

## "SAM" SHIP INQUIRY

### Evidence on Ballast Trim

#### MASTER'S ACCOUNT OF VOYAGE

At the M.O.T. inquiry into the heavy listing and abandonment of the Liberty-type steamer *Leicester* (ex *Samkey*), owned by the Federal Steam Navigation Company, Ltd., London, which was continued in London yesterday, much of the evidence taken again referred to the ballasting arrangements in "Sam" ships, and the master described the behaviour of the vessel on the voyage in question. The inquiry is being conducted by Mr. K. S. Carpmal, K.C., sitting as Wreck Commissioner, assisted by three assessors, Captain J. P. Thomson, Commander W. A. Williamson and Mr. E. F. Spanner. The previous proceedings were reported in yesterday's LLOYD'S LIST.

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. Boyes for R. & H. Green & Silley Weir, Ltd., shiprepairers; Mr. P. F. Broadhead, of Messrs. Ingledew, Brown, Bennison & Jarrett, for the Navigators' and Engineer Officers' Union and the Radio Officers' Union, on behalf of the second and third officers and the dependants of a deceased radio officer; and Mr. Neil Maclean for the National Union of Seamen and dependants of deceased members of the crew.

When the inquiry was resumed, Mr. LEWELLYN WEST, senior clerk of William Cory & Son, Ltd., who the previous day disclosed that the ballast applied to the *Samkey* was dry ballast from land pits and not Thames ballast, produced samples of Thames and pit ballast, and in reply to a question said the pit ballast was similar to the ballast supplied to the *Samkey*.

An experiment was then conducted to ascertain, roughly, the respective angles of movement of the two types of ballast on a steel surface. The Commissioner regarded the experiment as purely descriptive and in no way accurate to show the exact degree at which either ballast would move. He did not think they could experiment more realistically without enlisting the aid of a ship.

Mr. ADAMS, referring to the ballast on the *Samkey*, said he had studied the transcript of that inquiry, and found that the description of the ballast as "Thames ballast" was used by counsel or the Minister. He suspected that that was part of counsel's instructions.

At this point, the Commissioner intimated that he had no doubt that the *Samkey* inquiry experiment was conducted with material similar to that loaded in the *Samkey*, so the conclusions drawn were in order.

Captain W. A. HANN (now retired), senior nautical surveyor engaged in the investigation of marine casualties at the Ministry of Transport at the time of the *Leicester* casualty, said he would be visiting a ship to-day, which was loading Thames ballast, and if the Court wished he would give more information about that ballast later.

The Commissioner: Yes, that would be very convenient.

#### BELÖW LEVEL OF SHIFTING BOARDS

Captain DAVID CHARLES MACKIE, assistant superintendent to Scruttons, Ltd., said that he had supervised the loading of the ballast in the *Leicester*. The ballast was trimmed level in all the holds, below the level of the shifting boards, except in No. 5, where it was at the level in most places. When the work was completed it was inspected by the ship's second officer and himself. The officer expressed satisfaction.

Asked what condition the ballast was in, he said it was only in the last few grabs from the barge that it dripped. It was very similar to the Thames ballast which had been produced in Court.

Mr. MACLEAN: Did you think that extra supervision might be necessary to see that this ballast was properly loaded?

Captain MACKIE: The ballast was properly loaded, in my opinion.

He said he had not had previous experience of loading "Sam" ships.

Mr. LAWRENCE VICTOR HORN, radio superintendent to the New Zealand Shipping Company, Ltd., and the Federal Steam Navigation Company, Ltd., said he had known the radio officer, Mr. Adams, who was lost. He was familiar with his record, and his reports had always been satisfactory. The *Leicester* was one of the vessels selected as a weather ship, which involved the transmitting of weather reports at specified times for the use of the meteorological services ashore. He had no records of any hurricane warnings being received by the *Leicester* on Sept. 13—the first noted was on the 14th.

Reading from the ship's wireless log, Mr. Horn said there was an entry that on Sept. 13 the radio officer received a weather report from Washington at 14 00 hours; also that he missed the area traffic list owing to copying the weather. When the *Leicester* finally reached Baltimore, the radio equipment was inspected by a representative of the Radio Corporation of America, who reported that all receivers were in good condition except for missing valves. The emergency transmitter was good and in operating condition except for deterioration of battery supply. The main transmitter's high tension fuse had blown, and a disconnection was found in the auxiliary aerial lead-in. The radio officer appointed to the ship at Baltimore reported that all equipment was in working order after replacement of batteries, H.T. fuse and minor repairs.

Returning to the log, Mr. Horn said that the only entry indicating trouble with the equipment was made at 00.21 hours on Sept. 12, when the radio officer logged that he was unable to raise Cape Race direct as dampness had reduced radiation by half. Later, it appeared, the fault was remedied for the time being.

In reply to Mr. Broadhead, Mr. Horn said he believed the radio officer had carried out his duties in a very satisfactory manner.

Mr. BROADHEAD: He held a second class certificate, and was the only radio officer?—Yes, regulations are met, providing he has completed six months' sea service. In this case he had completed four years' service.

