

M(C) 16 / 1 / 084

Ministry of Transport & CIVIL AVIATION Marine (Crews) Division

HONOURS AND AWARDS

AWARDS FOR GALLANTRY

"MEDIANA"

Services rendered by R. ROBERTSON, Radio Officer, and Skipper FENNINGTON - m.t. "VALER", 1st December, 1953.

Papers permanently attached

Papers temporarily attached

Other related files

MS 7/9/03

THIS FILE MUST BE RECORDED ON THE SHIP WHICH MUST BE SENT TO THE

Lawrence 5125 PA  
 7/7/60  
 Capt Taylor 4043 18/11  
 Mr. Ahea 5060 24/11  
 Mr. Foxall 4028 27/11  
 Mr. A. Wood 5057 30/11  
 Mr. Shear 5060 30/11  
 Miss Lawrence 5125 30/11  
 B.I. 5125 30/11  
 Mr. Shear 5060 16/10  
 Mr. Shear 5060 15/11  
 PA 5060

**B.T. 238/4**

**CLOSED UNTIL 1985**

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 - precedent.....

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Division/Directorate *1e3*

Date *7/7/60*

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(1)

I have spoken to Mr. Cole as to the present position of this case and he has advised me that they are still awaiting the results of the preliminary inquiry. He is not sure whether it will call for a formal investigation but will let us know.

b. Lawrence  
8.1.54.

Miss Wedley.

(2)

Can you now let me know the present position of this case, please?

b. Lawrence.  
8.2.54.

Mr. Cole.  
Marine (Safety) Division.

(3)

The preliminary inquiry will not be completed until about the middle of this month. We will let you have a look at the reports as soon as possible.

Miss Lawrence.

J. Jackson  
8/2/54

(4)

Any news yet please.

b. Lawrence  
1/3

Mr. Cole

(5)

The P.I. report has still not been completed.

Miss Lawrence

J. Jackson  
1/3/54

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6.  
Can you tell me please whether the  
P.I. has been completed yet.

Amble.  
Am 4040.

b. Lawrence  
2.4.54.

7  
The P.I. has not been completed.  
Miss Lawrence

W. Jackson  
3/4/54

8  
Any news please about the P.I.?

Amble.  
4040.

b. Lawrence.  
5.5.54.

9  
The P.I. has been completed  
and being studied by the Professional  
Officers. I hope to be able to get it  
along to you within a few days.

Miss Lawrence

W. Jackson  
6/5/54

- 10 -

Please see doc. 20 which is a summary of the sinking of  
"Hildina"

You have already given your views (copy at doc.7) as to a  
possible posthumous award for the Radio Officer, R.M. Robertson.  
I should be glad, however, if you would let me have an assessment  
of risk to life in the case of the Chief Engineer, F. Heidstra

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M(C) 15/1/084

Reference

and Greaser Bond (deceased).

Examples of engine room gallantry are in the files attached - M.4716/49, M.1360/51 and M.4352/51.

*J. C. Taylor*

2nd June, 1954.

Captain Taylor.

11

There is something in common in this case with that of the "OUR BAIRNS" M 1360/51 - devotion to duty, but the "OUR BAIRNS" reached port whereas the "HILDINA" sank. The resemblance in the case, as I have stated, is that both displayed great devotion to duty under trying circumstances.

The main means of egress were blocked but of course the skylight would provide an ~~easy means~~ of exit.

I think the award of a piece of plate as was done in the other case mentioned would suffice.

You may wish to comment.

*J. C. Taylor*

J. C. TAYLOR

3th June, 1954.

Mr. Colvill

12

I agree with Captain Taylor's first paragraph but not with the statement that the engine room skylight, with a flooded engine room and a ship heavily listed, would provide an easy means of exit, in fact it would probably be shut in the weather prevailing.

A piece of plate would be a suitable award to the surviving man and whatever is usual as the equivalent in the case of Greaser Bond who lost his life.

