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THE HEROISM OF TODAY.

Among the annals of sailing ship history there is no tale more heroic than a story of today, enacted on the tanker "CHUKY" on the Pacific. This modern drama of the sea shows that the present day seaman is rich in the indomitable courage of the traditional sailing ship heroes. The crew of the "CHUKY" weathered a typhoon and then a hurricane just before disaster overtook them. Tired out by days of boisterous weather, they yet had strength enough to face shipwreck and, except for those whom an unfair fate denied escape, saved themselves from an almost certain doom.

At about 7.45 on the morning of February 15th, 1928, the American tanker "CHUKY" which left San Pedro on January 19th with a cargo of California Light Crude for Tsurami, Japan, broke in two parts and became a total loss, involving the sacrifice of fifteen lives including all of the deck officers, when about 220 miles east of Yokohama.

The "CHUKY" was a steel screw tanker having two steel decks with the machinery aft, and fitted for carrying petroleum in bulk, also low flash oils. She was built in September 1922 by the Blythwood Shipbuilding Company of Glasgow and and of 7,335 gross tons with a length of 440' x 56' beam and 34'6" moulded depth and a loaded draft of 26' 9". She had nine main cargo tanks and was provided with summer tanks. A cellular double bottom was arranged under the engines and boilers, and she was fitted with sixteen bulkheads, ten of which ran to the upper deck, and six to the second deck. She was also provided with fore and aft peak tanks and one deep tank forward under the hold. The propelling machinery consisted of a triple expansion engine taking steam from three ordinary single ended Scotch boilers. The deck officers were housed in the midship house under the bridge and the engineers and other members of the crew in the poop.

The circumstances associated with the loss of the "CHUKY" indicate that the vessel commenced to leak and gave other signs of disintegration a few days previous to breaking in two parts. The vessel was hove to at 5:30 P.M. on February 14th, after having encountered five days of extremely heavy weather of the typhoon variety with strong winds, during which time she was continuously pooping heavy seas. While hove to she behaved badly and was constantly pounding; weather during this time being extremely adverse with heavy rains; and at daybreak on the morning of the 15th she was shipping green seas clear over the fore and after bridge. A few days out from San Pedro, the after peak commenced to leak and on the 14th - the day before the vessel broke in two - a leak was observed on both sides of the ship in way of

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#5 tank under the water line, the oil coming to the surface and at times being carried back on board in considerable volume by the heavy seas and sprays.

At about 6:19 A.M. on the 15th, the engines were put full ahead after running at about half speed during the night. It is reported that shortly after the speed was increased the fireroom bulkhead at the cofferdam began to leak badly and showed signs of distortion. The vessel continued to labour in the heavy seas and between 6 and 7 A.M. various members of the crew observed that the ship was buckled in the galley and on deck over the pumproom and adjacent summer tank which is located just forward of the machinery space, and also cracked on one side above the water line further forward with the oil cargo running into the sea.

It appears that about 7:45 A.M. the vessel was swept by an exceptionally heavy sea, which entirely filled the well decks and buried the bow, causing her to give a severe shuddering tremble, after which the after well deck continued to be submerged with water and large patches of oil. Evidently the vessel had broken into two below the water line in way of #5 tank. This occurrence was immediately followed by a violent explosion, flames, water and burning oil shooting about 100 feet into the air; some of the burning oil spreading aft about 150ft feet and burning the cloths of men on the poop deck, which was also clouded with dense volumes of acrid fumes, smoke and oil vapour. The bulk of the burning oil was splashed by the force of the explosion on the midship house, which by this time was a mass of burning crude oil. The oil which escaped from #5 tank on to the sea was ignited by the water light from life preservers, thereby producing a turbulent fiery sea around the vessel.