#### FIRST MERCHANT SHIP COMMAND

Captain HAMISH NAPIER LAWSON, master of the *Leicester*, said that during the war he had commanded R.N. escort ships. His first command

of a merchant ship was the *Leicester*, which he joined in February, 1948, the voyage immediately prior to the one in question. Homeward bound on his first voyage he learned that the next voyage would be to New York in ballast. He therefore made certain calculations with a view to deciding the best stowage of this ballast. He was guided by the general information he had acquired and a copy of a letter he had seen on board from the Ministry of Transport, which stated that 1500 tons of solid ballast should be the maximum requirement.

The vessel arrived at Gravesend on Aug. 13, and berthed the following day. He then discussed with Captain H. Dawson, marine superintendent, the question of ballast, and asked for 1500 tons of ballast. He gave Captain Dawson a summary of his calculations as to possible distribution of the ballast, in which he decided to have all the ballast stowed in the 'tween decks, because "Liberty ships are very stiff in the light condition."

Captain Dawson informed him that shifting boards would be fitted for the next voyage, and "I was quite pleased about this, as it is an additional protection." He agreed with Captain Dawson over the ballast distribution, and before sailing, he inspected the ballast, and considered it well trimmed.

At this stage, Captain Lawson said that he knew when he was making his calculations that the *Samkey*—of which he would have been master but for illness—had been lost. He was not aware of the details. He had heard that she was reputed to have had 1500 tons of ballast, and that it was in the 'tween decks. He then said that after sailing he made alterations in the vessel's trim which were completed by Sept. 12. The main change was the transference of oil from Nos. 1 and 3 double bottom tanks to No 3 deep tank.

#### APPROACH OF HURRICANE

Their first experience of bad weather, said Captain Lawson, was on Sept. 9 or 10, but the ship was behaving very well. His first knowledge of the hurricane was about 11 a.m., ship's time, on Sept. 14, when the radio officer picked up a general hurricane warning from Washington. He estimated that at that time the hurricane was about 400 miles away. They were proceeding at 11½ knots with a gentle breeze blowing. During the afternoon the weather deteriorated slowly, and in order to try to avoid the hurricane, they altered course twice.

Shortly after midnight the vessel took a heavy roll to port and trembled slightly, and did not return to an upright position. She listed at about 30 degrees. "Before that happened I did not hear anything, but I felt the ship tremble, and I assumed that some of the ballast had shifted," he said. "Immediately I thought the best thing to do was to try to get the ship upright by transferring oil fuel to the starboard tank. I ordered someone to get into touch with the engine-room on the telephone, but he was unable to do so, and I sent a verbal message down. There was no improvement, however, in our condition."

#### RADIO OFFICER LOST

Shortly after the ship took the very heavy list, he was informed that the radio officer had been lost overboard, and he instructed the fourth officer to try to get a distress message sent off by wireless. "I also gave orders for the signal for emergency stations to be given, and I instructed the chief



officer to cut the falls of the port lifeboats, so that in the event of the ship capsizing the boats would float clear."

The chief officer reported back that when he had cut the falls someone had slipped the gripes of the port after lifeboat, and it was noticed that the third engineer and the radio officer were in that boat. Later he (the master) learned that the third engineer had also lost his life. The chief officer also reported that A. B. Whittaker had fallen over the side and lost his life. By this time, the list had probably increased somewhat, but they were still making headway at about four or five knots.

Captain Lawson said that about 20 minutes to half-an-hour after she took the initial list, he had the wheel lashed, and later in order to avoid the risk of an explosion he ordered that the oil fuel supply to both boilers should be cut off. During the early hours of the morning of Sept. 15, there was still a heavy swell running, but the weather was moderating.

Asked what was done about the starboard lifeboats, Captain Lawson said he had them made ready in more suitable positions, and on the evening of the 15th, when the ship appeared to take a further list to port, he gave orders for them to be launched.

#### RESCUE SHIPS ARRIVE

"Just as the ship's company were launching the boats we sighted the lights of another ship, and provisional distress signals were made and fired, and were answered. The ship was the *Cecil N. Bean* and she closed us about 22 00 hours and sent a lifeboat to us. About an hour after the American ship had rescued some members of the crew the Argentine *Tropero* came up."

Captain Lawson said it was eventually shouted to him from the *Cecil N. Bean* that they had no lifeboats left, and suggested that if everyone would jump over the side they would try to pick them up. "I gave orders for the remaining hands on board to swim for it, and I did so myself. I was picked up by a boat from the *Tropero*. In all, 19 were taken on board the *Tropero* and 20 in the *Cecil N. Bean*.

Mr. PORGES: "Do you know how the other three men lost their lives?"

Captain Lawson: "The chief officer reported that the carpenter was not on board at dawn on the 15th. I know nothing further of him. The donkey-man greaser was lost in swimming to the *Cecil N. Bean*. The chief steward was also lost in swimming to safety."

Captain Lawson estimated that at the time the ship was abandoned she had a list of about 50 deg., rolling to 70 deg. or over.

The inquiry was adjourned until to-day.



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