



SHIPWRECK HISTORIES

The Wreck of the *Louis Sheid* 1939



LOUIS SHEID

Date of wreck: 8 November 1939

Location: Books Rocks, Bigbury Bay, just under Links Hotel, Thurlestone. 50.15.48N 03.52.12W

Flag: Belgium;

Voyage: Buenos Aires - Antwerp;

Gross tonnage: 6057;

Owner: Cie Nationale Belge de Transports

Built: 1920 Nordd. Werft. M. b. H., Wesermünde;

Crew: 46 + 62 survivors from the Dutch ship Tajandoen sunk by U-47 (Gunther Prien) at 49.09N, 04.51W on 07.12. 1939

Cargo: General cargo and grain

Number on board: 108

Number saved: 10

1. Contemporary Newspaper Reports from British Newspaper Archive (online) and Kingsbridge Cookworthy Museum microfiche (for Kingsbridge Gazette)

1939 Dec 7 Gloucestershire Echo

DUTCH SHIP TORPEDOED ATTACKED IN THE CHANNEL 67 ON BOARD, 34 SAVED ANOTHER Dutch ship has become a victim of Germany's all-in sea warfare. The 8,159-ton vessel Tajandoen was torpedoed in the English Channel, it is revealed at Amsterdam to-day, and of the 67 persons on board only 34 have been picked up. The survivors—28 of the crew and six passengers were taken on board Italian ship, which transferred them to a Belgian vessel. It is believed that the six were the only passengers carried. The Tajandoen left Holland for the Netherlands, East Indies, November 28, and was sighted off the English coast yesterday morning. Built in 1931 and registered at Amsterdam, she was owned the Netherlands Shipping Company, of Amsterdam. The Belgian steamer which has the Tajandoen's survivors is the Louis Sheid (6,057 tons). The Louis Sheid is now searching for another boat containing survivors which is believed to be in the vicinity. Other vessel have been warned to look out.

1939 Dec 7 Gloucester Citizen

DUTCH VESSEL SUNK BY NAZI TORPEDO AMSTERDAM, Thursday. Another Dutch ship has become a victim of Germany's all in sea warfare. The 8,159-ton vessel Tajandoen was torpedoed in the English Channel, it is revealed here to-day, and of the 67 persons on board only 34 have been picked up. The survivors, of the crew and six passengers, were taken on board an Italian ship, which transferred them to a Belgian vessel. It is believed that the six were the only passengers carried. The Tajandoen left Holland for the Netherlands East Indies on November 28 and was sighted off the English coast yesterday morning. Built in 1931 and registered at Amsterdam, she was owned by the Netherlands Shipping Company, of Amsterdam.

1939 Dec 7 Portsmouth Evening news

DUTCH SHIP TORPEDOED Sunk in Channel. The Netherlands Navigation Company announced to-day that it had received advices that the Company's motor-ship Tajandoen (8,159 tons) had been, torpedoed in the English Channel. The Tajandoen left Amsterdam on November 29 bound for the Dutch East Indies. She called at Antwerp and a British contraband control station on the East coast. Sixty-seven persons were aboard the Tajandoen, including a few passengers. A Belgian vessel picked up survivors in one lifeboat, and then proceeded to rescue occupants of another boat. The Press Association learns that 28 the crew and six passengers were picked up, and that the rest are missing.

Of the 67 persons on board only have been picked up. The survivors—28 of the crew and six passengers—were taken on board Italian ship, which transferred them to Belgian vessel. It is believed that the six were the only passengers carried. This is the eighth Dutch ship sunk since the war began and the second sunk by submarine.

1939 Dec 8 Kingsbridge Gazette (source: Kingsbridge Cookworthy Museum microfiche)

Vessel Ashore off South Devon. Belgian Steamer on Rocks. Survivors of Channel Disaster.

