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AUSONIA DESTROYED BY FIRE. THREE KILLED IN BOILER EXPLOSION. BRILLIANT RESCUE WORK BY BRITISH NAVY.

PASSENGERS AND CREW LANDED SAFELY.

The s.s. Ausonia, one of the most luxurious ships in the Lloyd Triestino Fleet, which was very popular with local residents, was practically destroyed by fire following a boiler explosion shortly after entering the Alexandria harbour early yesterday morning.

The explosion, which was purely accidental, resulted, we regret to record, in the loss of three Italian seamen, while according to an official statement issued by the Lloyd Triestino Agency last evening three members of the crew are still missing and seven seriously injured.

British Sailors in Action.

That the disaster was not more serious was mainly due to the prompt and efficient work of the British Navy. Immediately the explosion was heard all ships sent boats to the rescue, attended the wounded, took off the passengers and helped the crew of the Ausonia and the Fire Brigade to combat the flames.

For several hours they worked heroically and it was after midday before they relaxed and the Ausonia was towed out of the danger zone a total wreck.

The Commandant of the Ausonia, later in the day, paid a personal visit to the Admiral of the Fleet and thanked him for the splendid work of the Fleet while the Italian Consul General in Alexandria also expressed to the Italian Minister in Cairo the highest appreciation of the work of the British Navy.

HOW THE FIRE STARTED.

BLUEJACKETS EARLY ON THE SCENE.

Prompt assistance by the British Navy in Alexandria early yesterday morning, when the well-known Italian passenger liner, Ausonia, of the Lloyd Triestino Fleet, caught fire following a boiler explosion, undoubtedly saved many lives and won the admiration of all who witnessed the terrible disaster.

Arriving from Haifa shortly after seven o'clock, preparatory to sailing for Italy today, the Ausonia had just entered the outer harbour and dropped anchor for the quarantine and police inspection, when, before the police work had been completed, there was a loud explosion.

Clouds of steam and smoke belched forth and although many on board were apparently unaware of what had happened, the naval men in the harbour seemed to realise, with their uncanny instinct, the full meaning of the loud report, and within a few minutes, the Queen Elizabeth, Sussex, Shropshire, Australia, Valiant and almost every other warship in the harbour had sent some form of craft to the rescue.

No Panic.

At first the trouble was not thought to be serious. According to one of the 33 passengers aboard, no one understood what had happened and they readily accepted the reassurances of the officers that a pipe had burst and there was no cause for alarm.

In a very short time, however, it was clear that there had been a serious disaster in the engine room, where one of the boilers had exploded. The fire alarm was sounded and the passengers were quickly mustered and taken off by the British sailors who had hastened to the rescue.

Engine Room Fatalities.

In the meantime, while some of the sailors helped to combat the fire, naval doctors and medical attendants rushed to the aid of those wounded in the engine room. First aid was given to those seriously injured and eleven were speedily removed to the hospital ship Maine. Some of them were already almost beyond human aid and within a few hours three died, including a 3rd engineer, and were removed to the mortuary by the A.I.P.A.

All this happened in less than an hour and in the meantime the ship had become thoroughly ablaze. Every available form of fire fighting appliances of the Ports and Lights Administration Fire Brigade and the Navy together with British naval ratings and the crew of the Ausonia battled valiantly against the flames.

Crew Taken Off.

It was soon clear, however, that they were fighting a losing battle. The crew of 230 was gradually taken off and when a roll call was taken it was found that in addition to the dead and wounded three of the mechanics were missing. Shortly after midday the ship had been cleared and after being towed away from the entrance to the harbour to Ramla el Beida, it was there left in the hands of the fire brigade.

Later it was thought that the fire had been got under control but then came a second explosion and a recrudescence of the flames, with the result that it is now generally believed the erstwhile popular Ausonia will be a total loss.

Although we have been unable to obtain the actual figures, it is generally believed that the Ausonia was insured for nearly one million pounds sterling and that the bulk of the insurance or reinsurance will fall on the London marine insurance market.

Passengers Continue their Journey.

The twenty-three passengers in transit were able to continue their journey later, complete with baggage, on board the Pilsna. The latter had been due to sail at midday but was delayed three hours to enable these passengers and 53 of the crew from the Ausonia to return to Italy.

s.s. Carnaro Replaces Ausonia.

We understand that the majority of the rest of the crew together with the three victims who will be taken to Italy for burial will sail to-day in the s.s. Carnaro, which was en route between Beirut and Rhodes and has been urgently summoned to replace the Ausonia's sailing. It is expected to leave Alexandria to-day at 2 p.m. for Trieste.

Italian Appreciation.

In the afternoon the Commander of the Ausonia went aboard the flagship and personally thanked the Admiral of the Fleet for the prompt assistance given by the British sailors. The Admiral, in reply, expressed his condolences on the loss of the Italian sailors who had been killed as a result of the explosion.

It is also understood that the Italian Consul General in Alexandria has reported to the Italian Minister in Cairo that the preliminary investigations show that the explosion was purely accidental and that he has expressed the highest appreciation of the work of the British Navy. Press despatches from Egypt to Rome have paid similar tribute to the Fleet.

Cotton Exports.

The Ausonia was scheduled to take a heavy cargo of cotton to Italy to-day in view of local exporters' fears that the early application of sanctions would prevent further despatches to Italy. It is reported that nearly 5,000 bales were awaiting transport and although yesterday there were fears of delay, we understand that this will not be the case as the bulk will now leave to-day aboard the s.s. Carnaro which is replacing the Ausonia's sailing.

LLOYD TRIESTINO OFFICIAL STATEMENT.

The General Agency of the Lloyd Triestino communicated to us last evening the following statement:

This morning the s.s. Ausonia, coming from Haifa, entered the Alexandria harbour at 7.30 and dropped anchor at Mex. Whilst the Police formalities were being carried out, one boiler of the prow compartment exploded, for reasons which are still unknown, setting fire to the whole vessel.

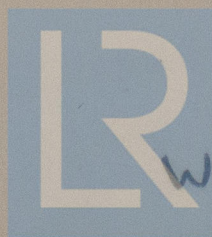
Notwithstanding the prompt assistance received from the Port and Lights Administration and from the British Fleet, which immediately sent men and material, the fire could not be extinguished, and at midday the vessel was hauled alongside the Ramla Beda bank.

Unfortunately three members of the crew are reported missing, three killed, and seven injured. No passenger was injured and the behaviour of the Ship's Commander and of the whole crew was admirable, while whole-hearted assistance was given by the British Fleet in this circumstance.

THE s.s. AUSONIA. COMFORT, LUXURY AND SPEED.

The s.s. Ausonia (12,995 tons gross) was built in 1927 at Trieste for the Sitmar Line, which later became part of the Lloyd Triestino Fleet. She had a speed of 21 knots and from the outset was very popular.

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