

# "WILLODALE" INQUIRY

## Drop in Boiler Pressure Due to "Keeping on a Fire"

### EVIDENCE OF SHIP'S ENGINEER

The Ministry of Transport Court of Inquiry into the foundering of the British steamer *Willodale* in the Bay of Biscay on Apr. 4, 1947, while on a voyage from Bordeaux to Cardiff, was continued yesterday when evidence was given by the ship's acting second engineer, who said the reason for the drop in boiler pressure was "just keeping on a fire." He also described how a water-tight door gave way in the stokehold, and was questioned as to the condition of the door. The inquiry, which is being held at the Royal Courts of Justice, Strand, London, is being conducted by Mr. J. V. Naisby, K.C., as Wreck Commissioner, assisted by three assessors, Mr. H. A. Lyndsay, Captain J. P. Thomson and Commander D. V. Setton. The previous proceedings were reported in LLOYD'S List of Sept. 21.

Mr. Peter Bucknill represented the Ministry of Transport, and Mr. David Meurig Evans appeared for the owners, the Bromage Shipping Company, Ltd. The dependants of the master (Captain Hill) and chief officer (who lost their lives) were represented by Mr. P. F. Broadhead (instructed by the Mercantile Marine Service Association and the Navigators and Engineer Officers' Union). Mr. Neil Maclean (instructed by the National Union of Seamen) appeared for the dependants of the deceased members of the crew.

NONTIKOS CAPETANIS, acting second officer of the vessel, continuing his evidence, said he considered the method of loading the deck cargo was correct. It was loaded in such a way that the cargo could be released quickly if there was trouble. There was not much of a list before the cargo started to shift during the evening.

Mr. BUCKNILL: Did you know that the authorities had made rules on the way in which deck cargoes must be lashed? — The chief officer was in charge and I only took my orders from him.

The COMMISSIONER: Was there anything in No. 2 hold except the cargo itself to stop it shifting when the list started?—No.

Do you know whether your chief officer had a certificate or not? — I never saw one, but he told me he had been in the service for 12 years.

### PILOT AND THE WEATHER

Did you at any time hear a conversation between the master and the pilot about whether it was safe to sail or not?—When the pilot came on board he asked the master if he was going out, and he said "Yes."

Capetanis, who is a Greek and had difficulty in answering some of the questions put to him, was in the witness box for over four hours.

WILLIAM ALBERT M. LEWIS, second engineer of the *Willodale*, said he held a temporary certificate. When the vessel left Bordeaux on Apr. 2, 1947, she carried about 90 tons of coal in her bunkers. Of this, 40 tons was on the port side and 50 tons on the starboard side. On the afternoon of Apr. 3 he was called to see the master, who wanted to know if any orders had been given for any tanks to be emptied.

At that time the vessel had a list to starboard, while before she had a list to port. He made soundings and discovered eight inches of water in the starboard bilges. Water started to come through the engine-room skylight at 7 p.m. that night. This was only slight and did not increase.

Lewis also said that the vessel's list increased after the cargo had shifted. The master asked him about putting the bilge pump on the starboard bilges in No. 2 hold. He thought that at that time the vessel was going full steam ahead.

Asked about the pressure of the boilers, the witness said their normal pressure was 165 lb. He had a request from the master to be told what the pressure was, and at that time he found it was 120 lb.

The COMMISSIONER: What do you think caused the drop?—Just keeping on a fire.

Lewis declared that the ship's pumps were working perfectly all right, but at the midnight watch the boiler pressure dropped to 110 lb.

Mr. BUCKNILL: When you were in the engine-room did you feel the ship tilt on her head?—No.

### THE WATER-TIGHT DOORS

What about the water-tight doors in the water-tight bulkhead between No. 2 hold and the stokehold?—They were in perfect condition at Bordeaux. On the morning of Apr. 4 there was a trickle of water seeping through on the starboard side. I went to examine it and found it was not very much. As I was examining it the cleats of the door on the port side came in and the door gave way.

Were you surprised at the door giving way?—Yes.

Did you know the cause?—The weight of water, as far as I know.

What happened?—The master sent for the chief officer and I went to examine the door and found it was true.

The next order was to stop the engines. Then came the order to abandon ship. The order to stop the engines was given at 5.19 a.m., and the order to abandon ship at 5.20 a.m.

Lewis added: "After that I almost went straight into the sea. I had a lifejacket on."

Mr. BUCKNILL: What do you say caused this vessel to founder?—The bad weather.

Do you think anything could have been done to avoid it?—We did everything possible.

