

*SIRDHANA*

# REPORT OF TOTAL LOSS, CASUALTY, &c.

WRECK DAY

No. 173  
Section 3

9698

No. 33770 in R. B.

Wreck Book, p. 88/39

Date of writing this report 4th December, 1939

Vessel's Name *Steel Twin S.S. "Sirdhana"* of *London*Tons { Gross 7745  
Net 4835Built at *Newcastle* When *1925* / *12* Casualty notice sent to Owner *30/11/39* Owner's reply *1/12/39*Owner's Name *British India Steam Navigation Co. Ltd.*Address *122 Leadenhall Street, London, E.C. 3.*Case previously before  
Classing Committee.Date  
Last Minute

Particulars of Classification.

<i>H 10091</i> <i>with freeboard</i> <i>11,38</i>	<i>H LMC9,37</i>  <i>BS 11,38</i>
<i>SS No 3-11,37</i>	<i>TSC 511,38</i> <i>PN 11,38</i>

Date of Casualty

*13th November, 1939*

Précis of particulars of Casualty This vessel is reported to have sunk after inadvertently striking a British mine just outside the port limits of Singapore harbour, about three miles from shore, on the 13th November, 1939. Salvage is stated to be practically impossible.

The owners report she is a total loss.

## SOURCE OF INFORMATION.

## EXPLOSION IN SHIP MYSTERY

### BRITISH LINER SUNK OFF SINGAPORE

SINGAPORE, Monday.

The British liner Sirdhana, 7,745 tons, belonging to the British India Steam Navigation Company, sank in Singapore Roads early this morning, 15 minutes after an explosion.

Eleven Asiatic deck passengers, mostly children, are known to have lost their lives and nine others are missing.

The cause of the explosion is a mystery. One suggestion is that the ship struck a mine.

A preliminary inquiry is to be opened by the Singapore authorities to-morrow and an official statement has been promised.

The passengers included 137 Chinese deportees from the British colony, most of whom were imprisoned behind a steel grill in the forward hold.

They were saved by the prompt action of the British inspector in charge of their police escort, who blew open the lock of the grill with five gun shots.

With water flooding the hold the Chinese rushed out and made for the lifeboats. Most of them have been rounded up and the authorities are searching for the remainder.

#### ESCAPE IN LAST LIFEBOAT

Thousands of people along the waterfront saw the liner go down. Asiatics and Europeans working in offices crowded out on to the street, but were powerless to go to the ship's aid.

An officer from a Japanese vessel was the first to reach the scene and he rowed about picking up survivors. Other rescuers, including naval and harbour launches and Chinese sampan men, quickly followed.

Among the survivors are a number of Americans, including Nicola, the magician, and his company, who lost all their equipment and belongings.

Mr. Nicola said that he and his wife boarded the last lifeboat, which held 70 people, just as the ship sank. After half an hour's rowing the lifeboat was taken in tow by a rescue launch.

"Two men in my company," he said, "were unable to get into the lifeboat, and they dived off as the ship heeled over and clung to some wreckage. After being picked up by a launch they helped in rescue work.—Reuter and B.U.P."

D. Tel.  
14/11

RETAIN

W.P. no. 173  
Section 3

Suggested Record

**SUNK-WAR LOSS. 11,39**  
TUE 5 DEC 1939

Date of Committee

Committee's Minute

*Sunk-War loss 11.39*  
*RB*



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W477-0321

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# BRITISH LINER MINED

## Sank in Harbour: Twenty Missing

SINGAPORE, Monday.

IN full view of thousands of people on the waterfront of this great British naval base today, the 7,745-ton British liner Sirdhana rocked after a sudden explosion, listed—and sank in 15 minutes.

It is believed that she struck a mine. Twenty people are missing, among them 11 deck passengers, most of whom were children.

In the Sirdhana's hold, locked behind a steel grille, were 137 Chinese deportees.

Water was already flooding the hold when the British inspector in charge of their police escort emptied his revolver into the lock and set them free.

Along the waterfront the large crowds, swollen by streams of sight-seers, who poured out of offices and warehouses, watched, helpless, as the liner settled down.

An officer in a Japanese vessel leaped into a rowing-boat.

### Lost Everything

Thousands cheered him as he strained over the oars. In less than a minute he was picking up survivors.

Naval and harbour launches shot out from the quay. Chinese sampan men ran to their boats and were soon helping in the rescue.

The missing passengers are mainly Asiatics. Among the survivors are many Americans, including Nicola, a well-known magician, his wife and his troupe of ten.

They were returning to America after a tour of Australia and the Far East.

All they have, their personal belongings, and 100 tons of equipment, is lost.

A preliminary inquiry into the sinking will be opened by the Singapore authorities to-morrow.

The Sirdhana belonged to the British India Steam Navigation Company and is registered at London.—*Reuter and British United Press.*

Times 14/11

# BRITISH INDIA LINER STRIKES MINE

## SUNK IN SINGAPORE HARBOUR

FROM OUR CORRESPONDENT SINGAPORE, Nov. 13

It is officially announced that the British India steamer Sirdhana (7,745 tons) sank in Singapore Harbour this morning after striking a mine. No explanation of how the accident occurred is likely to be given until after the inquiry, which will be opened to-morrow. It is feared that 11 deck passengers, chiefly infants and children, have been drowned, and nine Asiatics are also missing. All the Europeans who were on board were saved.

The vessel sank just outside the port limits, about three miles from the shore, shortly after the pilot had disembarked. Thousands of persons along the waterfront saw the ship sink within 20 minutes after a violent explosion. Among the passengers were Chinese deportees from the Colony, most of whom were saved, and the survivors included Nicola, the American magician, and his company, who lost their entire equipment, said to be worth a large sum.

