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Inquiry into loss of "MILFORD VISCOUNT"

Extracts from "Lloyd's List" and "~~Journal of Commerce~~".

Lloyd's List
28.11.50

A MISSING TRAWLER

Inquiry Opened into Loss of "Milford Viscount"

MINISTRY'S BAD WEATHER THEORY

Ministry of Transport inquiry into the loss of the motor trawler *Milford Viscount* (311 tons gross) was opened at Milford Haven yesterday before Mr. John V. Naisby, K.C., sitting as Wreck Commissioner, with Messrs. G. Darkins, G. H. Nicholson and H. Lyndsay as assessors. The vessel, with a crew of 13, left Milford Haven on Mar. 29, 1950, for the Western Irish fishing grounds. She failed to return when due on Apr. 16 and on Apr. 18 was reported overdue. A prolonged search was made for the vessel owing to various reports of wireless signals purporting to have come from the *Milford Viscount* being received. The Ministry, in its statement to the Court, suggests that the vessel was probably overwhelmed by bad weather on Apr. 2.

Mr. S. E. Pitts, for the Ministry of Transport, said that after leaving Milford Haven the *Milford Viscount* called at Berehaven for fresh stock and sailed from there on Mar. 31. On Apr. 1 Skipper Saunders, in the *Milford Duke*, had a conversation by radio telephone with Skipper Smith of the *Milford Viscount* who gave his position as approx. 52 30 N., 13 20 W. Skipper Saunders was about 120 miles east-north-east of the *Milford Viscount*. The weather at the time was bad, with a strong wind freshening from the west-south-west, but fishing was still possible. Smith expressed the opinion that he might have to suspend fishing later owing to the worsening weather condition. He made no complaint about the *Milford Viscount* and his radio-telephone transmitter worked well.

On the night of Apr. 1 the weather deteriorated. The wind freshened from the west-south-west and veered to the west-north-west of strong gale force. By midnight it was a full gale with confused seas. The weather moderated at Saunders' position at 10 a.m. on Apr. 2. During the next few days Saunders tried several times to contact the *Milford Viscount* on the R. T. but was unable to do so.

WEATHER STOPS FISHING

Skipper Brown, of the trawler *Dimita*, was on Apr. 1 fishing at a position approx. 52 30 N., 12 20 W. and saw the *Milford Viscount* six to eight miles to the west-north-west, towing in a north-westerly direction. On Sunday, Apr. 2, the *Dimita* was in the same position but Brown could not see the *Milford Viscount*. After dinner on Sunday Brown spoke to Smith who said he had only got four baskets of fish and was "laid," as there was a strong breeze and he was waiting to see what the weather was going to do. Brown said he was fishing and Smith replied, "If you were here with me you would not be able to fish." Later on this Sunday the weather became so bad that the *Dimita* had to cease fishing. The barometer was down to 29 in., with wind from the north-west at gale force with heavy seas running.

On Apr. 16 one of the *Milford Viscount's* lifebuoys was found near Ballybunnion, Co. Kerry, and on Apr. 22 two more of the vessel's lifebuoys were found at Meenagohane Causeway, Co. Kerry.

Mr. Pitts said the life-saving apparatus on the *Milford Viscount* was absolutely satisfactory and was checked just before she sailed. He referred to an incident during a fishing trip in November, 1949, when the *Milford Viscount* had a full tankage of about 98 tons of oil. She met some rough weather and was hit by a tremendous sea with results that were perhaps alarming. She heeled over to such a degree that the water reached the port lights in the engine room casing. "That was a serious matter," commented Mr. Pitts. As a result of this incident the crew went to the skipper and asked him to take the ship home, which he did.

When Mr. J. C. Ward, the owner's managing director, received this signal his reaction was that some of the oil should be transferred to another ship or put overboard, but the ship came back before he could send the message. Mr. Ward took up the matter with Skipper Smith but the skipper would not give up the ship. There had always been crew available for the *Milford Viscount*. The November incident was exceptional, and did not happen when the ship was being navigated head to sea. Everybody would say that as soon as this treatment was applied the ship corrected herself. It had been found at the preliminary inquiry that there was a high degree of stability in the ship.

