

S.S. "Huntress", Voyage 39.

Fracture of Shell Plates, Singapore, April 5th. 1930.

The following is a report of what actually took place with regard to above :-

The "Huntress" arrived at Singapore from Saigon at 3.45 p.m. on April 4th. to supplement the bunkers remaining on board by 250 tons to enable her to reach Durban, and also to load 500 tons of planks for Mauritius. Having received pratique the Pilot boarded and the ship proceeded into the Empire Dock to take bunkers on board. She finished bunkering at 8.30 p.m. and as the timber was to be loaded from lighters in the Roads, the Pilot boarded at 6.00 a.m. on the following morning (April 5th) and took us to our anchorage. The Chief Officer on going down below to see that everything was in readiness to receive the cargo, found that the Deep Tank was leaking very badly. I reported the matter at once to Lloyd's Surveyor, who, when he came on board, went down with me and we together made an examination of the tank. As a result I sent the following cable to Johannesburg :-

"Huntress a few rivets leaking badly in deep tank and frames at deck wasted. Propose fitting deep brackets to deck beams and frames as temporary repair. Lloyd's Surveyor recommends frames at deck to be cropped, new part frames and new brackets."

As repairs could be done much more expeditiously alongside than in the stream, we went alongside on the following morning, April 6th., at 6.00 a.m. and at 8.00 a.m. the repair gang boarded and repairs commenced.

On the 7th April, I received a written statement from Lloyd's Surveyor, for which I had asked him, and of which the following is an extract :-

"Have examined the frames and beams in the Deep Tank with the Singapore Harbour Board gentleman in charge of the job. Found the shell plate split, Port side, in the way of rivets and marked same. Found Starboard side split at deck. The Deck beams are at ends about 1/16" th. thick. Recommend cargo to be discharged and vessel placed in dry dock. The Dock Yard Manager states they would like all cargo out before docking. On the examination this afternoon found it impossible to carry out repairs without dry docking."

As a result of the above letter I sent the following cable to Johannesburg :-

"On commencing work in deep tank found shell plate split both sides. Lloyd's Surveyor recommends all cargo must be discharged, ship drydocked and repaired."

Our Agents, Messrs. Paterson, Simons & Co., and myself, immediately took up the matter of discharging all cargo before docking, with the Harbour Board. On April 11th. we received a letter from the Secretary of the Harbour Board in which he stated :-

"I have to acknowledge receipt of your letter dated 9th. April and to confirm the arrangement made by you with Mr. Niblock, the Board Dock Yard Manager, to the effect that the Board will be prepared to dry dock the s.s. "Huntress", but having regard to the apparent condition of the ship, the Board will request you to have the cargo removed from the ship before dry docking."

W 582-0189/14

That afternoon I conferred with Lloyd's Surveyor in the matter of dry docking with part cargo in the ship but he pointed out that the Secretary of the Harbour Board had already notified us that all cargo was to come out and that he concurred with the Board's action in the matter. I then suggested to Lloyd's Surveyor that it might be cheaper to take the ship to Sourabaya and have the necessary repairs done there if he would grant me a sea-worthy certificate after cargo had been discharged. He said he would not take the responsibility of issuing a sea-worthy certificate until all repairs had been effected to his requirements and satisfaction.

On the 15th April Paterson, Simons received the following cable from Johannesburg :-

"Telegraph immediately information with reference to cause damage which appears to be due some occurrence during voyage from Saigon. We presume you have taken necessary legal steps protect ship. Telegraph what you have done. Before signing agreement for repairs telegraph price tendered. If it is too high may decide not repair."

to which we replied :-

"Vessel cannot obtain certificate of seaworthiness until repairs ordered by Lloyd's Surveyor carried out. Those so far ordered 15 frames each side deep tank to be renewed. Further examination taking place to-day. If more ordered will telegraph tomorrow. Cannot obtain estimate of cost until after final examination in drydock. Presume we have your authority to proceed. Captain states no accident or damage current voyage. Cause is ordinary wear and tear. Slow discharge due to difficulty handling logs. Harbour Board will not work them after dark. Cannot discharge logs from 1, 4 & 6 with ship's gear owing goosenecks of derricks given out. Ship shifts tomorrow to only crane suitable discharging heavy logs. What legal steps other than note protest do you wish us to take."

Discussing these two last quoted cables with Mr. Morin after arrival in Durban he stated to me that owing to my cable saying that no accident or damage had happened to the ship and that the cause of the fractured plates was due to wear and tear, I had precluded the possibility of insurance on cargo in the matter of discharge, storage and reloading. In any case, I only stated the truth.

The reply from Johannesburg to the last quoted cable was as follows :-

"Are awaiting your further report with estimate before deciding whether proceed with repairs. Do not commence until you have our authority which will be sent promptly if we decide proceed. No legal steps required other than note protest."

On the 17th April we sent the following cable to Johannesburg :-

"Following additional ordered by Lloyd's Surveyor. Deep tank renew 15 beams also beam knees and web frame ship's side forward bulkhead. Renew top brackets web frames Port bulkhead plating now wasted through and examine further after sealing ship's side plating. Examine further in drydock. Forepeak scale and attend to wasted frames. In order save time suggest authorise scaling Deep tank

Register
W582-51804

immediately cannot obtain estimate expenses until scaling finished and tank examined further. Referring to your telegram of Wednesday last unless repairs carried out cannot obtain clearance."

