

"EMPRESS OF CANADA" INQUIRY

Workmen Who Tried to Put Out Fire

EXTINGUISHERS AND HOSE USED

From Our Own Correspondent

LIVERPOOL, Thursday

Further accounts of experiences by workmen when fire broke out in the Canadian Pacific liner *Empress of Canada* were given to-day when the Ministry of Transport Inquiry into the loss by fire of the vessel on Jan. 25 last, in No. 1 branch, North Gladstone Dock, Liverpool, was continued. One witness told Counsel that he did not think of moving some oxygen and gas bottles which were on board. Other witnesses described their efforts to quell the fire with extinguishers and a hose. Mr. K. S. Carpmal, Q.C., is sitting as Wreck Commissioner with Captain Lewis Parfitt and Messrs. W. J. Nutton, I. J. Gray and F. Dunn as assessors.

[The previous proceedings were reported in LLOYD'S LIST of Dec. 8, 9 and 10.]

Mr. J. B. Hewson and Mr. Gerald Darling are representing the Ministry of Transport. Mr. George Bean is appearing for Bootle Corporation. Mr. J. V. Naisby, Q.C., and Mr. R. J. H. Collinson are representing Canadian Pacific Steamships, Ltd. Mr. Glyn Burrell and Mr. Norman Sellers are appearing for the Mersey Docks and Harbour Board. Mr. Trevor Davies is appearing for Harland & Wolff, Ltd. Mr. P. F. Broadhead (instructed by Messrs. Ingledew, Brown, Bennison & Garrett, London) is instructed to watch the interests of the members of the Mercantile Marine Service Association and the Navigators and Engineer Officers' Union.

The witnesses to-day were employees of Harland & Wolff, Ltd. T. E. GALVIN, chargehand fitter, said that he was working at the forward end of B deck when he heard a number of men saying the ship was on fire. "I went down to C deck to get a fire extinguisher," he said. "When I got there I saw a joiner's apprentice with an extinguisher and we climbed back up the stairs to B deck. When we got back to the pantry the flames had started on the deckhead. The apprentice used his extinguisher until it was empty and then I used mine and by the time it was empty the lights went out."

J. H. DURBAN, chargehand labourer, said that he was working in the kitchen on C deck when he heard someone go past shouting, "She's afire!" "I did not take any notice of it because we got a few of those and I kept on working," he said. "Then I saw someone running past with a hose and saw smoke coming out of the ventilators over the galley store. There was nothing in the kitchen which might have caused the fire."

RIVETERS' PRECAUTIONS

WILLIAM MILLER, chargehand boilermaker, said he was in charge of 44 men working in the *Empress of Canada*. They included welders, riveters, burners and boilermakers and their labourers and were divided into gangs. The riveters were using small bellows fires for heating the rivets. Regarding fire precautions he said that there were fire watchers with each squad of riveters and welders

and underneath each fire was a steel tray. Scalers cleared up rubbish beforehand. There were welders in No. 2 hatch, welders and burners in No. 3 hatch, welders in the double bottom underneath the engine-room, a welder and burner in the oil tank and there was a set of burners in the galley. On the day of the fire they were working on three frames of the ship's starboard side at about D deck aft.

WRECK COMMISSIONER: Did any smoking go on during the work?—I hope not. If men are caught smoking they are usually dealt with.

Mr. HEWSON: How are they dealt with?—Sacked.

In reply to further questions, MILLER said he had not seen any notices about smoking but it was a recognised order that there should be no smoking.

WRECK COMMISSIONER: How many men have been sacked?—I have had no occasion to sack any myself.

Miller, continuing his evidence, said that he was on C deck in the kitchen when he first heard of the fire. A man shouted through the rivet holes from the quay that there was a fire. That would be about a quarter past four, although that was only a rough estimate of the time. When he heard the shout he told the burners to put out their machine and it was put out. A man who passed through the galley at the time told them that the fire was in the working alleyway. Knowing that this was a place where many people passed backwards and forwards he thought that the fire could be dealt with on the spot and did not concern himself with it. He could not smell or see anything of a fire at that time. He went down to D deck in the stewards' messroom, which was used as a storeroom by various trades, as he had some work to get on with and when he got there he found a number of men. One was shouting, "All workmen ashore."

He thought then that the fire must have been something serious so he picked up his coat and asked another man to come with him and see what the trouble really was. They went up the staircase to B deck and they were met by a solid wall of black smoke so thick that they could not see into the working alleyway. He then went ashore.

OXYGEN AND GAS BOTTLES

In reply to Mr. Naisby, Miller said there were some spare oxygen and gas bottles on board by No. 3 hatch on A deck. It was possible, although he was not sure, that there were a few in the working alleyway.

Mr. NAISBY: Did you think of moving these oxygen and gas bottles when you heard there was a fire?—No.

In reply to further questions, MILLER said he had heard of fires occurring in other ships in which he had been working, but not until after they had been extinguished.

WRECK COMMISSIONER: Did you find out the cause of the fires?—No, they had not been my responsibility. If they had been fires where my own men were working I would have found out the cause.

Replying to Mr. Bean, MILLER said that when he went ashore the fire brigade had arrived. Apart from men shouting he had not heard any fire alarm.

ROBERT CRAIK, who said he had been working for 26 years on and off as a plumber for Harland & Wolff, Ltd., said he was in cabin D 47, which was stripped, and he was dealing with wash basins. There was no burning or riveting going on in that cabin. At about five to four he heard a shout of "Fire." He went to the storeroom to find his mate but found he had gone to the *Empress of Scotland*, which was

moored nearby, to collect some piping. There was another shout that the ship was on fire, so he went up two decks and came out in the working alleyway on B deck. The smoke was not too bad then and he was able to go along the alleyway. Smoke was coming towards him from aft to forward.

