

Radio Lifts Curtain RESCUE SHIPS TALK

(Continued from page 11).

Brandenburg to Chertsey Abbey:
Increasing speed, reach you soon.

While the rescuing ships themselves talk to one another, H.M.S. Stafford to Monmouth: We two and Brandenburg chief competitors, others nowhere.

Monmouth to H.M.S. Stafford: Very grateful if you do boat work.

Chertsey Abbey to all ships:
Dynamo flooded.

THERE'S tension here, drawn out of the mechanically calm messages of the Morse, that ticks out words that mean the life or death of men in its mechanical, emotionless way.

On the "Monmouth" the work goes on, steadily and in the grooves of routine, but there is an underlying lash of excitement to the ordinary words that gives them a whip-like flick.

AT last, breaking the tension, comes the cry of the watch, "Rocket ahead!" as he sights the "Chertsey Abbey." And "Searchlight on the port bow!" as he picks up H.M.S. Stafford, while on the bridge, out to the north, they see the passenger liner Brandenburg "all lit up like Southend pier."

The Chertsey Abbey is there, lying in a trough with a 30-degrees list to starboard. Her hold is flooded. There's another ship gone through faulty steering gear.

The run is over.

TOGETHER the Monmouth and H.M.S. Stafford talk as they draw near.

"I will lower boats at daybreak," says the Stafford. "Please lay oil to windward."

"I will start laying oil now," says the Monmouth to the Stafford.

The Stafford waits, before lowering its boats, for the Monmouth's oil slick to reach the wreck.

Now the tension is over, and your ghost on board the Monmouth can find relief from excitement with the gruff second officer, who, human-wise, takes his excitement out in a homely outburst against the chief steward's apprentice.

"And tell him if my tea's not here in two minutes, I'll have his hide for a necktie."

STANDING on the bridge with the captain and the chief officer, your ghost can see the last act in this endlessly reiterated tale of the sea.

"The Stafford's starting to lower. She's turning to make lee. They're lowering the boat. She's swinging like a pendulum." Then, shouting suddenly, "Lower away, lads, lower for all you're worth. Well done, boys!"

Meanwhile the Stafford is reporting in Morse: H.M.S. Stafford to Admiralty. Am in touch with Chertsey Abbey in danger of sinking. Boats sent off."

One more scene from the bridge rounds off the tale as the men jump from the Chertsey Abbey into the sea to be picked up by the Stafford's boats. "Jump, you fools!" cries the Monmouth's captain. With its cargo of saved lives the boat draws away back to the Stafford and the men scramble back up by the cruiser's ladder.

"The Chertsey Abbey's going, sir," says the voice of the young officer alongside us. "Her funnel's gone. She's practically vertical. Look at that."

And, if you can't see it through his voice, you had better buy yourself an ear trumpet.

The Monmouth gives herself a shake and begins to get under weigh again. "It's all over bar the shouting." You hear her telegraph ring to the engine-room, and she sticks her nose into the sea again.

There is silence for a moment, and then radio has the last word:

H.M.S. Stafford to Monmouth, captain to captain: "Thanks for valuable assistance. Eighteen men rescued. Good luck, better weather."

Monmouth to H.M.S. Stafford, captain to captain: "Thank you. Glad to have been some help. Your wishes reciprocated."

You come back to land again, to your chair in front of the fire. Your ghost comes back from the ship. But it has all been so vivid, this plain, straightforward, commonplace story of the sea, that you begin to wonder whether it wasn't your real self that was on the ship, and only the ghost of you that waited sitting by the fire.

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