

S.S. SCALARIA

THE SHIP

Built in 1922 for the Anglo-Saxon Petroleum Co at Swan Hunters, Newcastle, this 5683 ton steam tanker was 411 ft long, 55 FT beam and 30 FT draught, capable of 10 knots and fitted with triple expansion engines built by the Wallsend Slipway engineering co. She was requisitioned in the Admiralty services and armed with 1 4", 1 12pnr 2 twin Lewis 4 Hotchkiss and one Breda. She had a crew of 52 including 4 navy gunners.

SS SCALARIA

THE FINAL VOYAGE

CAPTAIN J. WARING " We sailed from Hurgada at 0630 on 18th October 1942, arriving off Ras Gharib at 1530 the same day to load with crude and then proceed to anchorage "B". I hoisted a signal to be moored without delay conditions then being favourable. At 1615 I was informed that the vessel could not be moored until the following morning."

Next morning the Scalaria docked and started to load 7000 tons of crude oil. At 1750 Waring received an instruction to hoist his balloon, and not fire on any aircraft as there was to be a practise flight with lights burning between 2000 and 2200hrs.

THE SINKING

CAPTAIN J WARING "At 2215 I made the rounds of the ship, saw the gunners at their posts. At 2230 I retired to my room, being awakened at 2230 by an attacking Heinkel 111 approaching from the land, roughly westward. The aircraft circled at approximately 100 ft, then dropped a torpedo which struck the ship on the starboard side abaft of the bridge in no. 3 tank. There was a terrific explosion which caused the ship to shudder violently and carried away the stern moorings, causing the ship to swing round from north to south. All the woodwork in my room collapsed and the iron frame twisted, jamming the two doors. By sheer force I burst one door open and on reaching the deck saw the whole of the after starboard side of the deck was ablaze, with burning oil pouring from the ships side and drifting aft."

At this point the Heinkel lined up for another attack, this time releasing a bomb.

Some of the men were trapped aft and ran up onto the poop others on the fo'c'sle slid down ropes over the bow.

WARING " I WAS ABOUT TO SHOUT TO THESE MEN WHEN A BOMB STRUCK THE FOREDECK WITH A TERRIFIC EXPLOSION. I WAS BADLY BURNED AND INJURED BY THIS BOMB AND SAW IT WAS NO USE TRYING TO GET THE MEN TO COME AMIDSHIPS AS THE WHOLE FOREDECK WAS NOW BLAZING FURIOUSLY".

"I could not get to the ships papers as my cabin was completely wrecked and flames were coming up the accommodation ladder."

Aided by the Chief officer, and although badly wounded, Waring lowered the midships life boat. The bo'sun and chief steward made it into the boat as Waring and the chief officer slid down the falls. With only the Chief officer and the bo'sun un injured they were unable to progress forward to rescue other crew members in the water due to the weight of the boat and strong currents.

WARING "As we drifted I called out to the men on the poop to jump or throw us a rope but they were too slow. By the stern buoy we could see more men calling out and we picked up six more crewmen. Even with this extra manpower we were unable to row against the wind sea and current. I was thankful to see a launch approach from the foreshore which picked up all remaining survivors"

2ND OFFICER ARMATAGE

"I was 2nd officer on the tanker Scalaria about 11pm I was thrown out of my bunk by a terrific explosion. Altogether we were hit by 4 bombs. The ship was like an inferno. I noticed the 3rd officer unconscious. I picked him up and made my way forward. We joined others on the fo'c'le and lowered the anchor cables, went over the side and hung onto them with the ship blazing above our heads"

“It was instinct I suppose, as I reached the open air there was a second explosion .All together we were hit by 4 bombs-and we were heavily loaded with crude oil.

The ship was like an inferno .Making my way along the deck, I noticed the third mate unconscious. I picked him up and made my way f’ward.

I wasn’t really walking through flame the flames were following us all the time.

Many of the crew had gone forward. There was no question of being able to stay on the ship So we lowered the anchor cables and hung on them in the water as the ship blazed above our heads”

For his bravery Armatage was awarded the MBE and the Lloyds Medal

As the ship blazed she settled on a even keel her gutted centre island, accommodation and engine house totally gutted.

Armed with this detailed information and hydrographic reports three expeditions were carried out to locate the wreck. By the third trip we had located several other wrecks (Aboudy, Attiki, Bakr, Birchwood, Elliot, Gemini, Laura Security,) These findings have allowed us to eliminate several suspects-Scalaria was by far a bigger ship and by the third trip we had a pretty good idea where she was.411ft and 5600 tons of I of ship on a sandy bottom a big clear target.

Members of Brighton BSAC joined me in the search and we found her a mile north of our “guesstimation”. Even before we dived her I knew this was the Scalaria-there was her bow facing south just as J Waring had stated.

The bow and fo’c’sle were found upright broken off from the main section. Iron framework andadders helped define the section of ship. From here back to the centre island was a dispersed area of huge proportions with her valve-ing and pipe work twisted, distorted and mangled amongst sectional framing and bulkheads over an area of 200ft x 50ft. Portholes, deck fittings and winches lay scattered in a chaotic scrapyard of metal.

Where the centre island had been the wreckage stood almost to the surface with more large sections of her holds standing upright. More evidence of the massive explosions in the form of huge sections of steel holded outwards forming overhangs for fish and encrusting species.

Three huge boilers mark the aft section of the vessel. With the engine house gone, the triple expansion engine lies bare –big ends con rods and a huge reversing wheel are easily located and recognised

PROOF OF ID It was amongst the plates gratings and pies which had been the engine room that we found absolute proof that would keep any sceptics quite. The engine manufacturers plate lay upside down amongst the debris covered in concretion and half buried. Exhumed, and cleaned it was to read “WALLSEND SLIPWAY and ENGINEERING CO LTD NEWCASTLE ON TYNE 1921” ENGINES NO 843

The stern, like the bow is upright reaching to within a few feet of the surface- her propeller long since salvaged, but leaving no doubt as to the size of the vessel