*J. Colvill*

10 June, 1954.

Miss McEvoy

13

*Min. of Ag. and Fisheries have suggested that the skipper of the Rescue ship, H.V. "Velina" should receive an award (doc. 3). The skipper's statement is at doc. 8. I would have your views please.*

*Capt Taylor*

*M. J. McEvoy*  
14/6

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In Doc. 3 it is stated that the wind was of gale force and high seas prevailed but in Doc. 8 (the skipper's statement) there is no mention of high seas but a heavy swell (which is quite different) was running while the force of wind is given from 5 to 6 and gradually freshening.

In my view the Skipper of the "VELIA" carried on the tradition of the sea by hastening to the aid of a fellow seaman in distress and the conditions existing at the time of the rescue did not call for any great risk to life to the crew of the "VELIA".

It is my opinion that a letter of appreciation to the Skipper of the "VELIA" should meet the case.

*J. C. Taylor*

J. C. TAYLOR

Miss McEvoy

15th June, 1954.

Please see doc. 7 and mins. 10, 11 and 12. Three awards are recommended:

Radio Officer R. M. Robertson (posthumous)  
Chief Engineer Foppe Heidstra  
Greaser Bond (posthumous)

It is also recommended that a letter of appreciation should be sent to the Skipper of the M.T. "Velia".

Radio Officer Robertson: He sent out a distress message, which was picked up by M.T. "Velia" at 8.12 a.m., and nothing more was heard from him. The message was distorted so that it was at first thought to be from the M.V. "Gavina". This, and the lack of any further messages, points to the supposition that the radio apparatus was soon out of action, and as Robertson was not seen by any members of the crew when they were abandoning ship, one must suppose that unless he was injured and unable to escape, he stayed at his post until it was too late.

In the absence of any concrete evidence of his movements after the despatch of the S.O.S., it is difficult to assess the degree of bravery. The Radio Officer of the "Princess Victoria" sent messages for over four hours under appalling conditions, fully aware that he had no possible chance of escape. He was awarded a posthumous George Cross. The "Hildina" sank within half an hour of the despatch of the distress message and the opinion is expressed in the Preliminary Inquiry (last page of doc. 19) that Robertson undoubtedly sacrificed his life to send out an S.O.S., and this was the means of saving nine lives.

I suggest that the Sea Gallantry Medal in Bronze would be a suitable award.

Chief Engineer Foppe Heidstra and Greaser Bond: A piece of plate for the Chief Engineer and an equivalent posthumous award for Greaser Bond are recommended (mins. 11 and 12).

These two men were on duty in the engine room when the trawl became fast. The vessel immediately took on a list of 60 degrees

/which

*MC 16/1/043  
attached.*

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which ten minutes later had increased to 80 degrees. During this time they obeyed the telegraph instructions, although as the list increased water began to pour into the engine room through the ventilator, boiler funnel and the skylights, and the Chief Engineer had great difficulty in reaching the telegraph. The "abandon Ship" signal was finally received and they climbed out through the port skylight, the starboard side of the engine room by then being practically horizontal and full of water. Both men got on to the carley float, but Greaser Bond was unable to hold on and was drowned.

Both men displayed great courage in remaining at their posts under conditions which must have been most difficult. Mr. Colvill suggests in min. 12 that the port skylight was not an easy means of exit, and the fact that the Chief Engineer was unconscious when picked up and Greaser Bond was unable to hold on to the carley float is perhaps an indication that they had expended a good deal of their strength before taking to the water.

I consider that the Queen's Commendation would be suitable in the case of Greaser Bond, and a silver cigarette case for Chief Engineer Foppe Heidstra.

Skipper of M.V. "Velia": On receiving the S.O.S. and subsequently identifying the distressed vessel as the "Hildina", he chopped away his gear and proceeded to the rescue. He picked up ten survivors from the carley float and one from the lifeboat. He gave medical attention on the advice of Wick Radio to the Cook, who unfortunately died, and to the Chief Engineer, and then proceeded to Stornoway with the survivors when other vessels arrived to continue the search. His promptitude in answering the distress message is highly commendable, although no risk to life was involved. A letter of appreciation is recommended (min. 14), with which I agree.

*M. J. De'Booy*

17.6.54.