ACTION WITH HOSE

He shouted down on to the quay from an open door on the port side of the ship for a hose to be passed up, and one was handed up to him and the water was turned on. He carried the hose as far as he could from the half door and directed the water as far as it would go towards the dispensary in the cross alleyway. He continued to do that until the fire brigade came. He saw no actual flames apart from a flicker of sparks as if someone was striking a match up near the deckhead. He tried to play the water on the sparks. He showed the firemen where the fire was when they arrived and as he was standing in about 5 in. of water he left them to it and went ashore.

PETER HUMPHREY, chargehand scaler, said he had been working in the boiler room at the time of the fire. About 10 past four someone passed the word in that there was a bit of a fire up above. He noticed there was a haze in the upper part of the stokehold. He went through into the engine-room and saw there was a haze in the forward half of the engine-room. He then went up into the working alleyway on B deck and met one of his men who told him the fire was up there and he saw that there was very heavy smoke in the starboard alleyway coming from aft to forward. He went ashore to get a hose and this he passed up to Craik through the open door in the ship's port side.

NO IDEA OF LOCATION OF FIRE

In reply to Mr. Naisby, Humphrey said that smoke was only just starting to come through the port alleyway from the after end. It was clear at the time. He had no idea of the exact location of the fire but judged it to be somewhere in the vicinity of a couple of cabins forward and aft of the cross alleyway. He never actually saw any fire. He thought that the deckhead of the cross alleyway or something above the false ceiling was on fire at the time that he was going ashore to get the hose. He saw Davies running along the quay to telephone the fire brigade.

ALAN HALLIDAY, a fire douser, said his work was to attend men using burners in the kitchen on C deck portside where they were burning rivets out of the frames. He had seen no sign of fire until a man who was now dead had told him that the working alleyway was on fire. The time by his watch was 4.15. When he arrived at the scene of the fire, black smoke was coming from the deckhead near the dispensary.

He could only see about two yards because of the smoke. He put his hand on the bulkhead of cabin B 53, almost opposite the dispensary, and this was hot. He ran for a fire extinguisher and set it off as near as he could to the fire, but he could not see if he was playing it on the flames or not because of the dense smoke.

Cross examined by Mr. Bean, Halliday said he had not carried any sort of fire extinguisher with him. With his bucket of water he had a small can with which he could throw water up to the deckheads if a fire broke out above his head. At the end of the day's work he showed the officer in charge round the ship wherever fire had been used. When the officer had seen that

everything was all right he signed a book to that effect. In reply to a question by the Wreck Commissioner, Halliday said he had no instructions on what he should do if a fire broke out in a part of the ship when he was not patrolling. He said that he had also been a fire watchman in the *Empire Waverley*.

PUMP NOT WORKING

EDWARD WILLIAMS, chargehand plumber, said he was in the engineers' staff messroom on D deck port side when he heard there was a fire at about five or ten past four. He was told that it was in B deck cross-pantry. He went up the stairs from D deck to the main galley and there he tried a fire hydrant to see if the water was on. That was before he had even seen the fire. He opened the valve but there was no water in it and he shut it and went on up the working alleyway to B Deck where he tried the master valves to see if they were turned on. These were all painted red to indicate that they were fire mains. He found the valves were already opened. This proved that the pump was not working so he went towards the engine-room to ask one of the engineers to put the fire pump on, and he was told on the way down that someone had already gone to put the pump on.

He went along the working alleyway on the port side, following a second steward to get the smoke apparatus. When he got this he came back and went down to the messroom to give the general alarm that the ship was on fire and to tell the men there where to go off the ship. He came back up the staircase to the galley picking up two fire extinguishers on the way and he played these to the best of his ability on the fire on B deck.

In reply to the Wreck Commissioner witness said that the flames were in the alleyway outside the cross pantry. By this time there was a lot of smoke and they could see the flames wafting inside the pantry. Another man, a joiner, had also brought two fire extinguishers, and between them they emptied the four extinguishers on to the fire within about 10 minutes. Finally the fire became so bad that the staircase on which they were standing started to get alight and paint was falling about them so they decided it was time to get off the ship. He left about twenty to five and on the quay-side gave a general alarm for all men to proceed to the time office for checking.

Replying to Mr. Naisby, witness said that he saw members of both the Liverpool and the Bootle fire brigades on board before he left the ship. The first time he actually saw them was when he was getting off the ship, because the firemen had put a ladder from the quay to a small door on C deck for people to get off. He said that while he was playing the fire extinguishers there was also someone on the other side playing a hose into the pantry and he assumed that they were firemen but he could not see them because of the smoke.

MR. NAISBY: Am I correct in saying that the Mersey Docks and Harbour Board won't allow you to have your fire mains connected to the shore hydrants with the water turned on until the emergency arises?—I believe they are not allowed to connect them but that is not my job.

RESPONSIBILITY FOR SHORE HYDRANTS

Mr. BEAN told the Court that he had no questions to ask the witness but he might be able to help the Court regarding his statement about water supply. "The water arrangements on the hydrants have nothing to do with the Mersey Docks and Harbour Board," Mr. Bean said. "They are in fact controlled by the water suppliers in Liverpool."

At the conclusion of to-day's evidence the WRECK COMMISSIONER stated that the Court would be sitting on Saturday morning. The hearing was adjourned until to-morrow.



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