Pitiful scenes were witnessed at hotels in South Devon coastal villages in the early hours of this morning, when survivors of the Belgian steamer *Louis Sheid*, which ran ashore on some sharp rocks last evening were brought ashore by lifeboat and breeches buoy.

On board the *Louis Sheid* with several members of the passengers and crew of the Dutch freighter *Tajandoen* (8,159 tons) which had been sunk in the Channel. This morning the Belgian vessel had drifted further towards the shore and it was stated that she was in serious danger of breaking up.

Police officers, ambulances and nurses were rushed to the scene and in response to rockets and S. O. S. signals sent up when the boat grounded, lifeboats were sent out from the nearest stations, one arriving in time to take people off by rope ladder. These were landed at a village and taken by ambulance to an hotel, where they were given hot drinks, food and cigarettes. Many of them were Javanese seamen from the *Tajandoen* and bore evidences of the severe ordeal they had undergone.

One of the passengers on the Dutch boat described the sinking of the ship in the Channel. After the explosion, he said, the vessel suddenly broke in two and the sea became covered in oil. This caught fire and they had to row for their lives to get out of the way of the flames.

"We rowed about three hours before we were picked up by the *Louis Sheid*. One of the men who was rescued from the water was nearly burnt alive by the flaming oil. We heard him crying for help, but we could not help him because of the flames. Then we saw him picked up by another boat."

He thought there were about 54 survivors from the Dutch boat, including some women and children, and that six, all members of the crew, were drowned. It is believed that the crew of the Belgian steamer numbered about 60.

This morning there was still about 40 to be taken off and owing to the falling tide the breeches buoy apparatus had to be requisitioned. As they landed they were taken to an hotel not far from the shore.

Throughout the night, with lights blazing, the ship lay broadside onto the shore, buffeted by heavy seas and watched by people from the surrounding countryside.

Dressed in all sorts of clothing which had been given to them when picked up by the *Louis Sheid* the crew and passengers of the Dutch vessel presented a pathetic sight. One woman, wrapped in blankets, was clutching a little child, while a man was so exhausted that he fell asleep on the floor of the hotel. Another man who have been picked up from the sea was blackened with oil and nearly all of them were either barefooted or without boots.

Ready and sympathetic help was given by the people in the hotels and the survivors were made as comfortable as possible around big fires. The crew of the lifeboat which went to their assistance and a perilous voyage through heavy seas and a south-westerly Gale and took two hours to land the first boat load. (Continued on page 2).

[TO BE CONTINUED – Look for page 2 at Cookworthy Museum]

1939 Dec 8 Western Morning News

RESCUE SHIP DASHED ON TO ROCKS Driven Ashore Off South-West Coast SEA DRAMA IN THE BLACK-OUT Carrying Survivors Of Sunken Dutch Vessel lish South-West port by lifeboat , after the Belgian steamer Louis Sheid, which picked them up had run ashore and sent out an S.O.S. message . The Belgian vessel was stated early this morning to be in serious danger of breaking up, and lifeboats and breeches buoy apparatus were sent to her assistance. One lifeboat took nearly two hours to reach land because of the heavy seas. The survivors included a number of women. In addition to the Dutch survivors, it is believed that the crew of the Belgian steamer numbers about 60. The vessel was swept broadside to some sharp rocks not 100 yards from an hotel, and police officers and inhabitants of coastal villages were quickly on the scene to render what assistance they could. Seeing her precarious position, the captain sent up flares and rockets asking for tugs and lifeboats. Lifeboats were rushed from two ports, one arriving in time to take passengers from the ship by means of a rope ladder and land them at a nearby village. A Government tug was sent from the nearest naval port At 3am. it was decided that the crew should stay on board until daylight At dawn efforts will be made to pull the Louis Sheid off, but this will be a difficult proposition, as he is close inshore under the cliffs.