Referring to wireless messages purported to come from the *Milford Viscount* when she was overdue Mr. Pitts said it was incredible that a man of Skipper Smith's experience did not send S.O.S. messages according to accepted instructions. "When you take into account reports showing very severe weather that week-end, culminating on April 2," said Mr. Pitts, "there may be a strong feeling that you have the answer to this casualty riddle, that this ship was probably overwhelmed by bad weather taking some freakish form perhaps on April 2."

Mr. J. C. Ward, managing director of the Milford Steam Trawling Company, owners of the *Milford Viscount*, gave evidence that he had had no complaints about the vessel except that she was a "wet" ship, as many modern trawlers were. "We were very proud of this ship, and she was always very highly maintained."

Describing the incident in November when the *Milford Viscount* returned to port, Mr. Ward said he thought Smith had lost his nerve and he arranged for another skipper to take over the ship. Smith, however, was very angry at this, and said he would take no other ship but the *Milford Viscount* and that she would be perfectly all right with 50 to 60 tons of fuel oil on board.

Replying to the Commissioner, Mr. Ward said that when the vessel returned to port in November Smith told him that the crew had told him they would not carry on. They wanted him to take the vessel back and take some oil out. "It was on this that we had a reconciliation afterwards. I realised it was not the skipper. I realised that the crew had given him an ultimatum that unless he took the ship back they would not do any work at all."

THE COMMISSIONER: Did he tell you what the effect of having too much bunker was?

Mr. WARD: I don't remember exactly what he said, but she was taking too much water and if she had got fast in a wreck when towing in such conditions, things would not have been too good.

HAROLD GORDON STRINGS, a former deckhand in the *Milford Viscount*, said that during the bad weather on the November trip the vessel began to behave badly as a result of which all hands went to the wheelhouse, called the skipper out and asked him to take the ship home as they did not like her behaviour. The skipper said: "Well, if you want to take her home I can't do anything about it."

returned to port or discharged part of the bunkers. The

Spriggs was of opinion that they were being endangered by staying out. Other ships were fishing nearby, and he thought that if the *Milford Viscount* had had half the quantity of oil on board she would also have been able to continue fishing. After the violent roll she put her head to the wind and was then "a lovely ship," not taking a drop of water.

JOHN ALEXANDER KERR, a greaser in the *Milford Viscount* during the November trip, said she rolled so badly that he thought she would not come back. It was the worst roll he had ever experienced. Kerr added that he did not leave the *Milford Viscount* subsequently—he was transferred.

The hearing was adjourned until to-day.

When the Ministry of Transport inquiry into the loss of the motor trawler *Milford Viscount* was continued at Milford Haven yesterday evidence was given on behalf of the builders of the vessel by Mr. A. L. Cochrane, who could offer no suggestion as to why the vessel should behave in a peculiar manner when carrying a full load of fuel oil, otherwise than extraordinary stress of weather. The *Milford Viscount*, in charge of Skipper Alex Smith, left Milford Haven on Mar. 29, 1950, for the Western Irish fishing grounds and failed to return, being reported overdue on Apr. 18. The inquiry is being conducted by Mr. John V. Naisby, K.C., sitting as Wreck Commissioner, with Messrs. G. Darkins, G. H. Nicholson and H. Lyndsay as assessors. The first day's proceedings were reported in yesterday's *Lloyd's List*.

Mr. A. L. COCHRANE, managing director of Cochrane & Sons, Ltd., said that after his firm had supplied the *Milford Steam Trawling Company, Ltd.*, with the *Milford Viscount* they received nothing but good reports concerning her. An incident last November when the vessel had returned to port following complaints of her behaviour by the crew had not been reported to him, and he knew nothing about it until after the vessel was lost. He was aware now that the men in the ship had complained of her behaviour when she was full of oil.

"I can't express any opinion on it," he said. "They were there and I was not. I can see no theoretical or practical reason that the conditions should be such, but the crew said they were. I can offer no suggestions."

Mr. DAVID GRIFFITHS, ship's husband to the *Milford Viscount*, said the vessel's gear and tackle were maintained in first class order. Before the trip previous to the last one, he had checked over the life-saving apparatus. The steering gear was satisfactory, and he had never received any complaints from the engineers.

