

'SAM' SHIP INQUIRY

Master's Account of Listing

WASHED OVERBOARD AND BROUGHT INBOARD AGAIN

The M.O.T. inquiry into the heavy listing and abandonment of the forty-type steamer *Leicester* (ex *Neske*), owned by the Federal Steam Navigation Company, Ltd., London, continued in London yesterday, when the master continued his account of the casualty. At one stage the vessel was rolling so that the port side of the boat deck was in the water, and the vessel was washed overboard from the bridge and brought inboard again on the boat deck. The crew, he said, behaved remarkably well.

The inquiry is being conducted by Kenneth S. Carpmael, K.C., sitting as Wreck Commissioner, with two assessors, Captain J. P. Thomson, Commander W. A. Williamson and E. F. Spanner. The previous proceedings were reported in LLOYD'S LIST of June 28 and 29.

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

Mr. LAWRENCE VICTOR HORN, radio superintendent to the New Zealand Shipping Company, Ltd., and the Federal Steam Navigation Company, recalled, said that the ship's main transmitter derived its power from the ship's mains, and the emergency transmitter from a 12-volt battery. The normal range of the main transmitter was 200 miles by day and 150 miles by night. It was a simple instrument to use, and was started up by throwing over a starting switch looking at a card for the frequency required. The normal range of the emergency transmitter was 125 miles by day and 250 miles by night. To operate the emergency a starting switch only had to be used. Other equipment included a main and emergency receiver and an auto-alarm.

Continuing his evidence, Captain N. LAWSON, master of the *Leicester*, said that as from the time of the listing of the emergency signals, all members of the crew were wearing life jackets.

CHIEF STEWARD'S DEATH

In reply to questions as to events which he gave orders for the crew to go into the sea, he said Chief Steward Cook was drowned in swimming from the ship. "When he got into the water he appeared to be in difficulties and I shouted some words of encouragement to him." Soon afterwards the fourth officer went to his assistance and kept his head above water for an hour and a half, and finally swam with him to the vessel. "When they arrived along-side the *Traspero* Cook was dead," Captain Lawson added.

Mr. PORGES: Before you left the ship do you know if any water had entered her?

Captain LAWSON: Yes, but not to any great extent. There was a quantity of water in the accommodation on the port side and engine-room.

He added that the water had probably got into the accommodation through various openings, such as mushroom ventilators, and a trickle, possibly, from portholes. The water was in the lower alley-way and well over the deck. It was difficult to say how deep it was because there was no light. It appeared to be about two or three feet deep. It was reported to him that water in the engine-room was not of any great consequence.

When the ship was rolling at one stage she was rolling with the port side of the boat-deck under water and the port derricks and the 'midship hatches were being rolled under the sea. He did not think the ship rolled more than 80 deg. even when she had taken up her maximum list.

At about midnight on Sept. 15 she appeared to become more sluggish in her roll, and at that time he was of the opinion that the stability was reducing slowly, but he now thought it was more likely due to change of direction in the swell. In daylight on the 15th the ship was listing with the port bulwarks actually under water. He believed the list was caused by the ballast shifting, which he thought was due to the way some of the stiffeners were secured at both ends. He now thought the verticals should be so constructed as to give a certain amount of play, up and down.

Mr. BROADHEAD: From the time she took her initial list she was in grave danger, in your opinion?

Captain LAWSON: Yes.

Would you agree that it would be of help to masters if official advice was given of shifting boards and ballast?—Yes.

Captain Lawson agreed that ballast was more liable to shift in the 'tween decks than in the lower hold, but considered it was still the place for 1500 tons in the Liberty type of vessel.

Mr. MACLEAN: Considering you were to carry ballast for the first time in your experience, was it not of vital importance to find out precisely what happened to the *Samkey*?

Captain LAWSON: At that time I do not think anyone knew what had happened. The marine superintendent's ideas as to the distribution of ballast were the same as mine.

The COMMISSIONER pointed out that there were no shifting boards on the *Samkey*.

In reply to Mr. Adams, Captain LAWSON said that the ballast calculations he and his officers made on their homeward voyage, in preparation for the voyage in question, were made in ignorance of the *Samkey* story.

Mr. ADAMS: Do you think the shifting boards would resist any powerful lateral thrust?

Captain LAWSON: No, because the vertical stiffeners were not as I would now have them.

RADIO DIFFICULTY

Questioned about events on the voyage, Captain Lawson said his radio officer reported to him that he had difficulty in getting Washington weather reports on one or two days. Other messages the ship was receiving all right.