It transpires that the main well deck did not break until about ten minutes after the explosion. During the intervening period fire was raging along the entire after well deck on the port side while the bow and stern continued to rise and fall with the waves; the deck plating and pipe lines acting as hinges until the bow was carried away to port by a heavy sea tearing away the starboard side shell plating evidently above the water line. After breaking into two parts, the amidship house on the forward portion was submerged practically to the flying bridge the bow standing up almost vertical in the air and the oil on the water was again ignited by the water lights from the life preservers, which floated away from the submerged parts of the vessel. The after portion on which about twenty-three men still remained was riding the seas with its after end swinging and pitching high in the air while the fore part containing the cargo tanks, abaft of #5, was partly submerged. The forward portion after the breaking of the ship was swung around by the seas until it drifted, plunging and rolling until it seemed as though it would plunge upon or collide with the stern portion with imminent horrors of another explosion. However, when within 25 to 30ft of the forward

tanks of the after portion, this drifting fore part sheered away and was carried clear by the seas, drifting away for about a mile; then the bow rose straight into the air and sank slowly backward and turned completely over, leaving only the stem and part of the keel showing. The aft end of the stern portion continued rolling and plunging but the inclination of the deck fore and aft kept increasing and at the same time she took a 45° list. The sea was covered with oil, which was again ignited by the water light from a ring buoy, thus surrounding the after portion with the survivors by a sea of raging fire, except a small part on the starboard quarter. Fortunately, however, when these men were prepared to give up hope the high winds and seas once more carried the fire away to the leeward.

The story of the harrowing struggles and experiences of the crew during this catastrophe is one of remarkable human effort and bravery. With the exception of one man, who escaped by fighting his way aft through the seas of oil and water on the well deck after the first fracture, all officers and men on the forward portion were lost. They were seen attempting to launch the workboat from the bridge deck but the stern of this boat was blown away and the guys also led down to the main deck, which was submerged with oil burning on the water. The officers then tried to launch the starboard but the heat was too great and a few minutes later the ship broke in two and only the flying bridge was above the surface, these men being swept overboard into a wild and tempestuous sea of burning oil. Some of them were last seen struggling as they were carried past the after portion, upon which the survivors were endeavouring to launch their life boats and unable to render any assistance to their shipmates in the burning sea. Apparently twenty-three men, including the boatswain and engineers were left on the poop deck struggling to launch life boats when one man went crazy and jumped overboard. The boatswain and another man endeavoured to launch the starboard life boat and were in same when it slipped out of its chocks owing to the inclination of the vessel and dropped down into the remaining portion of the well deck which was partially submerged. These men managed to swim and struggle back on to the poop where they found men with knives slashing the port life boat falls and ripping the boat covers in the hope that they could escape in the port boat when it was level with the sea since the aft portion continued to sink slowly. After these men had severed the life boat falls, this boat, which was of a heavy wooden design, also slipped from the chocks and became inextricably wedged between the ventilator and the poop handrails and defied all efforts of the survivors to dislodge same until the happy thought occurred to one of the engineers that possibly there was enough steam remaining on the boilers to work the after winch. With 45 lbs of steam on the winch and a barrage of expletives, these frantic struggling men succeeded in dislodging and raising the boat which was lowered over the rail during which operation another man slipped from the deck and fell into the sea floating away to his doom apparently unconscious.

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At 9:30 A.M. after approximately an hour and a quarter of excitement and hectic struggles on the sinking after portion, this heavy wooden boat was launched over the weather side of the badly inclined, listed and plunging derelict, oars and fenders being used to prevent the boat smashing against the side of the poop with its twenty-one survivors. The weather was too rough for sailing. A sea anchor was hove overboard and the boat allowed to drift through seas which at times were moderated by drifts of oil which continued to escape from the fore part of the after portion of the derelict. In this manner they were hove to during the very dark and stormy night continuously bailing the leaky boat and obtaining a little protection from an improvised shelter made with the sail and the jibs. In the gray dawn of the next morning, the survivors saw the last of the stern portion of the ship which was still above water but submerged considerably lower, seas at times breaking over the engine room skylight. As the light improved, they also saw the forward portion of the tanker about three miles off rolling violently with heavy seas breaking over it. This was the last of the "CHUKY"

After rowing for about an hour in the direction of a presumed lighthouse, heavy rains forced the survivors to again seek shelter under the sails until in the early forenoon the weather moderated and they set sail with a fair N.E. breeze and proceeded at a good rate of speed toward the coast of Japan. About 11:30 A.M. on the 16th they were picked up by a Japanese fishing boat, after having been adrift approximately twenty-six hours in a badly battered wooden lifeboat in stormy seas and they were taken to Misaki, Japan, where they were extended every courtesy and consideration, later returning to the United States.



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