

# REPORT OF TOTAL LOSS, CASUALTY, &c.

No. 72245 in R. B. Wreck Book p. 14/40 Date of writing this report 19  
Vessel's Name S.S. City of Benares of Glasgow Tons { Gross 11081  
Net 6712  
Built at Glasgow When 1936 10 Casualty notice sent to Owner — Owner's reply —  
Owner's Name Ellerman Lines Ltd., (City Line Ltd. Mgrs),  
Address 5, Bothwell Street, Glasgow, C.2.

SOURCE OF INFORMATION.

CL18/9, 23/9, and 28/9.

Case previously before { Date  
Classing Committee. { Last Minute

Particulars of Classification.

+ 100 A.1. + LMC 9.40  
with freeboard  
5.40

Carrying Oil T.S. 10,39CL  
Fuel F.P. above 150°F. in deep  
tank.

Date of Casualty 17th September 1940.

Précis of particulars of Casualty Sunk by submarine in the Atlantic

about 17th September, 1940.

RETAIN

## EVACUEE SHIP SUNK

83 Children and 7 Escorts  
Lost

## TORPEDOED IN HEAVY WEATHER

The Children's Overseas Reception Board announces with deep regret that a ship conveying 90 children and nine escorts to Canada under its scheme of evacuation from vulnerable areas to the overseas Dominions has been torpedoed and sunk. It is feared that 83 of the children and seven of the escorts have been lost. A warship which proceeded to the scene of the disaster has brought into a northern port seven children, three girls and four boys.

The children embarked at a West Coast port during the second week of September, and were well on the way to their new war-time home when the ship was struck at 10 p.m. on Tuesday, Sept. 17. As with the evacuee ship which was torpedoed late in August on a similar voyage, when the whole company of 320 children was saved unharmed, the precautions taken by the Board were on the scale which has made it possible to transport overseas and place in homes nearly 3000 children without, hitherto, a single casualty. For every 15 children there was a skilled and experienced escort, in addition to a doctor and nurse. There were frequent boat drills. The complement of the ship was so calculated that for every child there was one adult passenger on board. The authorities were satisfied that the provision of boats was more than ample. The tragic circumstances defeated all precautions. A number of the children are believed to have been killed by the explosion. There was a terribly heavy sea which swamped many of the boats and defeated gallant efforts at rescue.

Mr. Geoffrey Shakespeare, M.P., Under-Secretary for Dominion Affairs, the Chairman of the Children's Overseas Reception Board, hurried off to the West Coast port on receipt of the news, in order to meet the warship bringing in the survivors and personally to supervise the arrangements made to secure their comfort. He reported to the office of the Board that the little handful of children who were landed were well and in good heart, though some were slightly bruised. The three girls were at once taken to a local hospital, and the boys were taken by the local Deputy-Director of Education to his own home.

## "BARBAROUS METHODS OF WARFARE"

Later Mr. Shakespeare issued the following statement:—

"I am full of horror and indignation that any German submarine captain could be found to torpedo a ship over 600 miles from land in a tempestuous sea. The conditions were such that there was little chance for passengers, whether adult or children, to survive. This deed will shock the world. It is another example of the barbarous methods of warfare associated with Nazi Germany, and it is only comparable with their present brutal and indiscriminate bombing of women and children in London."

The children, who practically all came from State-aided schools, were drawn almost entirely from vulnerable areas in London, in those parts of Middlesex which are just over the border from London, from Liverpool, Sunderland and Newport (Mon.). Their ages were from five to 15, and in a number of cases they represented entire families. Five of them were the children of London parents named Grimmond, who recently found when they emerged from a public shelter after an air raid that their home had been shattered by a bomb. The Board took over the children, had them fitted out with clothing, and found accommodation for them in the ship. Two other children had been passengers in the ship which was torpedoed in August. The home of one of these, Michael Brooker, was threatened by a delayed action bomb about the time he returned from the first interrupted voyage. In the case of the second, Patricia Allen, other circumstances made it impossible for the child to return home. So these two, also, were accommodated in the ill-fated ship.

