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(No. 4805.)

“HAZEL BRANCH” (S.S.)

SOUTH AUSTRALIA. MARINE BOARD.

REPORT of a Court of Inquiry held to investigate the circumstances attending an explosion on the S.S. “HAZEL BRANCH,” of Sunderland, 1,690 tons, official number 95,292.

An inquiry was held at the Marine Board Offices, Port Adelaide, on the 19th September 1893, into the circumstances attending an explosion on board the steamship “Hazel Branch,” by which the boatswain, Thomas Gerard, lost his life.

From the evidence taken, it appears the vessel left Port Adelaide on the 6th September with 1,390 tons sugar (original cargo) bound for Melbourne, and when in lat. 37°30 S. and long. 138°50 E., at 2.40 p.m., on 7th September 1893 during a heavy gale, the boatswain went down the chain locker in the forepeak, where some drums of W. B. Dick & Co.’s (London) patent paint were stowed, taking a naked light in order to see whether anything was adrift in the forehold. The composition having leaked had generated a gas, and upon contact with the light an explosion immediately took place, which burst open both bows, smashing the stem, blowing the collision bulkhead into No. 1 hold, and lifting both steel decks from their side fastenings, and other considerable damage. The forehold began at once to fill, and the vessel to become unmanageable. With great difficulty the master brought the vessel to Port Adelaide, as the gale then blowing was too severe to proceed, arriving there on the 9th September, and proceeding into harbour for discharge of cargo and repairs to vessel. The composition not being marked dangerous was not treated as an explosive, and no one on board was apparently aware of the dangerous nature of it.

The Board are of opinion that the explosion was caused by the leakage of gasoline from drums of anti-fouling composition (thinings) mixing with the confined air of the forepeak, so causing an explosive mixture which was ignited by the naked flame of a lamp carried by Thomas Gerard, boatswain of the “Hazel Branch.” The Board find that the explosion was accidental, and that no blame is attachable to the master or officers of the steamer. The Board will recommend the Board of Trade, London, to promulgate a warning to mariners as to the future safe carriage and storage of these and similar compounds, and the proper ventilation of the compartments in which they are carried.

(Signed) ARTHUR SEARCY,
Secretary to the Marine Board.

Marine Board, Port Adelaide,
Sept. 22nd, 1893.