BOAT DRILL COMPLAINT

Replying to the Commissioner, Griffiths said that he had never seen the *Milford Viscount's* lifeboats in the water but had seen the lowering gear tested. It was the skipper's responsibility to see that lifeboat drill was carried out at sea, and an entry should be made at the back of the log-book. He agreed there was only one entry, in a previous *Milford Viscount* log concerning lifeboat drill, dated Dec. 17, 1949.

The COMMISSIONER: What did you do about it?—All I can do is request the skipper to carry out lifeboat drill. I am satisfied that the tackle is in good order. It is his responsibility to carry it out.

The Commissioner: How often: Periodically, not every trip.

WITNESS agreed that a complaint had been received from the Mercantile Marine office that the *Milford Viscount* had not been carrying out boat drills.

The COMMISSIONER: Don't you think it was more incumbent upon you to take steps to see that it was done?—It should have been done.

Evidence that the *Milford Viscount's* wireless was in good order when she left port was given by Mr. I. J. H. Morgan, technical assistant with the Marconi Company.

Mr. JOHN JAMES FORTUNE, who was skipper of the *Brecon Castle*, a Swan-sea trawler, fishing off the West Coast of Ireland last March, was asked what he thought happened to the *Milford Viscount*. He replied, "I would say an unlucky sea hit her. If she was fishing she could have caught fast and this would have caused a serious emergency."

Mr. NORMAN OWEN BROWN, skipper of the trawler *Damito*, said he thought that Skipper Smith might have shot his trawl and this caught fast and he was overwhelmed by the sea. Witness had been fishing near where the *Milford Viscount* was last seen and he was able to get his gear back all right but conditions were getting very bad when they got it on board.

WIRELESS SIGNALS

A deposition made by Mr. RONALD WILSON of Land's End radio station was read. This described the special radio watches which were maintained after the *Milford Viscount* was reported overdue. All information about signals said to have been received from the *Milford Viscount* by others was checked back but no definite information was received that the signals were actually made by the *Milford Viscount*. Throughout the time that signals were purported to have been made by the *Milford Viscount* nothing was heard at Land's End station which could be identified as being made by the *Milford Viscount*. With regard

to the confusion which arose concerning signals said to have been heard from the *Milford Viscount*, Wilson expressed the view that the confusion arose from mistaken interception of signals made by other vessels. In order to avoid such mistakes, the *Milford Viscount* owners ceased to use the name of *Milford Viscount* when calling and used the Christian name of the skipper "Alex" instead.

Mr. ALBERT STEPHEN SAUNDERS, a former skipper of the *Milford Viscount*, said he had had confidence in the *Milford Viscount*.

Mr. PITTS (for the Ministry of Transport): Was it confidence because of your skill and knowledge or because of the ship's good qualities?

Skipper SAUNDERS: A combination of both. "A less experienced man might get excited, but Skipper Smith was equally experienced as me."

Mr. HENRY GEORGE MASON, who was chief engineer in the *Milford Viscount* for two years, said there were times when he was not very happy in the vessel.

The COMMISSIONER: Did you ever have the feeling I wonder if she is coming back this time?—I never went as far as that.

Why were you not very happy. Was it because you were uncomfortable or because you feared some casualty might happen to the ship?—When a ship rolls very heavily anything could happen to her.

Mr. HENRY BACHELOR, skipper of the trawler *Barry Castle*, described the bad weather he experienced while fishing off Ireland between Mar. 25 and Apr. 2. He thought that if the *Milford Viscount* had been caught in such weather with her gear down there would have been a big risk.

MINES RISK "EXTREMELY REMOTE"

Captain DANIEL WYNNE JONES, Senior Nautical Surveyor to the Board of Trade, said there was no evidence that mines were ever laid in the area of the last known position of the *Milford Viscount*. It was officially considered that the loss of the *Milford Viscount* could not be attributed to a moored mine, and the chances of a floating mine were extremely remote. Referring to green flares stated to have been seen by members of the crew of the steamer *Basiliak*, witness said there was no such recognised distress signal as that described and he did not think it could have been a distress signal.

