

JAPAN CHRONICLE
18th FEB. '28

EXPLOSION AT SEA.

OIL TANKER BLOWS UP AND
SINKS.

FIFTEEN LIVES LOST.

An explosion occurred on the 15th instant on the freighter Chukuy (7,335 tons) of the Sturt Steamship Company, 25, Broadway Street, New York, when she was about 100 sea miles off Misaki, Chiba-ken, and she sank immediately. Of her crew the Captain and fifteen others perished, but the chief engineer and twenty-one others, managed to keep themselves afloat on life-belts, planks and were picked up by the Sen-maru, a 25-ton motor-boat, owned by Mr. Sugiyama Denjiro, of Misaki, which happened to pass there the following morning. They were taken to Misaki, Mura-gun, yesterday evening, and the party was soon sheltered at the Haisunekwan Hotel in the town, and attended by a medical party. Their progress is satisfactory, and it is certain that they will survive.

The Kyodo Transport Company, the agents in Yokohama, say that the vessel was built at Glasgow in 1922, and was registered in Britain. Laden with crude oil she left Los Angeles for Japan on January 19th, and was expected at Tsurumi on the 15th instant, but owing to the rough sea her arrival was delayed. The vessel is the sister ship of the oil tanker which disappeared in the Pacific in December, last year. The Yokosuka Naval Station has instructed the transport Kurihashi to visit the scene of the disaster. Mr. Seto Motokichi, captain of the motor-boat, stated that while fishing off the islands he sighted foreigners clinging to wreckage and crying for help. He picked up all he could find, but owing to lack of knowledge of English did not know who they were. On arrival at Misaki he learned that a seaman from the Yokohama Water Police Station was there and through him the details were ascertained. This was the vessel's first voyage to Japan. Another message says that she was an oil tanker built in America in 1922, and a crude oil is said to have been insured for ¥209,835 with the Mitsubishi Marine and Fire Insurance Company. The people of Misaki have opened a subscription list for the crew and are giving them every aid. Those rescued were 14 Americans, a Swiss, an Irishman, a Spaniard, a German, an Indian, and 21 Filipinos, 21 in all.

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SHHP'S SURVIVERS TELL GRAPHIC TALE OF RESCUE AT SEA

Some Deny Blast Occurred,
Declaring Waves Smashed
Open Side of Hull

BLAME FLARE FOR FIRE

Compass Out of Order, They
Were Forced to Guess
Direction to Row

SPENT 26 HOURS DRIFTING

Gripping, personal stories of how they narrowly avoided death while the ill-fated oil tanker Chuky caught fire and sank early Wednesday off Nojima were told Saturday night for the first time by the survivors as they sat grouped about the fireplace at the Seaman's Y. M. C. A. in Yokohama. The suddenness with which the catastrophe came upon them was evidenced by the fact their narratives disagreed on what actually did happen, and that while some contended there had been an explosion, others emphatically denied this and said the detonation was only the waves as they suddenly battered open the hull.

"The tremendous force of the sea cracked the hull between two tanks, and the report there was an explosion is erroneous," declared J. C. Sheenan, chief engineer, as Fred H. Buckley, first assistant engineer, nodded his agreement. "There was an unusually strong wind, and the force of the waves against the sides of the boat was deafening," Mr. Sheenan continued.

"I had just finished breakfast when I heard a terrific explosion, and rushed on deck to find that the vessel had split in two and that the sea on the starboard side was one mass of flames," stated E. F. Ritchley, third assistant engineer.

"The fore part of the ship gradually turned round so that the bow faced the stern. The aft part seemed stationary but the fore end of the vessel drifted out to sea. The captain and all the deck officers either were killed by the explosion or burned to death.

"Those of us who were alive remained in the stern of the ship, which was now at an angle of about 40 degrees, for about two hours until the flames on the water at the starboard side of the ship had burned itself out. The sea was too rough on the port side for us to immediately lower the life-boat, but after considerable difficulty the bos'n managed to get it in the water, and it was only through his presence of mind and bravery that we were saved. None of us ever will forget George Robins, our bos'n, for what he did during those crucial moments.



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Wireless Operator Killed

"After about two hours we were able to get away from the ship, and as our wireless operator was killed and all the apparatus blown away, we could not send an S O S, and had to count on some passing vessel picking us up. After about 26 hours in the lifeboat, which was leaking, and continuously bailing out of water, we were picked up by the Matsuchi Maru, a small fishing boat.

"Our sincere thanks are due to the fisherman for their kindness to us. They gave us all the warm food they had on the boat, and they even took off their own clothing to keep our boys warm, some of whom had become very weak. They eventually took us to Misaki where the Mayor and the whole town were kindness itself to us.