S.O.S. SIGNALS Black-Out Rent By Rockets As Ship Strikes. By Staff Reporters on the Spot. Rockets blazing into the into the air suddenly rent the darkness which shrouded the South West coast line is distress signals were sent up from the Louis she'd which was drifting inshore bow on. Coastguards were among the first to see the vessel, which, brilliantly lit from bow to stern, presented a strange appearance in the blackout. Steps were immediately taken for rescue work, and by 9pm —the ship was first about 7pm- a lifeboat had succeeded in reaching her and lifesaving apparatus was on the beach in readiness while doctor and ambulance were standing by. Drifting shorewards into shallow water the vessel lay close in to the big rock opposite an hotel, and rapidly he shore became thickly-populated with sightseers and helpers. An onlooker commented: About 7 p.m. we saw the lights of the ship, and rang up the coastguards, but they, too, had seen her. It is thought she may have been mined or damaged in some way, for she came in bow on. She is now lying close in to big rock opposite an hotel. The ship is fully lighted, and there is signalling from the shore.

IN SHALLOW WATER. Early this morning the vessel was still hard and fast on the rocks, apparently upright, with her two funnels, showing her nationality, "Belgie" distintly visible from the shore. It practically low water when she came ashore, according to people who witnessed her arrival. In fact, before she struck rocks which always shoal at low water, her plight was realized, and a warning was sent to the coastguard station, so that they might apprise the master of the Belgian steamer of his approach to dangerous waters. That was about 7.20pm. Visibility was so poor that only 20 yards could be seen from the vessel when she strick. The water for some distance out is shallow and it is apparent that she must have got out of her course.

LIFEBOAT'S SECOND TRIP. Sixty-two survivors were taken off the Louis Sheid shortly before midnight by the lifeboats and landed. One lifeboat which landed 40 of survivors of the Tajandoen. made a second voyage to land the remainder The coxswain of one of the lifeboats said "We had a very rough passage. The first time we went along the port side of the Louis Sheid and took off 40. The second time we went to the starboard side and took off 22 more of the crew and passengers. They had to jump with ropes" around them, and so high were the seas that it was with the greatest difficultv that we got them all safely on board. There was as much as a 30ft. rise and fall in the waves. I am happy to sat that no one went into the sea

CREW REFUSE TO LEAVE. The coxswain said that when he left the Belgian steamer the crew of 45 were standing by, and had refused leave their ship. The engines were kept full speed to hold her in

position, but there was a lot motion in the water. As the tide rose the breakers increased in force. It was with the utmost difficulty that the lifeboat was able to land the survivors. In a sheltered position near the land they were transferred to small boats, and then had to traverse steep cliffs, guided through the muddy slopes by men with lanterns and torches. Another lifeboat took off two loads people, the second at midnight Between 10 and 11pm efforts were made by the crew to get the vessel off under her own steam. This proved to be unavailing, and two hours later it seemed as if the vessel was settling deeper.

DRAMATIC STORY Race For Life~Against Lake Of Blazing Oil.According to Lloyd's register, the Louis Sheid. ex-Kendal Castle, of 6.057 tons gross, was built at Wesermunde. Germany, in 1920- Roistered at Antwerp, her present owners are the Cie Nationale Beige de Transports Maritimes (managers. Armement- Deppe). She is 418 ft. long, of 55ft beam and 29ft. depth. She has two steel decks.

The Taiandoen. from which the survivors were being brought to port was outward bound from Amsterdam and Antwerp to Batavia when, yesterday morning there was a terrible explosion.. Within quarter of an hour the vessel foundered. She had on board a large general cargo and fourteen passengers. All the passengers and the majority of the crew had been saved. Six men, including two boys, are missing or have lost their lives. Two vessels were associated in the rescue work, the Louis Sheid and an Italian steamer, the Georgio Ohlsen. All the survivors were transferred to the Belgian steamer, which was homeward bound. A dramatic story of a race for life against a rapidly-spreading lake of blazing fuel oil was told to a "Western Morning News reporter early today by Capt. Jean Bernard Roterink. master of the Tajandoen.