Lloyd's List, 30.11.50

COURT INSPECT SISTER-SHIP

Mr. J. V. Naisby, K.C., sitting as Wreck Commissioner, and the three assessors at the M. O. T. inquiry at Milford Haven into the loss of the motor trawler *Milford Viscount*, yesterday inspected a sister-ship, the *Milford Marquis*, when she docked. Earlier, further evidence was taken from Skipper Saunders, who was on the Western Irish fishing grounds at the same time. His opinion was that the *Milford Viscount*, which left Milford Haven on Mar. 29, 1950, and failed to return, disappeared on the night of Apr. 1-2. The previous proceedings were reported in LLOYD'S LIST of Nov. 28 and 29.

The Ministry of Transport are represented by Mr. S. E. Pitts, of the Treasury Solicitor's Department, and Mr. J. B. Hewson is appearing for the owners, the Milford Steam Trawling Company, Ltd.

Skipper SAUNDERS, of the *Milford Duke*, recalled, said he knew Skipper Smith (skipper of the lost trawler) very well, and was certain he was a man who would take all precautions at sea. He was not a man to do a foolish thing. Saunders considered that the *Milford Viscount* was a little better than the *Milford Marquis* in a seaway. He was satisfied with the two ships, and would go anywhere in them. When the *Milford Viscount* left on her last voyage Saunders was already at sea. On Saturday, Apr. 1, at 1.30 p.m., he had a conversation with Skipper Smith on the R/T, and shortly after 7.30 p.m. he spoke to him again. Smith told him he had finished fishing and was "laying." The weather was freshening all the time, and became a full gale, with seas very confused. He heard nothing more from Smith, although he tried to get him for four or five days. If the *Milford Viscount* had been afloat she would definitely have been within calling distance.

Mr. PITTS: When you tried to get him without success, did it make you anxious?—We were never unduly worried if Smith was off the air, for he was always getting into a tangle with his wireless set and might be *hors de combat* for a few days. So if he was off the air we never took much notice.

SAUNDERS expressed the opinion that the *Milford Viscount* disappeared between Saturday night and early Sunday morning, when the worst of the gale was on. If the *Milford Viscount* had survived the week-end storm there was nothing else to account for a good ship like that going. He was quite certain that Skipper Smith would not try to get his gear down in such weather.

Mr. PITTS: Can you assist the Court with any suggestion as to how this would be likely to happen to a fairly modern ship without her gear down?

"I have lost a ship down that way myself some years ago," replied Saunders, who explained that there was a great amount of confused seas in that area owing to the contours of the sea bed.

Would it be possible to be caught unawares and gone before you know where you are?—Before you could say Jack Robinson.

It would give you no time to do anything?—No time at all.

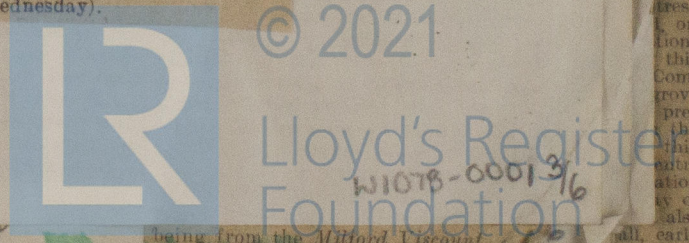
Mr. REGINALD GEORGE SPURGEON described how, on the night of Apr. 26-27, he was on board the trawler *Norman Wilson* in Milford docks when he switched on the radio and heard a message which he took to be from the *Milford Viscount*. At this time he had read in the local newspaper that the search for the *Milford Viscount* had been abandoned. Asked what exactly the message was, Spurgeon replied: "He started his message calling all ships and went on to all Milford ships. Then he said something about his batteries were low and that he would transmit every 15 minutes of the hour."

Witness said that the signal was normal, and there was nothing about it which made him suspicious.

Mr. PITTS: Have you had occasion since seriously to consider whether it was a genuine call or a hoax?—At the time I thought it was genuine, but since then, because of other messages and talks I have had with the skipper and others, they have put a doubt in my mind.

Witness said the message was also picked up by the Scottish trawler *Inchmickery*.