Captain Lawson went on to say that late on the evening of the 14th the radio officer reported to him that he was unable to clear a weather report, and thought that the main and emergency aerials were down. This proved incorrect, and he then went back into the wireless office to try again. He had been working on normal frequency, but during the course of the evening he had had difficulty in maintaining contact with ship and shore stations, and had asked the engine-room to step up the voltage. That did not do any good, and he later reported to him that both the main and emergency transmitters appeared to be out of action.

Mr. ADAMS: Do you know whether anyone touched the insulators on the top of the trunk way?

Captain LAWSON: I am not aware that anyone touched them.

What was the first thing that happened to you after she took the list?—There appeared to be a colossal sea come right over the ship. I was standing on the port wing of the lower bridge. I was washed overboard and brought inboard again on the boat deck. I was rather shaken.

He then instructed the signal for the emergency station to be made, and he thought the third engineer mistook the signal—which was incorrect—for "abandon ship" and then vacated his place. One long blast was given, instead of the emergency stations signal of six short blasts, followed by a long blast, but to the best of his knowledge it was generally made.

He agreed that the only justification for people attempting to abandon ship was a specific order from the master.

Mr. ADAMS: How did the crew behave after the signal?

Captain LAWSON: Remarkably well.

How were people walking about in the ship at the time?—Walking is hardly a correct description. One had to crawl and hang on to anything available. The ship was rolling and the decks were almost at an angle of 45 deg. People were mostly walking on the bulkheads.

Captain Lawson told the Court that he rejoined the *Leicester* as master at Baltimore in December, 1948. About 50 per cent. of his original crew rejoined with him.

Mr. ADAMS: Have you been taken off the ship only for purposes of this inquiry?

Captain LAWSON: Yes.

A LATER EXPERIENCE

Captain Lawson then spoke of an experience he had in the ship in going from Baltimore to New York, which he thought would assist the Court. They encountered some bad weather, he said, a very strong gale from the north-west, a high sea and short swell. The ship rolled in the most violent and alarming manner, and she would not steer. "I must say that I was very much more frightened on this occasion than when the vessel was beset in the hurricane. I did everything possible to relieve that. I altered course, I tried her on every point of the compass, and juggled with the speed." Captain Lawson said they did not have solid ballast on board, apart from their permanent ballast of just over 191 tons. That experience confirmed that the smaller the G.M. the less violent was the motion, and also confirmed his opinion that the most suitable G.M. for the vessel was about three feet.

During his evidence Captain Lawson said he would like to make a recommendation that the wartime practice of supplying every member of the ship's company with red lights would be of great assistance during an emergency disembarkation. "It would have been of great assistance to us in our disembarkation of the *Leicester*," he said. "The best we could do was to use rockets and Verey lights, fired from a pistol."

Captain Lawson paid tribute to several members of the crew: Fourth Officer A. K. S. Franks and Cadet Gardyne for "great personal courage" in the manner in which they attempted to operate the wireless sets in the wireless room, while standing on the bulkheads looking through the port into the sea; Second Engineer J. McLeish, Fifth Engineer Badderley and Fireman Cain for "their great work" in bringing the injured chief engineer out of the engine-room; Fireman Hudson, for manning a lifeboat wireless receiver set on the boat deck and maintaining watch throughout the day of the 15th, and A.B. Mair, for courageous action.

Of A.B. Mair, Captain Lawson said: "When the *Cecil N. Bean's* first boat came alongside the coxswain said they had lost the rudder, and asked if we had a spare one. A.B. Mair stripped off, and with a heaving line attached to his waist, swam out to the boat in a sea which was still quite rough, and thus a rudder was passed out to them. As far as I know the rudder was used."

JAMES HERBERT BAYLEY, chief officer, said he was present during the stowing of ballast. Replying to Mr. Maclean, he said he had no previous experience of loading this type of ballast and no experience of shifting boards. Of the emergency, he said that shortly after midnight of the 15th he cut the falls of the lifeboats, as ordered, others giving assistance. When he reached No. 4 boat he was aware of a person or persons in that boat, but he was somewhat intent on the job in hand and in keeping a foothold on what was a rather slippery deck, and he took no further notice of it.

Mr. PORGES: When you cut the falls of No. 4 boat did it go overboard?—
Chief Officer Bayley: Almost instantaneously.

Questioned by the Commissioner in regard to the gripes, witness said that they were not touched to his knowledge. But almost at the same time as he hacked through the rope he heard a shout in which the word "gripes" stood out, and obviously someone must have let them go.

He remarked that after he had cut the falls of No. 4 boat he heard a scream behind him and a body shot down the deck and went over the side. He subsequently found it was Able Seaman Whittaker.

The inquiry adjourned until to-day.



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