# Helpless crowd see British liner sink

SINGAPORE, Monday.

CROWDS lined Singapore's waterfront, powerless to help, as the 7,745-ton British India liner Sirdhana sank in the roadstead after an explosion this morning.

Eleven deck passengers, some of them children, were drowned. Nine others are missing.

An officer from a Japanese ship lying in the harbour was the first to reach the mass of struggling people. He took several aboard his small rowing boat.

Naval and harbour launches, Chinese sampans, picked up the rest.

Among the white passengers was an American music hall star, Nicola the magician. He and his company were saved, but they lost all their gear and belongings.

Chinese passengers included 137 undesirables who were being deported from the colony. They were locked in cells below decks when the explosion occurred. An officer freed them by shooting off the locks of their cells.

Some of the 137 are believed to have swum ashore to liberty, and Singapore's police are searching the city for them.

An inquiry into the loss of the ship is to be opened tomorrow. It is thought the vessel struck a mine.—*Reuter and British United Press.*

Times 15/11

# SINKING OF THE SIRDHANA

## MILITARY PERSONNEL SAFE

The Admiralty announces that it would appear that the British merchant ship Sirdhana, which struck a mine off Singapore on Monday and sank, "must have inadvertently entered the British minefield off that port."

DELHI, Nov. 14.—It is officially announced here that all the military personnel on board the Sirdhana have been saved. The personnel includes 163 Indian non-commissioned officers and men with "followers" (native servants) of the Hong-kong and Singapore Artillery.—*Reuter.*

\*The Sirdhana was a ship of 7,745 tons belonging to the British India Steam Navigation Company. Eleven Asiatic deck passengers lost their lives and nine others were reported missing.

Times 14/11

# SINKING OF THE SIRDHANA

FROM OUR CORRESPONDENT SINGAPORE, Nov. 15

The inquiry into the loss of the British India steamer Sirdhana, which sank after striking a mine off Singapore on Monday, will open on Friday. There were a number of Chinese deportees on board, and it is now officially announced that 123 out of 137 of them have been accounted for, and were again in custody. One has died in hospital, six are in hospital with injuries, one has escaped from hospital, two have escaped ashore, and four others are missing.

# SINKING OF THE SIRDHANA

## COURT'S FINDINGS

FROM OUR CORRESPONDENT

SINGAPORE, Nov. 23

Mr. Justice Pedlow has announced the findings of the Court of Inquiry into the sinking of the Sirdhana, the British India steamer which struck a mine off Singapore on November 13.

The Court found that the master, Captain Philip Fairbairn, did not take adequate steps to ascertain the position of the minefield where the Sirdhana foundered, although the authorities had issued warnings, both written and by wireless. The casualty was caused by the wrongful default of the master in not acquainting himself with the correct position of the minefield. The second officer, Mr. Thomas Gerard Green, also failed to acquaint himself with the position of the minefield, and was thereby guilty of wrongful default, which was a contributory cause of the casualty. The Court recommended that the master's certificate should be suspended for one year, with the recommendation that he should be granted a first mate's foreign-going certificate during the suspension. The second officer should be censured.

In order to obviate a repetition of the occurrence the Court recommended a modification of the method of issuing notices to mariners requiring a master's signature for their receipt. The Court considered that there were strong grounds for consideration by the proper authorities whether a battery commander of a fort should not be at liberty to fire, at his own risk and discretion without reference to anyone, a "bring-to" round to save a ship at the last moment when nothing else would stop her from entering a minefield. The Sirdhana had been seen approaching the minefield by a battery commander, who had said, during the inquiry, that he could not fire a warning shot without permission from the fire commander, stationed some distance away.

Captain Fairbairn, giving evidence yesterday, said that although he received warnings about minefields in Singapore waters he was never warned of the minefield No. 3 where the Sirdhana sank after the explosion.

The Court expressed the opinion that the rescue work of the master and officers after the explosion was admirable.

LL 24/11

# THE "SIRDHANA" LOSS

## Singapore Court Suspends Master's Certificate

SINGAPORE, Thursday

After a five-days hearing a special Court, composed of a High Court Judge as president and three master mariners as assessors, to-day found Captain Philip Fairbairn, master of the liner Sirdhana (7745 tons gross), owned by the British India Steam Navigation Company, Ltd., guilty of wrongful default in not acquainting himself with the position of the minefield into which the vessel sailed when leaving Singapore harbour for Hong-kong at 10 a.m. (local time) on Nov. 13, and sank after striking a mine. The Court suspended Captain Fairbairn's master's certificate for one year, but recommended that he should be permitted to act as mate during the suspension.

The Court found the second officer, Thomas Gerard Green, guilty of wrongful default in not acquainting Captain Fairbairn of messages received regarding the minefield, and censured him. The Court found that the location of the particular minefield was not marked on the ship's chart, and considered that Captain Fairbairn should have taken steps to acquaint himself with the location of the minefields, about which the fullest information was available from the port authorities. The Court found that this neglect was directly responsible for the loss of the ship.

The Court found that after the explosion all the officers took all possible steps to save life, and considered that the conduct of all the officers was most admirable. The Court advised that the authorities should consider at a very early date delegating authority to the officer in charge of the port battery to use his discretion in firing a "bring to" round when vessels were noticed approaching dangerous areas. This recommendation was made as a result of the officer giving evidence that he had no authority to fire, and that if he had fired across the Sirdhana's bows he would have been acting directly contrary to orders. The Court had suggested that the Sirdhana could have been stopped by this means.—*Reuter.*



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