The inquiry was adjourned until to-day (Wednesday).



"A CRUEL HOAX"

Saunders said he was certain Smith would know exactly what to do with regard to sending out distress messages. Referring to wireless messages said to have been received after Apr. 2, Saunders declared: "I told them at the time it was a cruel hoax."

Describing the search, Saunders said: "If the *Milford Viscount* was floating, she was bound to have been located." He had heard rumours that she had drifted on to the West Irish coast, but to him that was nonsense. The vessel could not have drifted through the screen of searching ships without having been seen.

Mr. HEWSON: Are you satisfied that everything was done by those afloat?—I am more than satisfied.

HENRY BRYNMOR BECKETT, who served in the *Milford Viscount* for nearly two years, described her as a wet ship with a tendency, when she was "laying," to scoop up water on the lee side. The trouble was immediately counteracted by putting her head to wind.

Mr. PITTS: Have you ever felt any anxiety about her as a trawler?—No, Sir.

Mr. WILLIAM JAMES HAWKINS, Senior Ship Surveyor at the Ministry of Transport, said his opinion was that the stability of the *Milford Viscount* on her last voyage was up to good trawler practice and was sufficient to meet all normal conditions. When she carried 94 tons of oil on the November trip her stability would still have been quite good.

When the Court resumed after inspecting the *Milford Marquis*, in Milford dock, Captain ALEX. FINDLAY, Senior Nautical Surveyor of the Ministry of Transport at Swansea, stated that at his request the skipper of the trawler *Inchmickery* wrote him giving details of the messages he had picked up on Apr. 27. The skipper's letter said that at about 1.30 a.m. on Apr. 27 he heard a ship calling on the 141 metre waveband, and the message she was transmitting was: "This is the *Milford Viscount*. Hello *Milford Duchess*, *Marquis* or any trawler." This was repeated twice. The *Inchmickery* went over to her and asked her to acknowledge the call, but while she was waiting for the reply another ship started calling the trawler that was calling: "Any trawler."

The ship calling herself the *Milford Viscount* came back saying she could only transmit for a couple of minutes and would call again at 1.45 a.m. At 1.45 there was no message, but at 2 a.m. a ship was heard again by the vessels *William Caldwell*, *Madden*, *Coadjutor* and the *Inchmickery*. The ship said:

"This is my position . . ." but owing to interference from other ships all that was picked up was "five deg. west . . ." Both the *Inchmickery* and the *William Caldwell* tried to contact the ship, but were unable to do so.

Questioned about boat drills, Capt. Findlay said: "I'm afraid they just don't do them. The requirements are that they should do them once every fourteen days."

Mr. THOMAS ARTHUR DAVIES, G.P.O. Inspector of Wireless Telegraphy, said that at the time in question no signals had been received at all from the *Milford Viscount* by any of the G.P.O. stations. "It is incredible to me," continued Mr. Davies, "that an experienced skipper like Skipper Smith should not have sent out a distress call on the distress wave-band of 181 metres. Had he been able to do so and had he used the 181 metre band, I have not the slightest doubt it would have been received at one of our coastal stations at Valentia or Land's End. In my 25 years' experience in the G.P.O. I cannot recollect an instance, nor can I find in the records of the G.P.O. over 42 years, any case where a distress message has not been received by a Post Office station when it should have received it by virtue of the ship's position."

At the close of the hearing the Commissioner indicated that to-day the Court would deal with the wireless messages said to have come from the *Milford Viscount* after Apr. 25. This, he said, was a matter which would have to be investigated very fully.

Lloyd's List, 1-12-50

The Ministry of Transport inquiry into the loss of the missing trawler *Milford Viscount* was concluded at Milford Haven yesterday, and the findings of the Court will be made known to-day. Yesterday evidence was given regarding wireless messages purporting to have been sent from the vessel after she had been reported overdue, having failed to return from the Western Irish fishing grounds, and a Post Office official expressed the view that the belief that the messages were sent by the *Milford Viscount* resulted from misunderstanding. Counsel for the Ministry, in his submission, did not suggest anybody was to blame, and thought that the greatest possibility was that the vessel was lost in the storm of Apr. 1-2. Previous proceedings at the inquiry, which has been conducted by Mr. J. V. Naishy, K.C., sitting as Wreck Commissioner, with three assessors, were reported in Lloyd's List of Nov. 28, 29 and 30.

