

Basic Detail Report



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Title

MV MALABAR wrecked off Long Bay headland

Date

April 1931

Primary Maker

Samuel J Hood Studio

Medium

Emulsion on glass

Name

Glass plate negative

History

The Burns, Philp & Co motor vessel MALABAR bound from Melbourne, Victoria to Singapore and Darwin via Sydney, was wrecked on the morning of Thursday 2 April 1931

when it ran aground at full speed onto the northern headland of Long Bay, Sydney. There was a heavy bank of fog along the coast at the time when the vessel went ashore less than 300 metres from Miranda Point. Captain Leslie and the crew (19 Caucasian officers, 63 Chinese and 26 Malay sailors), realising the ship was badly damaged, prepared the ship's boats, handed out lifebelts to the 28 passengers and quickly abandoned ship. The ship's boats were then towed to safety by the Long Bay fishing fleet and the passengers and crew were assisted ashore by local residents who billeted them in their homes providing clothing, blankets and meals. The MALABAR grounded on an almost full tide and soon became firmly wedged on a rocky reef less than 100 feet offshore from the cliffs. Attempts to tow the ship off the rocks failed and a survey of the vessel indicated the hull of the vessel was badly damaged along the length of the keel and the engine room and cargo holds were flooded. Although the lower decks could not be accessed some of the passenger and crew effects were recovered along with the ship's papers, navigational instruments and three valuable stud horses which were lowered over the side of the ship by the crew and towed inshore by local fishing boats. By the afternoon of 2 April the vessel was heeling dangerously to seaward and beginning to bump heavily in a rising swell. By the evening waves began to crash over the stricken vessel and it quickly began to break up. About midnight the vessel's keel finally broke and the after part of the ship slewed around and lay against the base of the cliff. As news of the stricken vessel reached Sydney hundreds, then thousands of people came to see the steamer as it broke up on the rocks. Although it was the Easter Show weekend various sources (Sydney Morning Herald, 4 April 1931; Canberra Times, 4 April 1931) estimated that somewhere between 100,000 and 120,000 people visited the scene of the wreck that weekend lining the cliffs and beaches of the Bay looking for flotsam

washed in from the ship as it broke up and buying refreshments from the local residents. The Long Bay bus relocated its terminus for several weeks in order to get additional fares, photographers from Sydney mingled with the crowd selling photographs of the event and both the Royal Agricultural Society and the Port Jackson and Manly Steamship Co. Ltd reported a downturn in Easter trade due to the grounding of the MALABAR. Although the wreck site, cliffs and beaches were patrolled by officials of the Burns, Philp & Co Ltd, the local police and customs officers, hundreds of items, including bags of flour and containers of milk were carried away by the spectators who visited Long Bay. Almost every type of conveyance, including cars, trucks, wheelbarrows and prams were used over the weekend to carry off timber, tinned meats, butter, carcasses of meat and other items that had been washed ashore. In one well reported case two local seamen climbed on board the wreck and removed the ship's compass, some electrical fittings and a lifebelt, before being detained by the police and charged with theft. Many of the salvors risked their lives in attempting to recover material from the surf and along the base of the cliff. The Sydney Morning Herald reported on 4 April that several men had to be rescued by the Beach Inspector Mr Bond when they got into difficulty in the surf - other salvors were less fortunate with the Sydney Morning Herald (11 April) reporting that Henry Charles Primer was drowned at Long Bay while attempting to recover souvenirs from the wreck. On Tuesday 7 April the remains of the MALABAR were sold at auction for £140 to Mr Williams from the Penguin Salvage Company and the cargo was sold for £41 to Mr Sutton. Working in partnership the two groups of salvors commenced work on the wreck the next day but, severely hampered by the weather, were unable to recover little from the wreck other than the binnacle stand, cabin furniture, wash basins, the contents of the bo'sun's store, helm, and the vessel's flags. The Union Jack was sold to a local church and the cabin furniture along with other mementoes of the vessel were offered for sale in the papers. Longer lasting reminders of the event include the renaming of the village of Brand at Long Bay, long associated with the stigma of Long Bay Gaol, to that of Malabar and the remains of the ship itself which can still be seen at low tide along the northern cliffs of Long Bay. At the Marine Board Inquiry which occurred a few days after the wreck the MALABAR's master, Captain George William Leslie, a former Sydney Harbour Pilot, who was relieving the MALABAR's regular commander, was severely reprimanded for his actions and had his certificate cancelled. The MALABAR was a 350 foot long, steel, 4512 gross tons motor vessel built in Glasgow, Scotland for the Burns, Philp Company in 1925. Following its launch it was dispatched to Australia where it was placed on the Sydney, Darwin, Java and Singapore run. At the time of its loss it was carrying over 1,800 tons of general cargo including flour, butter, tinned fruits, biscuits and condensed milk along with three motor vehicles and three race horses.