In reply to the COMMISSIONER, WITNESS said the water-tight doors were inspected at Bordeaux, but as far as he knew no one had any feeling of apprehension about the condition of these doors.

Lewis told Mr. Maclean that he joined the *Willodale* in February, 1947, and this was his fourth trip in her and he had twice previously experienced a similar type of cargo.

Mr. MACLEAN: Did you at any time discuss with the chief engineer or any other member of the crew the condition of this ship?—No.

Had you on any previous occasion noticed any list on the ship?—Yes, but it was not a bad list. It was approximately a list of five degrees. This was my first timber ship and I was given to understand that all timber ships were that way inclined. The chief engineer was seasick when the bad weather came up and I took charge at 10 p.m. on Apr. 3.

Was there any special significance in your inspection of the water-tight doors?—No. We always inspected them before loading timber.

Was there any reason why these doors should be singled out for inspection?—They were the only doors that concerned us in the boiler-room.

Lewis told Mr. Broadhead that the chief engineer never "handed over" charge to him; he just took over. He had never sailed as second engineer before.

When Mr. BROADHEAD suggested that one of the doors was not inspected, Lewis replied: "It was, and I know my job."

Mr. EVANS: During your inspection of the doors did you find everything in good condition and in good working order?—Yes.

And during the inspection at Bordeaux the chief officer and the chief engineer were with you?—Yes.

The COMMISSIONER pressed the witness about the door giving way and the order to abandon ship having all taken place within a period of five minutes.

Lewis said the door may have given way at 5.5 a.m. and not at 5.15 a.m.

The COMMISSIONER: You can give us no indication as to why the door failed?—No.

While your vessel was loading right up to the time when she completed her loading, do you know whether she was on the ground?—I cannot say, but while she was loading we found her doing a list. First she went to port and then she went to starboard.

Do you know what happened to the lifeboats on the ship?—No.

How did you get in the sea yourself?—I was washed off into the sea.

When did you think that things were getting dangerous?—At about 3 o'clock in the morning.

### FIRING DIFFICULT

Asked further about the pressure, Lewis said he did not ask anyone "What are we doing in the middle of a watch with a pressure of 120?" The ship then had a list of about 12 deg., and he went to see the fireman. Work in the stokehold was difficult with the ship listing.

The COMMISSIONER: When you get a list of about 12 deg., it begins to make things rather awkward, doesn't it?—Yes.

Knowing what we do now, do you consider that this water-tight door was fit for its purpose?—That is rather difficult to answer.

I know it is difficult, but we are here to ascertain the reason for the loss of this ship and the loss of many of your comrades?—The door was perfectly all right when it was inspected.

That is not the question you were asked. I asked you, do you consider that this door was fit?—Knowing what I do now, I should say not.

FRANCIS FITZHUGH, an able seaman, another survivor, said that he heard the French pilot hint to the master that he should make for La Pallice. The pilot spoke in broken English and witness heard him say: "Weather bad, go to La Pallice." Fitzhugh also described how a wave hit the ship and lifted a lifeboat overboard. When the boat actually left the ship there was nobody in it, but two men eventually got in. He attributed the loss of the vessel to the list and the bad weather. When the cargo on No. 2 hold was washed overboard it was impossible to put another tarpaulin over the hatchway.

Fitzhugh added that the French pilot also spoke of getting the list righted. He considered the weather on the night of Apr. 3-4 was the worst he had been in in a ship of the *Willodale*'s size.

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JOHN WILLIAM THOROGOOD, an able seaman, said he was at the wheel when an attempt was made to turn the vessel, but she would only come round so far.

Asked by Mr. BUCKNILL if he could give an opinion as to why the vessel was lost, THOROGOOD replied: "I do not think the ship should ever have been allowed to carry the cargo she did."

Witness added that he formed this opinion while the ship was being loaded.

Mr. MACLEAN: The opinion you expressed was the result of your own thought?—Yes.

It was not put to you in any way?—No.

Mr. BROADHEAD: I understand that you, very gallantly, went to secure No. 2 hatch?—There was nothing gallant about it. I was the only man there and I went with the master.

The master was doing all he could for the preservation of his ship?—Yes.

In reply to Mr. EVANS, WITNESS said he did not consider anybody to blame for the loss of the vessel. It was just due to a series of events.

The COMMISSIONER: When you expressed your opinion, did you think the ship had too much cargo for a good ship of her size, or did you think she was not in good enough condition to carry a normal cargo?—I thought it was due to both and to the all round dilapidated condition of the ship.

How did the dilapidated condition of the ship show itself?—The rigging was rotten and the top of the foremast had gone and it shook. There were also things which were rusty.

The hearing was adjourned until to-day.



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