GRIM BID FOR SAFETY. " All the passengers and a number of the members of the crew were in their bunks when the explosion occurred," he said. He explained that there were 14 passengers, including 5 women. " It was a terrific explosion, and the vessel went down within a quarter of an hour. Fortunately, we were able to get all the passengers and crew, with the exception of two of the ship's engineers and four seamen, into four lifeboats before she foundered. " Then began grim race for safety. The explosion had ignited our fuel oil, which had escaped, and the sea around the vessel was soon a huge blazing lake. "The lifeboat crews worked desperately to keep their boats ahead of the blazing oil, and, fortunately for all the boats, they won the race." Capt. Roterink said he did not know, whether the Tajandoen was sunk by mine or a torpedo. The explosion happened at 5.15 a.m., and it was bitterly cold. Among the passengers were two children, aged five and twelve. The women reached the boats wearing wraps or coats over their sleeping attire."

MINE OR TORPEDO? Two Men Picked Up By Chance In Darkness Chief Engineer Maus said the second and fourth engineers and one engineroom rating on duty in the engine-room must have lost their lives immediately as the result of the explosion. " I have heard," he said, "we were attacked by a submarine, but I did not see one myself. Whether it was a mine or torpedo I do not know. There was a tremendous explosion; flames started rushing out of the funnels, and the oil fuel caught on fire. The entire engine-room was lit up by the flames. " In few moments the oil started to burn on top of the sea. It was a terrifying spectacle. " Even away on the horizon the water seemed to be blazing. Eight hundred tons fuel oil had been let loose. " Our boats were run out immediately, but once we were in them had to fight for our lives and row like blazes to escape the oncoming flames. " In the boat I was we picked up two men quite by chance. They were indeed lucky to come in contact with us in the darkness. For two hours we were in our boats before being picked up." One of the Dutch crew is suffering from the effects of having to swim in the fuel oil that escaped from the sinking steamer immediately after the explosion. Away in the distance, flames attacked the oil on the surface of the water, but the swimmer struck out strongly, and managed to escape being burned, but he badly discoloured as a result of contact with the oil.

1939 Dec 8 Yorkshire Post

RESCUE SHIP DAMAGED ON ROCKS Survivors of U-Boat Attack Landed in Lifeboats HOLLAND last night was indignant at the sinking of her eighth ship since the war began the Tajandoen, a freighter of 8,159 tons, which was torpedoed in the English Channel on Wednesday. Survivors of the Dutch freighter were landed late last night an English Southwest port lifeboat, after the Belgian steamer Louis Sheid, which picked them up had run ashore and sent out an SOS message. The Belgian vessel was stated early this morning to serious danger of breaking and lifeboats and breeches buoy apparatus were sent to her assistance. All but six of the 157 persons In the Dutch ship are stated to have been accounted for and missing are believed be members the crew. A number of women were among those landed by lifeboats from the Belgian steamer. The Louis Sheid was swept broadside on to some sharp rocks. Police officers and Inhabitants of coastal villages were quickly on the scene to render what assistance they could.