In so far as such a blow to bereaved parents can be softened, the Board took every step which was possible. It was felt that with the present difficulties of the post the sending of letters would be slow and inappropriate, while the receipt of a telegram conveying the sad news would involve shock which should be avoided. Tactful human agency was required, and accordingly the assistance of Local Education Authorities in the areas affected was enlisted. Experienced welfare and other social workers undertook on their behalf the sad task of calling at the homes of the children and breaking the news as gently as possible. It cannot be too strongly emphasised that any parent with a child or children in process of evacuation overseas under the Board's scheme who has not already received such a message may rest assured that their child was not in this ship. All the bereaved parents have been officially informed.

To each home affected Mr. Shakespeare has sent the following letter:—

"I am very distressed to inform you that, in spite of all the precautions taken, the ship carrying your children to Canada was torpedoed on Tuesday night, Sept. 17. I am afraid your children are not among those reported as rescued, and I am informed that there is no chance of there being any further lists of survivors from

the torpedoed vessel. The Children's Overseas Reception Board wishes me to convey its very deep sympathy with you in your bereavement. Like so many other parents you were anxious to send your children overseas to one of the Dominions to enjoy a happier and safer life. You courageously took this decision in the interest of your children, believing that this course was better than continuous air raids. Hitherto there have been no casualties among the thousands of children sent overseas: unhappily the course of the war has shown that neither by land nor sea can there be complete safety, and all of us are subject to risk whether we stay at home or proceed overseas. As a parent I can realise the anguish that this letter must cause you and the great sadness which will be brought into your home. I should like to assure you how profoundly I, personally, sympathise with you and how deeply I share your grief."

Suggested Record X

Date of Committee

Committee's Minute

OMITTED FROM R.B.

TUE 29 OCT 1940

OMITTED FROM R.B.

RETAIN

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LL 28/9

## SUNK EVACUEE LINER'S BOAT FOUND

### 46 More Survivors

The Air Ministry announced late on Thursday that a boat containing 46 survivors from the torpedoed evacuee liner *City of Benares*, had been found by a Sunderland flying boat on Wednesday, after having been adrift for eight days in mid-Atlantic. The survivors, including six evacuee children, were picked up by a British warship, and were landed at a British port on Thursday night.

The boat was found 600 miles from land. The survivors had been adrift since their ship was torpedoed in mid-Atlantic on Sept. 17. Two Sunderlands, one belonging to the Royal Australian Air Force, shared in the rescue. The Australian Sunderland had just been relieved from convoy escort when it found the lifeboat. The captain flew to the convoy, and asked the captain of an R.A.F. Sunderland which had taken over from him to see to the rescue of the survivors. By Aldis lamp signals he gave their exact position.

The captain of the second Sunderland said: "The Sunderland we were relieving over the convoy sent up a message just before going off patrol. The captain said he had sighted a boat. He could not stay because his petrol was running low. We went straight to the place he indicated and found the boat at once. All the people in the boat were sitting or lying down, except one man who was at the tiller. Some, amidships, seemed to be in rather a bad way. They had hoisted a sail and were making what speed they could. When we got there we dropped a parachute bag filled with all the food we had on board. We attached a life-jacket to keep it afloat.

"We circled round and made them a signal that we were going to get help, but they had only a semaphore which we were travelling too fast to read. However, we made them understand that we were going to fetch a ship which we thought was about 40 miles away. Before leaving them I went down very low on the water and saw that it would be possible to land and take them on board if they could not be rescued otherwise. Then we went to fetch a ship. We found a warship and signalled that there was a boat full of people and indicated their position. I said we would meet the warship near the lifeboat.

"We flew back to the boat and then to the warship again, but she was not on the right course, so I signalled 'Follow me,' and then flew directly over the ship towards the lifeboat. The warship altered course and followed. When I was getting near the lifeboat I dropped a smoke flare which the warship saw and signalled O.K. We waited until we saw the warship actually stop alongside the lifeboat, and then, as we had received a signal telling us to return to base before dusk, we left. We were very glad to see those people safe and all felt very bucked about it."

One of the survivors, Mr. Bohdan Nagorski, a director of a Polish shipping company, gave an account of his experiences to a news agency reporter. He said: "We had made up our minds that there was no hope of being rescued. We had been at sea in an open boat for eight days. We had little water and our food rations were also practically exhausted. Suddenly we heard the roar of aeroplane engines. We looked up and saw to our joy a Sunderland flying boat appearing from the clouds. A plane swooped down and the pilot signalled to us and then disappeared. Later he returned and dropped food consisting of fruit and other light diet from the plane. The food, however, missed the boat and fell into the water, but we were not worrying about food by this time. The flying boat went off again but returned later, almost simultaneously with the appearance of a warship which had come to rescue us."

