

court consisted of Mr. E. Page, who had with him as assessors L. C. Worrall, nautical assessor, W. Parker, engineer assessor, G. Huntley, naval architect.

Violent Crashing Noises.

Judgment stated that when 480 m. Harotonga violent crashing were heard from the direction starboard main shaft tunnel, a heavy vibration of the ship, by violent racing of the starboard engine. The second and fifth engines, who were on duty in the engine room, hastily shut off steam, the starboard engine stopped abruptly, and the second engine ran through the bulkhead along the starboard tunnel to the cause of the violence. He saw a rush of water was pouring upwards from the starboard side of the ship to the port side. He ran to the engine-room to get the starboard bulkhead closed, the onward water keeping pace with him, before the door was closed water was pouring through it into the engine-room.

Long and Dogged Fight.

After the abandonment of the ship a half day later a long and hard fight was put up against the elements. In addition to the pumps, bailers and 44-gallon drums worked, which wires was maintained. The Norwegian steamer "Tahiti," which had responded to SOS on the second night and with her flood lights thrown on the "Tahiti," and her crew ready to go, if needed, to the aid of those on the "Tahiti."

The Ship Abandoned.

On August 17 the chief reported that conditions were such that he hoped to be able to get the water for about an hour. Orders were then given by the captain for the passengers to abandon ship. Within 13 minutes all the passengers were got into the boats and the ship, and they were afterward picked up by the steamer Ventura, which had responded to the SOS calls, and was rapidly approaching, and had that she was ready to take the passengers and crew.

Puncture in Hull.

"We are of opinion, from the evidence," stated the court, "that the cause of the loss of the ship was the breaking of her tail shaft at a spot just forward of the stern tube, and that the breaking caused a puncture in the hull of the ship. The exact manner in which this puncture was brought about cannot be ascertained with certainty, but the indications are that the break was a diagonal or scarf break and that the driven end, overriding the other, and becoming twisted and distorted in alignment, as it revolved under pressure from the racing engine, flogged the bearing supports through the side of the ship."

Inspected and Passed.

"The shaft, which was a spare one that had had previous use in the ship, had been put in at Sydney in July, 1929, at which time it was inspected and passed by the company's own engineers and by the Commonwealth Government surveyor and by Lloyd's surveyor. Though the breaking of tail shafts in ocean-going vessels throughout the world is not uncommon, records show that cases in which, through such breaking, serious damage is done to the hull of the vessel, are exceedingly rare."

"Notwithstanding the puncture in her side the ship would have been saved but for another vital injury. The watertight bulkhead that divides the tunnel and No. 3 hold from the engine-room, and through which the shaft fits, was torn at its base by the violence of the racing engine coupled with the disturbed alignment of the broken shaft. The rent in the base of the bulkhead was a horizontal one and occurred just at the top edge of the bottom boundary angle, at which spot time and the elements had no doubt reduced to some extent the original strength and thickness of the plate. Water in quantity immediately found its way into the engine-room."

"But For This Injury——"

"In addition, this injury to the bulkhead destroyed its stability and, notwithstanding the utmost efforts of the engineers and their staff in propping up and supporting the bulkhead, the increasing weight of water gradually caused the rent to extend and the seams to open. Efforts were concentrated throughout on the engine-room, for on that room depended the maintenance of the fight. But for this injury to the bulkhead there is no reason to doubt that the bulkhead would have fulfilled its purpose and confined the waters aft."

A1 at Lloyd's.

The ship has been throughout her life subjected to the usual surveys by Government marine officers and by Lloyd's surveyors. Her last certificate of survey (by the Navigation Department of the Commonwealth of Australia) is dated October 31, 1929, and would have remained in force till October 29 next. Her last Lloyd's certificate is dated at Sydney, June 12, 1930, and classifies her as plus one hundred A1. In our opinion the ship was staunch and well found. Her loss was due to a peril of the sea which no reasonable human care or foresight could have avoided.

Tribute to All Ranks.

"In the handling of the situation throughout, the master displayed resource and cool accurate judgment worthy of the highest praise, and all ranks under him responded to the example that he set. His tenacity in staying off, despite the crises that from time to time arose and threatened her, the giving of the final order to abandon the ship which he knew throughout to be doomed and sinking, ensured the safety of the lives entrusted to his keeping. Under a command less sure a different story might have had to be recorded."

Engineers' Gallant Fight.

"On the engineers and the engine-room and stokehold staff under them fell the brunt of the fight. For close on sixty hours, without sleep and without respite the engineers directed and waged a gallant losing fight against the relentless waters, working for long periods deep in water and in eminent danger of the collapse of the strained and partly rent bulkhead that imprisoned the wall of water high above them. It was their courage and endurance that made it possible for the master to delay until the propitious moment, the giving of the final order to abandon the ship."

No Order for Costs.

Mr. Kirkcaldie, who appeared for the master and deck officers, submitted that the costs of those who had been cited to appear before the inquiry should be paid by the department.

Mr. Hay, for the engineers, supported the application.

Opposing the application, Mr. Prendeville, who appeared for the department, said that the master's and engineers' certificates were never at stake. When a master's certificate was at stake there must be two master assessors, and the same applied to engineers. There was no actual necessity for counsel to be engaged.

After a short retirement the court said it proposed to make no order as to costs.



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