To quote all cables which passed between Johannesburg and Singapore and 'vice versa' would take up too much space but those quoted will serve to show the rotten state of the ship, owing solely, as Lloyd's Surveyor in Singapore stated, to owner's neglect. Forepeak and deeptank were in that condition when the ship left Durban on the 15th of January and the Management were cognisant of the fact. Time and again the state of the deep tank has been pointed out to Captain Stephens by myself and the fact that when on a voyage the tank was either full of cargo (when loaded) or water (when light) was also explained to him, so that an opportunity for scaling and painting seldom presented itself. But there was never time to have anything done and the time honoured promise of "next voyage" became a legend. Before leaving Durban on this same voyage (39) we found that our No.3 Bilges were choked. This meant that if the ship made water anywhere from the stem to the after bulkhead of No.2, the water would not run to the main pumps and could not possibly be pumped out. If the leak were a serious one and we had many serious leaks at one time and another, it meant the possible loss of the ship. All this was explained to Mr. Morin who had come down to chase the ship out, but he couldn't see why the clearing of the bilges could not be left until the following voyage. To clear the bilges meant the shifting of about 120 tons of coal in the reserve bunker to enable us to lift the limber boards which cover the bilges, with a consequent loss of one day or thereabouts. I pointed out to Morin that if anything untoward were to happen to the ship during the voyage owing to the fact that these bilges were choked that I would be solely to blame and might lose my certificate on that account. But even then he did not see why it should not be left over until the following voyage. Fortunately Captain Weller, who at that time was Acting Port Captain, came into my room while this argument was going on and he backed me up in my statement that the bilges must be cleared, and when Morin again suggested that it might be left over till the following voyage, Captain Weller remarked "Next voyage never comes". The coal was shifted and the bilges were cleared and as a result the ship did not sail on Monday, January 13th. as Morin had determined, but on Wednesday, the 15th. Such was the policy of the Shipping Office throughout.

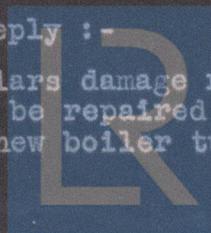
In the engineroom department it was the same. The vessel would arrive in Durban after a 22 to 24 day's run with the engines turning all the time. Two days in Durban and on to Capetown. Two or three days there and on to Port Elizabeth, then East London and Durban where we went right under the coal belt and in another two days we were outward bound for an Eastern port with a full cargo of coal and the prospect of another 24 days before the engines stopped. The Chief Engineer never had a chance to take anything adrift in his engineroom.

On request I wirelesslyed Johannesburg through Western Australia on August 5th 1929, with regard to necessary repairs on arrival in the Union. The following is a copy of message :-

"Crack No.1 tank. Leaks Nos. 2 & 4 tanks. Boiler tubes leaking very bad condition. Bilge suction pipes two, six ventilators and two air pipes."

I received the following reply :-

"Radio us fuller particulars damage reported. Could crack in tank and leaks be repaired East London during discharge. Are new boiler tubes essential. How many."



© 2021

Joy's Register
Foundation

W382-018

I cannot imagine any legitimate shipowner enquiring whether leaks in the double bottom of a ship could be repaired while the ship was discharging. However, my reply was :-

"All repairs with exception of ventilators, boiler tubes absolutely impossible until after cargo discharged. No. of new tubes required 350. Necessary."

On approaching the African coast on my way to East London I received the following radio on August 18th 1929 :-

"What is your estimate of minimum number new boiler tubes essential this voyage as only 76 at Durban pending arrival consignment from Europe."

to which I replied :-

"Boiler tube position bad. If not obtainable South Africa will makeshift for voyage with 76 Durban and 71 second hand she has on board."

This radio was followed by a letter dated August 22nd. of which the following is an extract :-

BOILER TUBES.

I have explained by wire that the number of boiler tubes required is 350. The Chief Engineer put boilers under pressure while in Bunbury and that was the number he found in a leaky condition. The tubes have been expanded and are now so thin that they will not stand further expansion. I consulted him over your last radio on the subject and he said he would try to make-shift for the voyage with the 76 new tubes available at Durban plus 71 second hand spares he has on board. I wirelessly you accordingly. Mr. Black says the tubes are in a very bad condition.

These 76 new tubes and the 71 second hand spares were put in in East London, 203 less than were asked for, between Aug. 26th. and Sept, 5th, 1929, and on July 3rd. 1930, the Chief Engineer is still making shift with them. Whether the consignment has arrived from Europe or not, I do not know, but no further attention has been paid to the tubes nor questions asked as to their condition.

I only quote these cables and extracts from letters to show how little care is taken where the upkeep of the Administration's steamers is concerned. No repairs and quick dispatch in port has been the policy but it is a policy which takes its toll in the long run and costs more in the end.

What happened to the "Huntress" in Singapore is a case in point. Had it happened at sea it would have been another "Trevessa" case with no one but the Management to blame.

(Sgd.) E. A. C. WEBSTER,
Lieut. R.A.R.
Late Master s.s. "Huntress".



© 2021

Lloyd's Register
Foundation