- 1. Mr. Howard
- 2. Mr. Wood

16

*I agree with the recommendations above*

*Mr Howard*

*17/6/54*

*Mr Wood*

17

*A formal Enquiry will be held - date not yet fixed.*

*M. J. De'Booy*  
*22/6*

*Mr. Wood*

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I should be glad of your opinion on these recommendations for awards for gallantry. In my view, they do not exhibit quite that exceptional degree of courage, or at least the evidence we have is insufficient, to merit awards. I do not propose, therefore, that they be pursued for the time being except for a letter of appreciation to the Skipper of the "VELIA".

The incident is described in Doc. 20 and the grounds of recommendation in Minute 15. The proposals have the support of the surveyors who conducted the preliminary inquiry, and also of Captain Taylor, Mr. Steel and Mr. Welch (see Doc. 7), and I am most reluctant to reject any suggestions based upon their judgment and experience. You will see, however, that the whole affair did not take much more than 10 minutes or so and, for example, only one signal was received from the Radio Officer. This was effective, but it is really all we know about his actions during those critical minutes. The courage of engineers who stay down below while the ship is obviously in grave difficulties commands admiration, but unless we can recognise the Radio Officer in this instance I do not think that we should recognise the engineers, and it would be as well to wait for a more outstanding case before recognising engineers in this way. There is in any case to be a formal inquiry and we should have to await the result of it. This may well bring forward clearer evidence upon which any recommendations for awards can be based and I would propose to review these proposals when the report of the formal inquiry is available. I suggest, however, that we need not hold up the letter of appreciation to the Skipper of the "VELIA" on that account.

*A. W. Wood*  
(A. W. WOOD)

23rd June, 1954.

Mr. Faylaker

*I agree that we should await the result of the F.I. before we decide whether or not to recognise the Radio Officer, the Chief Engineer and Grease Band.*

*It would also be desirable to hold up consideration of the issue of a letter of commendation to the Skipper of "Velia" in case the Court has any comment to make on the issue. A further reason is that it would be undesirable to deal with the case piecemeal.*

Mr. A. W. Wood

*PJ 35/6*

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20

Please watch out for the Formal Inquiry  
so that this matter can then be reviewed. In any  
event b.f. in 3 mos.

*[Signature]*  
30/6

Miss McCoy  
Miss Lawrence.

21.

Will you advise me please when the  
Formal Inquiry has been held?

b. Lawrence.  
1/7.

Mr. S. G. Jackson.

22

The report of court will be sent  
to you as soon as a copy has been  
prepared for printing purposes. So far,  
no date has been fixed for the  
Inquiry.

*[Signature]*  
1/7/54

Miss Lawrence.

23

Have you any news please of this Inquiry?

b. Lawrence  
1/9.

Mr. Jackson.

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24  
The date of hearing has now been fixed for the 18th October next. A report of the Court should be available a few days after the conclusion of the inquiry.

Miss Lawrence.

*J. Jackson*  
2/9/54

25

I showed Mr. Jackson to see how Inquiry was progressing - he thought the final hearing was to be this morning. He has promised to let me have a report as soon as it is received.

b. Lawrence.

23/10/54

- 26 -

Note:

The Report of Court dated 23rd October, 1954, into the loss of "Hildina" stated that the cause of the said loss was the falling on to the starboard and weather side of the vessel, while she was held by her warps athwart wind, sea and swell, of a succession of heavy waves which filled her weather deck and caused her to list to starboard so that water found its way below through an open door on the starboard side of the main deckhouse, and thereafter rapidly filled the spaces below deck abaft the engine room. The loss was not caused or contributed to by the wrongful act or default of any person, nor by any defect in design or failure of any machinery. It was brought about by a complex of unidentifiable, indefinable and momentary errors of human judgment which combined to produce a critical situation, and was therefore a true accident.

*M. J. McBooy*  
27/10/54

27  
Extracts from the Report of Court are at doc. 24. In addition to the recommendations contained in para. 15, the Wireless Operator of "Velia" is mentioned in the speed with which he ascertained that the distressed vessel was the "Hildina".

*M. J. McBooy*  
27/10/54

Mr. Shea

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You will recall from Minutes 18, 19, that we deferred a decision on recommendations for awards in this case until after the Formal Inquiry. This has now been held and an extract from the Report is attached at Doc. 24. In its Report the Court

- (1) paid tribute to the Skipper and Wireless Operator of "VELIA";
- (2) mentioned Mr. Robertson, Wireless Operator of "HILDINA", as having shown exceptional devotion to duty; and
- (3) mentioned the behaviour of Chief Engineer Heidstra and Greaser Bond, respectively, as commendable and as showing exceptional devotion to duty.

