

(No. 7324.)

"AHMADI" (S.S.).

REPORT of a Marine Court of Inquiry held at Bombay on the 23rd and 24th days of December, 1909, to investigate the circumstances attending the wreck of the s.s. "Ahmadi," of Bombay, on Ras Serani Point, Island of Mombasa, on 16th November, 1909.

Bombay,
Chief Presidency Magistrate's Court,
24th December, 1909.

PURSUANT to Government Resolution, No. 121, dated the 22nd December, 1909, Marine Department, the Court assembled on the 23rd and 24th December, to conduct an investigation into the circumstances attending the wreck of the s.s. "Ahmadi," on Ras Serani Point on the Island of Mombasa, on the 16th November, 1909.

2. As it appeared that the investigation was likely to involve the consideration of the cancellation or suspension of a certificate, the Court appointed as its assessors Captain E. R. Elton, master of the s.s. "Kasara," and Captain T. B. Peabody, master of the s.s. "Iran."

3. The evidence shows that the s.s. "Ahmadi," a steamship belonging to the Bombay and Persia Steam Navigation Company, built at Hepburn-on-Tyre in 1888 by R. Stevenson & Company, of a gross tonnage of 2518 and registered tonnage of 1640-49, with triple-expansion engines built in 1888 by Blair & Company, of a nominal horse-power 250, left Zanzibar at 4.40 a.m. on 16th November on her way to Mombasa.

4. Besides her master, Mr. T. L. Green, who holds a certificate of competency granted by the Government of Bombay on 23rd November, 1907, she had 3 navigating officers, 2 of whom were certificated, 4 engineers, and a crew of 71 all told. She was carrying 343 first, second, and deck passengers and a general cargo.

5. Before leaving Zanzibar Mr. Green had requested the local agent to send a telegram to Mombasa to the effect that the occasional lights at Ras Kibera mini and Ras Kisaoni should be lit, as the master intended to enter the port of Mombasa at night.

6. On arriving near the entrance to Mombasa, the third officer, under the orders of Captain Green, lit a blue flare, the recognised signal for a pilot.

7. It may here be pointed out that pilotage is not compulsory at Mombasa. The local pilot is a native who holds no certificate, and his services are used more with a view to his local knowledge than with a view to his assistance in navigation.

8. Mr. Green had entered Mombasa once before by daylight. The state of the tide was that which the "East African Pilot" recommended as the most favourable for entering; it was just after sunset. There was a moon and the weather was bright and clear.

9. The master accordingly decided to enter the port. He expected to pick up the pilot at any minute, but it was his intention to enter in any event.

10. For some reason, the explanation of which is not clear, the occasional lights had not been lit. When the lights on Ras Serani were in transit the master, who was steering N. 12 E. by compass or N. 9 E. true, altered the course to N. 54 W. by compass or N. 57 W. true. This was the course indicated on the chart as the correct course to steer.

11. The red buoy on the starboard side had been sighted for some time, and when Mr. Green got a bearing S. 58 W. true on the occasional green light leading to the Kilindiri Channel on the port side, he gave the order "hard-a-port," and the seacunny who was at the wheel obeyed the order.

12. It had been noticed before that the s.s. "Ahmadi" was occasionally somewhat sluggish in answering her helm, and on this occasion she continued on her course. Up to a short time before the course was altered the engines had been going at full speed, and for a minute they had been going at half speed ahead. She had a good head of steam, so there is no reason to ascribe the failure to answer her helm to want of steerage way.

13. As soon as he noticed that the ship did not swing, the master reduced the engines to "slow ahead." At

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7.22 p.m. he ordered "stop" and "full astern," and gave the order to stand by the anchor.

14. The order "full speed astern" would in the ordinary course have had the effect of canting the ship's head to starboard, but she continued on the same course, and at 7.26, four minutes later, gently touched the ground. Soundings showed 11½ feet forward, 21 feet on the bridge, and 7 fathoms of water under the stern. The impact was very slight.

15. Mr. Green kept the engines at "full speed astern," pumped out the forward ballast tank and shifted the cargo from the forward hatch to the aft hatch. The boats were made ready for the passengers, but it did not then appear that there would be great difficulty in getting the ship off the ground.

16. A kedge attached to a 3½-inch steel hawser was laid out astern to keep the ship in position against the incoming tide.

17. When the tide was coming in, Mr. Green hove away at the kedge, and kept the engines full astern. The hawser parted, and the ship swung broadside to the reef at right angles to her course when she struck.