Fourth Officer R. M. Cooper, who was in charge of the boat, paid tribute to the behaviour of the children, and especially praised the work of Miss Mary Cornish, who massaged the children, keeping them as fit as possible. The boat picked up five men who were on rafts.

Obituary

## TORPEDOED EVACUEE SHIP

### The "City of Benares"

It was revealed yesterday that the vessel which was torpedoed last week while carrying 90 children and their escorts to Canada was the Ellerman's City Line steamer *City of Benares*, 11,000 tons gross, the largest vessel in her owners' fleet. When she left the Clyde in October, 1936, on her maiden voyage to India it was stated that she had a service speed of 15 knots, enabling her to make the voyage from Liverpool to Bombay, via Marseilles, in 21 days. She was built by Barclay, Curle & Co., Ltd., Whiteinch, and was completed within 9½ months of laying the keel. Her propelling machinery, consisting of Parsons turbines, supplied by Cammell Laird & Co., Ltd., Birkenhead, developed 6500 s.h.p., and on her trials she attained a speed of 17½ knots. In a way she was a pioneer vessel in the Indian trade, for her passenger accommodation set a new standard, the cabins being remarkably spacious and airy; one of the features was a tastefully and gaily decorated children's dining and play-room at the after end of the bridge deck. The cabins were on the upper deck and bridge deck, and the public rooms, promenade decks and sports deck were very extensive. The 10 lifeboats were all fitted with Fleming hand-propelling gear.

LL 27/9

## "CITY OF BENARES" TRAGEDY

### Three of the Officers from Tayside

From Our Own Correspondent

DUNDEE, Thursday. Three of the officers of the sunk evacuee liner *City of Benares* are from the Tayside district. Captain Landless Nicoll, who is missing, made his home at 3, Viewfield Road, Arbroath. He is aged 51, is married and has three daughters. The only son of the late Captain David Nicoll, Arbroath, he served his apprenticeship in sail with the Shire Line. During the last war he held commissioned rank in the R.N.R., serving in a patrol yacht in the Atlantic and later in convoy escort vessels. After the war he joined the City Line, and for over 20 years was master of liners trading to India and the East.

Fourth Officer Ronald M. Cooper, who is also missing, resides at Invergowie, near Dundee. He is a son of the late Mr. Arthur W. Cooper, who was associated with the marine engineering firm of Cooper & Greig, Dundee, now out of business. Mr. Cooper was posted to another of the company's vessels which sailed some time ago, but he was prevented from joining her by malaria. He served his apprenticeship in the ill-fated *Athenia*, and latterly in the *Lotitia*. Three of his five brothers are also ship's officers, and one of them was in a ship which picked up the *City of Benares*' S.O.S.

Third Officer William Lee, of Forthill Drive, Broughty Ferry, has been saved.

## EVACUEE LINER SURVIVORS

### Fourth Officer's Account of Boat Trip

On his return to Dundee after navigating a lifeboat from the torpedoed evacuee liner *City of Benares* for eight days in mid-Atlantic, Fourth Officer Ronald M. Cooper was given a great reception by his friends. Mr. Cooper's boat, containing 45 survivors, was found by a flying boat.

In an interview, Mr. Cooper said that after casting off they stood by until the liner went down. They picked 10 or 11 survivors out of the water and then ran before the wind. The lifeboat proved a fine dry boat, and though the spray was troublesome at times they shipped no more water than could be comfortably dealt with by baling. When the seas ran too high for safety they used the sea anchor and hove to. During calm weather they used a hand-paddle arrangement in the stern. At the week-end they sighted a cargo steamer, but she appeared to think their sail was a U-boat trap as she made off. When the plane spotted them a naval man who had been saved from the water semaphored the ship's name.

The six children never complained, and Miss Cornish, the escort, performed wonders in keeping them warm and in good spirits. Although some of the natives were suffering severely by the time they were picked up, most of the Europeans, he thought, could have held out for another two or three days.



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