A letter had now been produced relating to what had actually been ordered.

Mr. West explained that in the case of the *Samkey* special dry ballast was asked for. It was supplied. In the case of the *Leicester*, sand ballast was requested, and Thames ballast was supplied. His firm, he said, had supplied a sample of ballast used in the *Samkey* to the owners, at their request, in connection with the inquiry on the *Samkey*. He had taken it to them himself. Not only was there difference in content between Thames and pit ballast, but there was also a difference in colour.

The CHAIRMAN asked Mr. West to supply a sample of Thames ballast and pit ballast to the Court, and indicated that he wished to study a copy of the transcript of the *Samkey* inquiry.

"I have said that I was going to draw on my experience of the *Samkey*," he said, "but apparently I was given incorrect information."

He said he now wished to carry out an experiment to see what kind of angle there had to be to start a ballast movement.

The inquiry was adjourned until to-day



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