

loss of life has been more than one hundred and twenty. Years ago it was often days before news of the disasters was brought to Wellington: once the first the authorities knew of a wreck only a few miles from their offices was when the captain rode into the city on a horse with the information and a request for help. Another time homing pigeons were sent with a message for assistance. Worst disaster of all was when the ferry steamer "Penguin" returning from Picton was wrecked; the vessel was a total loss and seventy-four of her passengers and crew were drowned.

It must have been an exciting night for Wellington in April, 1938, with the water of the storm-ridden harbour whipped by gusts of seventy miles an hour, the wave-crests picked out by glaring searchlights, the wink and flutter of Morse lamps between two cruisers, and a collision between the stern of the "Rangatira" and the bow of H.M.N.Z.S. "Achilles." The steamer damaged herself, and "Achilles" more, that night of a north-west gale when an anchor which was dropped to stop her drifting from control fouled the cruiser's anchor cable. Nearly three years later she holed herself again when one morning of dense white fog she slid gently on to the reef at the western headland of Pigeon Bay, twenty miles from Lyttelton. For ten hours she remained hard aground until she was helped off on the afternoon tide by a tug and an intercolonial steamer. The seven hundred and fifty passengers were transferred to a cargo steamer to finish their journey.

The "Wahine" has been luckier. Probably the most serious of what have been minor mishaps was when she crashed in a dense fog into Pipitea Wharf at Wellington in 1936. For 20 ft. she ground and tore a way through massive piles, iron stanchions, and reinforced concrete to stop, shuddering, only a few feet from the wharf buildings. Pushing, pulling, and straining by two tugs for four hours moved her only a foot; to stop her filling with water from the making tide she had to be cut from the wharf by oxy-acetylene lamps.

More damage was caused than in all her years of service in the Great War. One morning before daylight in 1915 the "Wahine," then a new ship with an uncommon turn of speed, slipped through the heads at Port Chalmers to sail for the other side of the world. It was 1919 before she returned. The bright brass plate in her saloon summarizes her years of war. It reads: "Record of War Service—H.M.S. 'Wahine'—October 13, 1915, to May 28, 1916, Dispatch vessel to Gallipoli Forces; July 22, 1916, to April 21, 1919, minelayer. Number of mining operations carried out, 76. Total number of mines laid, 11,378. Presented to the officers and ship's company serving in H.M.S. "Wahine" on the conclusion of hostilities." Not the least of her exploits during the war was on a trip from Mudros to Malta when she landed a direct hit on the conning tower of a German submarine which was preparing to launch a torpedo at her. No one, unfortunately, knows the result: the "Wahine" didn't stop to see.

It's early morning and Lyttelton is still grey. To lessen the force of a wash which once swept a most surprised fisherman and his son off the rocks into what had been, a minute before, a flat sea, and which has caused, sometimes, small craft to smash into each other, the "Rangatira" steams down the harbour at half speed. We are on time—at least, to the half minute. "I have a faint recollection of some pitching, Sir," says the master to the first officer; but at least last night the waves had not been 40 ft. high; we would take fifteen minutes to berth (stern first), not the two hours the "Wahine" took (stern first) one roaring sou'-west morning. Soon the passengers are on the wharf and away to their trains. The mail is unloaded; soon after follow the motor-cars and the cargo from the holds. The horse stalls are swung up from down below. Some of these thoroughbreds, yearlings from the Trentham sales, give trouble. One, a colt, has to be led, coaxed, pushed, pulled, and finally carried into his box. "Must be a stayer," grunts one of the wharfies.