No additional facts emerge from the Report of the Court and the only additional feature is that the Wireless Operator of "VELIA" has been mentioned and should therefore be included in our considerations.

I am still of the opinion that we do not know sufficient about what happened to enable any degree of gallantry to be established such as to recommend awards to the Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries, but in view of the opinions expressed by our professional advisers and the Report of the Court, I think we should at least inform Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries that these cases deserve consideration and that, in our view, they are border line cases for Queen's Commendations in the case of the men from "HILDINA" and for letters of appreciation as regards the Skipper and Wireless Operator of "VELIA". In view of the difficulty in making a clear recommendation, Mr. Shea's suggestion of a meeting is, I think, a good one and, if you agree, I will ask them to come over and discuss with Mr. Shea and myself and our professional officers. It will then be for Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries to decide whether they should put forward recommendations.

*A. W. Wood*  
(A. W. WOOD)

Marine Crews Division  
10th November, 1954

Mr. Faulkner

30

*Mr. Wood* Our knowledge falls short of what is required to judge the conduct of these men correctly.

It seems fairly clear that letters of commendation would be right for the Skipper & Wireless Operator of "Velia".

I am doubtful whether we should be justified in recommending anything for the other three. It is not clear that the Wireless Operator, who appears to have sent out only one message, did more than his duty.

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If he had not sent out this message he would certainly have been failing in his duty.

A Queen's commendation in any case does not seem appropriate as a posthumous award and it has not been our practice to recommend such an award posthumously.

The award of a piece of plate posthumously also seems inappropriate and so far as I know we have never made such an award.

I agree that you should discuss with Mr/A/F and the Consultants Officers.

M. A. W. Wood

PJ 15/11

31.

Please arrange a meeting accordingly.

Mr. Shea.

(v)(2)

32

A meeting has been arranged for 3pm on 25.11.54 in Mr. Wood's room. Capt. Taylor, Mr. Colwill, Mr. H. G. Taylor, Mr. Leach and Mr. Shea will attend.

J. J. McBooy  
18/11/54

33

You wished to see this file.  
Thank you, J. J. McBooy  
Capt. Taylor Miss McBooy. 18/11/54

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34

You need this file for tomorrow's meeting. I asked Mr. H. K. Taylor if he wished to have our up-to-date information, but he said he would wait until the meeting.

H. K. Taylor  
24/11/54

Mr. Shea

35.

A note of the meeting with the hr. of A.F.F. is at Doc. 26. I have sent a copy to Mr. Taylor.

Mr. Faulkner may wish to know the outcome.

Mr. Wood

A. Wood  
29/11/54

36.

Following your minute 30, I have discussed with Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries and a note of the meeting is attached at Doc. 26. Their representatives agreed that there was not an adequate case made out to enable them to recommend awards for members of the crew of "HILDINA". They will, however, send letters of appreciation to the Skipper and Wireless Operator of "VELIA".

The question of posthumous awards <sup>of the</sup> and Queen's commendation does not therefore arise in this instance. I understand from Mr. Shea that it has been awarded posthumously in the past, but the question whether we should do so in future can perhaps now be left until another case arises.

A. Wood  
(A. W. WOOD)

Marine Crews Division  
29th November, 1954

Mr. Faulkner

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37.

Thank you. I feel sure the decision is the right one.

PY 30/11

Mr. A.W. Wood

*[Signature]*  
30/11

Mr. Shea. 1/12/54

Miss Lawrence

PLEASE SEE LETTER DATED 13.12.54.  
FROM *Min of Agriculture & Fisheries* WITHIN  
*14-12-54.*

38

You will wish to see docs. 29a and b.

*[Signature]*  
15/12/54

Mr. Shea

39.

To see docs 29a and 29b. Mr. A.F. do not send out their letters of appreciation on the same high level as we do.

Mr. Wood

40.

Thank you

*[Signature]* 15/12/54

Miss Lawrence

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