The Ministry of Transport are represented by Mr. S. E. Pitts, of the Treasury Solicitor's Department, and Mr. J. B. Hewson is appearing for the owners, the *Milford Steam Trawling Company, Ltd.*

Captain ALEXANDER FINDLAY, Ministry of Transport Senior Nautical Surveyor at Swansea, was recalled to give evidence in respect of rockets in the *Milford Viscount*. He handed in a letter he had received from the lighthouse-keeper at Tarbet Ness, stating that on May 7 at 4.30 a message was heard: "This might be last call, calling all stations, position 72 40 north latitude, 17 00 west longitude. Battery going fast, signed Alex."

Evidence regarding 25 radio reports received at Plymouth was given by Mr. WILLIAM WILLIAMSON, Assistant Inspector of P.O. telegraphs. Several of the messages were reported on Apr. 28 and Apr. 29. The Commissioner referred to a report of May 7 that Skipper Smith's voice had been recognised by his brother Willie, at Tarbet Ness lighthouse. "Have the elementary precautions been taken to ascertain that there is a William Smith at Tarbet Ness lighthouse and that he recognised the voice?" asked the Commissioner.

Mr. PITTS: That inquiry has not been made.

A few minutes later Mr. Pitts told the Commissioner that he had been informed that Skipper Smith had a brother Willie who went up to Tarbet Ness, and he was the brother who recognised the voice of Alex.

A letter was handed to the Commissioner from a man living in the Grimsey Island off Iceland, stating that on May 8 a message was received "*Milford Viscount* calling." It was very faint and the only word he made out was "stuck" or "struck."

"NOTHING HEARD AFTER APR. 2"

Asked by Mr. Pitts if after his careful search it was his belief that anything was ever heard from the *Milford Viscount* after the week end Apr. 1-2, Mr. WILLIAMSON replied: "It is my opinion that nothing at all was heard after Apr. 2."

Mr. PITTS: Do you regard the messages as in the hoax class or the misunderstanding class?—In the misunderstanding class.

Can you put your finger on any point where you think the misunderstanding began, or crystallised?—It was not unnatural after the *Milford Viscount* had been given up for lost that some people in Milford Haven were anxious to contact friends or relatives of the crew of that vessel and inform them as to what had happened. I feel possibly that the mistake arose by someone talking about the *Milford Viscount* either from Milford Haven or from a vessel at sea in the early morning of Apr. 27. That might have been misunderstood as being from the *Milford Viscount*.

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returned to port or discharged part of the bunkers. The

MR. ARTHUR MANLEY TUCKER, a Bideford amateur radio operator, gave evidence of having heard three messages which he thought came from the *Milford Viscount*. The first was on Apr. 24 or 25, when he heard: "Hallo Land's End" called three times and "*Milford Viscount*" called three times on two or three occasions. The messages were not at the usual signal strength for trawlers but were perfectly readable and could be understood. They were heard on the 181 metre band. He did not report the messages to any official source.

Continuing, Mr. Tucker said that on Apr. 28 he picked up a foreign voice which said it was a Spanish ship, and that a plane had sighted the *Milford Viscount*, and that a rescue ship was on the way. He reported it to the Admiralty who informed him there was no plane out. Later, on Apr. 28, he heard a message: "This is *Milford Viscount*" twice, and on Apr. 29 heard trawlers calling for "Alex," after which there was a faint voice saying: "Engine trouble only I hope." On May 8 he heard the *Milford Viscount* call three times between nine and 10 o'clock at night. That was the last message he heard.

Questioned by Mr. Pitts, witness agreed that all the messages picked up could have been due to a hoax. He had more doubts about it now than on Apr. 27.

Addressing the Court, Mr. R. D. SAUNDERS (representing the relatives of one of the crew) drew attention to the fact that in her life of three years the *Milford Viscount* had experienced two incidents—the one in November, 1949, and the final tragedy. "With regard to the messages received after Apr. 2, there had been considerable comment on the fact that they had not been couched in the appropriate formula, but if Skipper Smith and his second in command had been lost the wireless would be operated by some one who had no knowledge of the correct procedure."

