

LOSS OF "WARREN GROVE"

Evidence of Survivors at M.O.T. Inquiry

The Ministry of Transport inquiry into the loss of the collier *Warren Grove*, of 351 tons gross, was continued at West Hartlepool yesterday when evidence was given by surviving members of the crew, who described the condition of the vessel as "fair" and "fairly good." The *Warren Grove*, which was owned by Challis, Stern & Co., Ltd. (Warren Shipping Company, Ltd., managers), was on a voyage from Hartlepool to Buckie with coal and foundered off the Firth of Forth on Nov. 9 last with the loss of seven of her crew of 10. The inquiry is being conducted by Mr. J. N. Naisby, K.C., sitting as Wreck Commissioner, assisted by Captain J. H. Grimston, Mr. J. Shand and Mr. L. C. Burrill as assessors. The previous proceedings were reported in LLOYD'S LIST of July 26.

The Ministry of Transport are represented by Mr. Arnold Baker, and Mr. Neil Maclean appears for the National Union of Seamen.

RICHARD M. DAINES, a former member of the vessel's crew, said he left her because he "didn't fancy the ship." Before he left her in July he had noticed when painting that a lot of rivets in the area of the forepeak tank were weeping. He reported this to the master and got no satisfaction and he formed the opinion that the master was afraid to report these things to the owners. He made four or five trips in the *Warren Grove* and on most of these trips she took a list of up to three or four deg. and seemed to take a lot of water, even in fine weather.

IN "FAIR" CONDITION

When one of the three survivors, Able Seaman George Bruce Mair, took the witness stand, Mr. BAKER asked: What sort of state was the *Warren Grove* in when you joined her in August, 1948?

WITNESS: She looked fair enough to me.

Did you hear any suggestions that she might be making water?—No, except in the case at Blyth before repairs were carried out.

Describing the lurching which the ship gave, Mair said he had just gone off watch at 8 a.m. and was in his bunk. "She sheered over and never came back again." Describing the

firing of rockets, he said he saw "what we thought were the lights of houses ashore." Although the first lifeboat was successfully launched, a following wave struck the boat and turned it over. "Everyone was hanging on to the bottom of her," he said. He climbed back on to the grating. "The mate called to us to go back on to the boat, but when he could see we were not coming he let it go. We watched her go away."

Mair said that he and the other two survivors cut away all the tackle holding the remaining lifeboat and they just sat in her for an hour. When the ship went down he went with her, and was brought up by his lifebelt. He saw his two mates clinging to the upturned boat. When they all held on to the keel the boat came upright. The three struggled in and began baling.

NO BOAT DRILL

Mr. Maclean: While you were attached to the ship, was there any lifeboat drill?—No.

Another survivor, WALTER REID, said when he joined the *Warren Grove* on Nov. 1, seven days before her last voyage, he thought she was "in fairly good condition." In a deposition read to the Court, Reid was stated to have said: "If the crew had boarded the lifeboat in an orderly fashion she may have remained on an even keel."

In Court, Reid said: "Everyone took hold of the gunwale and the boat turned over. I heard a cracking and smashing of wood and I knew it was useless to go back in the boat again."

The COMMISSIONER: Have you ever had the misfortune to leave a ship in a hurry before?—Yes.

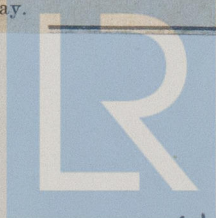
During the war?—Yes.

Reid said his previous escape had, however, been in fine weather. He had never previously abandoned ship in bad weather.

Captain JAMES THOMPSON, nautical surveyor with the Ministry of Transport, reported on a survey of the *Warren Grove's* life-saving appliances and light and sound signals on Oct. 28, 1948. These were, he said, in fairly good condition, and any defects found were minor ones.

"I have inspected a large number of coasters and colliers," commented Captain Thompson, "and I find ships of the *Warren Grove* type do not seem to pay much attention to life-saving appliances. Possibly the master may have known there was to be an examination and made an effort to put things in order. After the survey I congratulated him on the state of things."

The inquiry was adjourned until to-day.



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