Rope Ladder Rescues. The captain sent up flares and rockets asking for tugs and lifeboats. Lifeboats were sent from two ports, one arriving time to take passengers from the ship on a rope ladder and to land them at a nearby village. One lifeboat took nearly two hours reach land because the heavy seas. Holland has protested to Germany over the torpedoing of the Dutch oil tanker Sledrecht (says Associated Press). The vessel was torpedoed November 16, but the Government had withheld action pending questioning of the Sledrecht's five survivors by the Dutch Consul London. Meanwhile, despite official silence on the sinking of the Tajandoen, high official spokesman replied to German criticism that Holland did not take strong stand against the British export control. He said that neutrals were pushed too far by belligerents they would " reply to violence with violence, regardless from which side It comes." Holland Warned Again BERLIN, Thursday Unless Holland refused export to Britain, informed sources said to-day, the German Government would not consider her truly neutral. Permitting the British Consul Issue certificates origin (navicerts) was regarded as amounting to support Britain. True neutrality, these sources said, Involved declining to ship anything to Britain. In retaliation for Britain's breach of International Law. —Associated Press. AMSTERDAM, Thursday Holland is unlikely to follow the suggestion made the House of Commons Mr. Churchill yesterday to let Britain hire her ships, state well-informed quarters. They point out that Holland needs her own ships present and there also the possibility that Germany might construe this unneutral act. —British United Press. " Germany, fighting for her existence, does not hesitate regard the attitude passive neutrality of certain countries deliberate assistance to the enemy." This statement, according the French wireless, was made to foreign Journalists meeting at the Propaganda Ministry In Berlin. — Press Association War Special.

1939 Dec 8 Portsmouth Evening News

SHIPWRECKED TWICE Rescue Ship Ashore U-BOAT VICTIMS LANDED Channel Drama Graphic stories of the ordeals of survivors of two vessels —both neutral —in angry English Channel, were told to-day. Twenty-five members of the crew of the Belgian steamer Louis Sheid (6,057 tons), which went ashore last night with survivors of the torpedoed or mined Dutch freighter Tajandoen (8.159 tons) aboard were rescued by breeches buoy, and were brought safely ashore to-day. The Tajandoen survivors had been taken off last night. They had had the harrowing experience of being shipwrecked twice within a few hours, and after their ship had sunk in 15 minutes they had had to race for life in the boats before a rapidly spreading sea of blazing oil. had to row like hell," was the comment of the mate. Some survivor* of the Belgian ship had to be half carried up a precipitous cliff. Ttie captain of the Louis Sheid was making his last voyage before retiring. The crew of the Louis Sheid numbered 45 (44 Belgians and one Spaniard). They were all saved. All but six of the 67 yersons on board the Dutch ship are accounted fo r, the missing being two engineers and four seamen.

1939 Dec 8 Western Daily Press

WAR NEWS: LATEST RESCUE SHIP AGROUND The Belgian steamer Louis Sheid, which yesterday picked up 61 survivors from -the Tajandoen—(See foot of Columns 1 and 2)— sent out SOS last night stating that she had gone aground off the southwest coast England and needed assistance. Lifeboats went to her aid, and after rescue efforts, one lifeboat took nearly two hours to reach land because of the heavy seas. The survivors included number of women, and addition the 34 Dutch survivors it is believed that the crew of the Belgian steamer numbered 60. Passengers were rescued from the Belgian steamer by rope ladder. Early this morning she was danger of breaking up. She had been driven broadside on to some sharp rocks. A lifeboat stood by. It was later learned that one lifeboat which landed 40 of the survivors of the Tajandoen made a second voyage to land the remainder.— Press Association War Special.

1939 Dec 8 Western Daily Press

HOLLAND SEETHING AFTER LOSING EIGHTH SHIP Admiralty Trawler-"One Moment There, Next Moment Gone (Press Association War Special) HOLLAND last night was seething with indignation at the torpedoing of the Tajandoen, which is the eighth ship and the third largest the Dutch have lost in the war. The disaster follows immediately on Germany's threat to Holland Wednesday over her attitude towards the Allied blockade and the reply, which the Dutch Government defended its interpretation of neutrality. Six of the crew of the 8,159-ton Dutch freighter Tajandoen, which sank after being torpedoed in the English Channel yesterday are missing. The other 61 persons on board, including all the passengers, are stated to have been rescued. They are on board the steamer Louis Sheid (6,057 tons), which is expected to land them at a British south coast port.

SANK IN 25 MINUTES The Tajandoen sank in 25 minutes, following a heavy explosion. She left Holland for the Netherlands East Indies November 28 and was sighted off the English coast on Wednesday morning.