18. Just after the wire parted, a German steamship, named "Wintock," arrived, and a signal was made for assistance, but the s.s. "Wintock" replied "wait."

19. Mr. Green signalled for boats and labourers and for a tug, but no tug was available. The passengers were landed in boats, and the baggage and cargo shifted into lighters.

20. Four days were occupied in removing the cargo owing to the difficulty in obtaining labourers and lighters. A starboard bower anchor and a starboard steam anchor had been laid out.

21. On Wednesday evening an attempt was made by the s.s. "Africa" to tow the s.s. "Ahmadi" off. The s.s. "Tima" then joined in the attempt and subsequently the s.s. "Nadri" also. All three ships towed, but failed to tow her off.

22. Meanwhile the ship had been making water in No. 2 hatch and the collision bulkhead was buckled. The holes were plugged, a steam pump was borrowed from the s.s. "Africa," but all efforts to save the ship were unavailing. The crew left the ship on 25th November and the master on the following day.

23. No lives were lost. The entire cargo and baggage and the ship's papers were saved.

24. In Captain T. B. Peabody the Court has had the assistance of an assessor who has personally visited the port of Mombasa.

25. The Court agrees with the assessors in their opinion on the questions which have been framed by the representative of the Local Government.

26. While it would have been wiser for the master of the s.s. "Ahmadi" to have anchored outside and waited until daylight before entering the port, the Court is of opinion that taking into consideration the favourable state of the tide and the clearness of the weather and the fact that he had visited Mombasa on a previous occasion, the master was justified in the course which he adopted. In the opinion of the Court the grounding of the s.s. "Ahmadi" is to be ascribed to the strong currents from the Kilindiri and Mombasa Channels preventing the ship from answering her helm. The Court is given to understand that several accidents of a similar nature have occurred before on the same point.

27. While it does not appear from the evidence that the non-lighting of the occasional lights at Ras Kibera mini and Ras Kisaoni contributed to the casualty, the Court strongly recommends that those lights should be made permanent in future.

A. H. S. ASTON,
Chief Presidency Magistrate, Bombay.
C. F. OSBORNE,
Master of the s.s. "Circassia."
W. HUGHES,
Master of the s.s. "Wooda."

Questions.

(1) Was the s.s. "Ahmadi" wrecked on Ras Serani Point on the Island of Mombasa on 16th November, 1909?

(2) Was the s.s. "Ahmadi" navigated with proper care and in a seamanlike manner when approaching the port of Mombasa and up to the time of her being wrecked?

(3) Were proper steps taken when approaching Ras Serani Point to fix the position of the s.s. "Ahmadi" by taking bearings? If not, did such omission conduce to the casualty?

(4) Were the charts and other aids to navigation on board the s.s. "Ahmadi" used to ensure safe navigation? If not, did any such omission in any way conduce to the casualty?

(5) Was any attempt made to signal for a pilot and was the master justified in attempting to enter the port without one, having regard to (a) the time, (b) locality, (c) weather, (d) possible effect of tide and currents, taking into consideration the fact that the master had only once before visited port and then during daylight?

(6) Did any special circumstances with regard to making the port call for extra precautions in navigation so as to avoid danger, and were such precautions taken?

(7) Was a good and proper look-out kept on board the "Ahmadi"?

(8) Should the green light on the buoy on the port side and the unlighted buoy on the starboard side have been sighted in sufficient time to enable the master to stop the "Ahmadi"?

(9) Were the occasional red and green lights in Mombasa Harbour sighted? If not, should not the master have at once stopped the "Ahmadi" and anchored in a safe position?

(10) Was the grounding in any way due to defects in the steering gear or machinery?

(11) After the "Ahmadi" grounded, were all efforts made and proper precautions taken to ensure the safety of the steamer, her crew, passengers and cargo?

(12) Did the master, officers, and crew of the "Ahmadi" carry out their respective duties on 16th November in a proper and seamanlike manner?

(13) Was the loss of the "Ahmadi" caused or contributed to by the wrongful act or default of the master?

Answers.

- (1) Yes.
- (2) Yes.
- (3) Yes.
- (4) Yes.
- (5) Yes. Yes.
- (6) No.
- (7) Yes.
- (8) Yes.
- (9) No. Yes.
- (10) No.
- (11) Yes.
- (12) Yes.
- (13) No.

GEO. R. ELTON,
Master of the s.s. "Kasara."

T. B. PEABODY,
Master of the s.s. "Iran."

*(Issued in London by the Board of Trade on the
22nd day of February, 1910.)*