"At Misaki we were given a hot bath and some dry clothing, and plenty of good food and drinks. The Mayor kindly presented each of us with a Japanese kimono (dofera) to keep us warm on our way to Yokohama. We cannot speak too highly of the people at Misaki. They did everything possible to comfort us, and in spite of the language difficulty, we had only to express a wish and it was fulfilled. None of us, also, will ever forget the kind little skipper of the fishing smack Mitsuchi Maru which brought us to Yokohama and saved our lives."

R. Book, seaman, also gave an interesting account. "I was in my quarters preparing to go to work when I heard the terrific explosion, and then the words, 'All hands on deck,' he says. 'I rushed to deck and saw oil burning right to the bridge, which is amidships. About five minutes later I heard a second explosion.

Vessel Torn in 2 Pieces

"After this the ship pitched violently several times and then broke in two. I saw two Filipino messboys running toward the stern from the bow, but they were blocked by fire and they undoubtedly burned to death. I was fearful that the forward part of the ship, which was separated from the stern, might strike the stern, but fortunately the high seas separated the two parts.

"Soon after the fore-castle turned turtle and showed its bottom on the surface of the water. Meanwhile, the stern of the ship began to incline and the screw and rudder began to be seen. The ship tilted so much we had difficulty in lowering the lifeboard. I saw six men on the deck in the stern throw themselves overboard to

death. I think if they had remained on deck and waited they might have been saved. But as the oil floating around the ship was on fire, they met a certain death.

"I also had a strong desire to hurl myself into the water, which I cannot explain because I knew the water was blazing with oil. After I had reached deck, I returned to fetch my overcoat and life preserver, and the others did likewise, some even grabbing pieces of bread. Probably they were at breakfast when the explosion happened and weren't going to let the mere fact of the ship's sinking interfere with their meal or make them panicky.

"There were 15 gallons of water on the lifeboat, some biscuits, a compass and tins of rockets for use in signaling. However, when we lowered the lifeboat, it struck against the side of the ship and was slightly damaged. Twenty-one men were in the lifeboat. As it leaked, some were mighty busy scooping out the water with two baskets and a scoop.

Bos'n Took Charge

"At night we lost sight of the broken parts of the ship. At 9 o'clock the next morning we still caught a bare glimpse of the fore-castle. Our bos'n, George Robins, then took command of us. I saw a dim light in the distance, in the dark night. It was eerie, this drifting on the ocean in a small open boat. But we could not help it.

"Of course, we did not know whether we would live or die. But all of us fought against death and rowed for shore. We did not feel hungry, only cold and chilled. Waves dashing against the lifeboat kept us continuously soaked. We had blankets but they were as wet as our bodies.

"Oh boy, I can't say what I felt when the fishing smack saved us. We just rushed for it. They gave us some rice and stew which helped to warm us up. Everybody treated us dandy."

Cook Tells His Story

J. B. Hughes, the chief cook, told his account as follows:

"Soon after the hull broke in two, the oil in the tanks caught fire. The fire was caused by the flare in throwing the lifebelt. Several men were struggling to be rescued on the surface of the water when the lifebelt was thrown. An hour and a half after the hull was smashed open, the forward portion of the ship had turned over. An attempt was made to lower a lifeboat but as the aft part of the ship was listing so much, it slipped and crashed against the side of the ship and was lost. As there were two boats on the stern, the other was lowered, although with much difficulty.

"The two broken parts of the ship were sighted by us until dusk. As the compass on the lifeboat was out of order, we rowed in a direction of which we were not sure. We found out later we were rowing the wrong way. The next midnight someone sighted a small, dim light, and 10 red flares were sent up. We flashed the rockets at two or three minute intervals, but as the dim light went away, we stopped.

"We drifted 26 hours. The floating oil had caused the sea to subside had helped us in getting the lifeboat safely into the water, else there might have been a much sadder story. When we were taken aboard the Matsuchi Maru we found they already knew our vessel had broken in two, and knew we were the crew. A Japanese sailor with a Japanese-English dictionary helped the conversation along."

Ship Built in England

The Chuky was an American-owned vessel, although it was built in Scotland and formerly was owned by the Sheridan Steamship Company. It was purchased by the Chile Steamship Company of New York last year and has been flying the American flag for only several months.

Of those who lost their lives, it is known that Captain C. Hernes and the second officer, Mr. Carlstrom, were married. Both their homes were in Los Angeles. The deck officers and engineers were all Americans. The crew however, represented five nationalities

—29 Americans, three Filipinos, two wedes, one German and one Spaniard. The survivors expect to leave Yokohama on Wednesday afternoon for San Francisco via Honolulu on the President Pierce. Residents of Misaki raised a fund of ¥20 for the seamen, which was distributed yesterday.

The Matsuchi Maru, the rescue ship, sailed from Yokohama at 11 o'clock Saturday morning for Misaki. The Kanagawa prefecture authorities are considering some means to express official recognition for Motokichi Seto, skipper of the Matsuchi Maru, and his men.