1939 Dec 8 Yorkshire Evening Post

ASHORE AFTER SAVING TORPEDO VICTIMS BELGIANS RESCUED BY BREECHES BUOY LIFEBOAT TAKES OFF DUTCH SURVIVORS After Race for Life in Sea of Blazing Oil All the crew of the Belgian steamer Louis Sheld, which went ashore in the English Channel last night with survivors of the torpedoed Dutch freighter Tajandoen, were rescued breeches buoy to-day, when the vessel had been driven in too close for the lifeboat to approach. The survivors the Tajandoen (3,159 tons) were taken off last night by lifeboat, when the Louis Sheid (6,057 tons) was driven inshore with a fast sea running. All but six of the 67 persons on board the Dutch ship are stated to be accounted for, the missing being two engineers and four seamen. The passengers included five women and two children. They had the harrowing experience being shipwrecked twice within few hours, and some were state great exhaustion. After the Tajandoen had been torpedoed and sunk within 15 minutes, there began race for life in the boats before a rapidly spreading sea of blazing oil. The thrilling story of the race was told by the captain, Jean Bernard Roederlnk, early to-day, at a Post Office where and he other the ship's officers had been accommodated.

"A Terrific Explosion" All the passengers and some the crew were in their bunks, when, early yesterday, the explosion occurred which sank my ship," said. "It was terrific explosion, which did such damage that the vessel went down within quarter hour. Fortunately were able get all the passengers and crew, with the exception two of the ship's engineers and four seamen, into four lifeboats before she foundered. "Then began a race for safety. The explosion had allowed our fuel oil to escape on to the sea and had Ignited It. The surface around the vessel was soon a huge blazing lake, which spread away from the sinking vessel. "As it spread, lifeboat crews worked desperately to keep their boats ahead of the blazing oil, and fortunately for all the boats, they won the race. "I don't know," went on Captain Roederlnk, "whether the Tajandoen was sunk by a mine a torpedo. The explosion happened at 5.15am and it was dark, and bitterly cold. "Passengers and those of the

crew who were sleeping grabbed coats any other garment handy before rushing on deck and crowding into the boats. "Among the passengers were five women and two children, aged five and 12. The women reached the boats wearing wraps and coats over their sleeping attire. We were fortunate in being picked up after spending only 2½ hours in the boats " I was taking the Tajandoen from Antwerp to Batavia." Two of the crew of the Tajandoen who jumped into the sea to save themselves as the ship was sinking were caught the blazing oil and were severely burned before one of the vessel's boats picked them up. When they were landed from the Louis Shied they were placed on stretchers and taken to hospital. Of the race to escape the blazing oil, the mate of the Tajandoen declared reaching shore: "We had to row like hell."

Carried Up Steep Cliff. The lifeboat had difficulty in landing the survivors from the Belgian vessel after it had run ashore. A small boat had to be obtained to carry the survivors from the lifeboat to land, as the water near shore was shallow and dangerous, and after that they had to be half carried up a precipitous cliff. The Journey up the cliff was accomplished with difficulty and proved a great hardship to many of the survivors, who had no footwear and very little clothing. On reaching the cliff top they were taken to a hotel, where guests and the staff joined forces to make them comfortable.

The Breeches Buoy Rescue. The officers and crew of the Sheid, who remained on their vessel after the removal of the survivors of the Tajandoen, in the hope that she could be towed off the rocks at high tide, decided to leave her early to-day, when the ship was drifting inshore. The ship, according to watchers, moved to a point about 300 yards from the land, and while the lifeboat and other vessels stood by her a breeches buoy apparatus was placed in position. Although it was foggy, a rocket carrying the lifeline was shot across the steamer and the breeches buoy apparatus brought into operation. In a short time many of the officers and men of the crew had been brought ashore in the buoy. The rescue work was hampered by fog and darkness, and the vessel had moved so far inshore at high tide that the lifeboat could not take off the crew with safety. Spectators could see the figures of the seamen bobbing over choppy sea as they were hauled through mist and rain on to the sands, where helpers took them to an hotel hardly more than 100 yards from where the ship lay buffeted by the waves. Scores of police, special constables and villagers from miles around hurried to the beach to aid in the rescue work when they heard the ship's plight. One man told a reporter, as he arrived, weary and sodden, at his home; "It has been a terrible night. There was no respite from the lashing rain and tide. We had to rush the apparatus to another point two miles away to bring the vessel within length of the rope. "All the stokers were ashore before dawn, when we started bringing in the seamen."