MEN CONTENT TO REMAIN

Mr. HEWSON referred to the November incident which had "loomed quite darkly at times in the evidence." They had heard the evidence of two witnesses who had served in the ship that they were perfectly happy when 45 tons of oil were taken out of her. There were nine others who were in the ship in November, 1949, who were still in her on the last voyage. It was a striking comment that if this ship behaved in a dangerous, uncomfortable manner there were members of the crew who were content to remain in her up to her last voyage.

Mr. PITTS said he was not suggesting that anybody was to blame in any matter that gave rise to this casualty. He put it to the Court that in the storm of Apr. 1-2 the ship suddenly turned over and was gone before they were able to send a message. That seemed to be the greatest possibility. There was no reason to believe that the *Milford Viscount* was ever heard after her radio telephone talk with the two other trawlers. If anybody perpetrated a hoax the Court might have something stronger to say about it, but the false reports might have come from confusion, for there was a tremendous amount of stuff going over the R/T in the area.



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W1076-0001 5/6

THE FINDINGS OF THE COURT.

"MILFORD VISCOUNT" LOSS

Severe Weather of Apr. 2 the Most Probable Cause

NO RELIABLE RECORD OF LATER MESSAGES

The Ministry of Transport Court of Inquiry into the missing trawler *Milford Viscount*, which failed to return from the Western Irish fishing grounds last April, announced its findings yesterday. The Court found that the most probable cause of the loss was an exceptional combination of weather and sea conditions during the night of Apr. 2 and was satisfied that there was no reliable record of any message from the trawler after 1930 hours on Apr. 2, 1950. The inquiry, which was conducted by Mr. J. V. Naisby, K.C., sitting as Wreck Commissioner, with three assessors, was held at Milford Haven and the proceedings were reported in LLOYD'S LIST of Nov. 28, 29, 30 and Dec. 1.

The Commissioner said that having carefully inquired into the circumstances, the Court found that the loss of the *Milford Viscount* was most probably due to an exceptional combination of weather and sea conditions. The report, he said, was unanimous. It was found that the *Milford Viscount* was seaworthy when she left Milford Haven on her last voyage and was properly manned and equipped to meet the normal perils of a fishing voyage at that time of the year.

On Apr. 2 the *Milford Viscount* was in communication on the radio telephone with the *Damito* and the *Milford Duke* at 7.30 p.m. This was the last reliable information of the *Milford Viscount* having been heard. The radio conversations were substantially to the same effect, which was that the *Milford Viscount*, after fishing in a westerly direction, had been compelled to cease fishing by the weather and was "laid"; that is with engines stopped waiting for the weather to moderate.

"It is now known," said the Commissioner, "that about this time a weather ship about 250 miles farther west was experiencing weather conditions of exceptional severity with waves up to 32 ft. in height and wind speeds of 37 knots. This disturbance was moving easterly, and might well have reached the position of the *Milford Viscount* on the night of Apr. 2 when she was most probably in an area in which, due to the rapid shoaling, very confused sea conditions are liable to occur. These conditions are normally accentuated by a quick change of the wind. On the night of Apr. 2 the wind did shift rapidly from west-south-west to north-west and the weather conditions became very severe."

The Court found that the *Milford Viscount* was a well-found vessel in charge of a competent skipper and crew. Her life-saving equipment and boats were in good order and condition, although boat drills had not been regularly carried out, nor had her rockets, which were overdue for renewal, been replaced. The stability of the vessel was normal and adequate. The main engines and auxiliaries, which had just been surveyed, were in good order.

The Court was satisfied that all messages received were adequately examined and, where possible, suitable action initiated, and the Court considered it desirable that the valuable assistance of the officials of the Telecommunications Section of the Post Office, including the B.B.C. and the work of the many unofficial wireless operators both afloat and ashore, should be placed on record. The Court was also satisfied after examination of all the messages brought before it, that there was no reliable record of any message from the ship after 1930 hours on Apr. 2, 1950.



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