61 Dutch Survivors. The Dutch survivors on the Louis Sheid were today taken by ambulances 30 miles to the nearest town, in a state of great exhaustion. Altogether there are 61. Among whom are 14 passengers. One of the passengers, a student named Nijon, aged 19, who was going home to Batavia, said that when the explosion occurred most of those on board were asleep. A submarine was not seen. Two of the lifeboats were smashed while being lowered. The ship immediately caught fire and broke amidships. "She crinkled just like a piece of paper." he said. The crew and passengers were in the lifeboats for three hours before being picked by an Italian ship, which was bound for Lisbon. When the Louis Sheid came on the scene, an hour later, the survivors were transferred to her. Chief Engineer Maus, of the Tajsndoen, said: "Three members of the engine-room staff must have been killed immediately in the explosion. Flames once started rushing out the funnels, the oil fuel having caught fire. Within a minute or two the oil started to bum the top at the sea. It was a terrifying sight. Even away on the horizon the water seemed to be ablaze. Eight hundred tons of fuel oil was loose." The captain the Louis Sheid was making his last voyage before retiring. The Louis Sheid is owned by Nationale Belge de Transporte Maritimes, and is registered at Antwerp.



TWICE SHIPWRECKED CREW LANDED SAFELY. SURVIVORS. An injured seaman of the Tajandoen taking a hot drink after being rescued from the Belgian steamer. Six of the 67 persons who were on board the Dutch ship are missing. She sank in 15 minutes, and survivors had to race in the boats before a rapidly spreading sea of blazing oil. **TWO CREWS SAVED.**—A member of the crew of the Belgian steamer Louis Sheid, which went ashore on a rocky coast, being landed yesterday by breeches buoy. Survivors of the torpedoed Dutch ship Tajandoen, who were picked up the Louis Sheid, had been taken off during the night.

STEAMER FAST AGROUND Crew Landed By Breeches Buoy DRAMA IN DARK. Good Work By L-S-A. In The South-West. ALL the crew of the Belgian steamer Louis Sheid were landed by rocket apparatus on the Southwest coast in the early hours of yesterday morning. A report of the stranding of the vessel and of the dramatic landing from her of personnel appeared in the later editions "The Western Morning News" yesterday morning. It was at 4.5 a.m. in the darkness that the first man was brought ashore under the direction of Station Officer Bryant, who was in charge of the life-saving apparatus. The span from the stranded ship to the shore was about 600ft., and this involved a considerable haul on the breeches buoy, but there were numerous helpers both before and daylight. The task was not completed until after 10 o'clock. Connecting lines were made fast on the stern of the steamer and the rescue party hauled the crew ashore in full view of an hotel. A number of the sailors sustained minor injuries, and some were exhausted as result of their night's exposure in the Louis Sheid, which is in the command of Capt. Van Dinckelberge who was the last to leave the ship.

SHIP ON FIRE Dutch Crew And Passengers Rescued After Explosion A graphic story was told by A.B. Van Staten Armand, who was a Belgian refugee in the Great War, and lived in England for four and a half years, the last two years of which were with an English family at Chingford. When 11 years old he returned to his home in Antwerp and since 1925 he has been serving at sea. "On Thursday

morning," he said, " I was on watch from 4 to 8 a.m. I was stand-by In the early morning I saw a flash right abeam. It was bright light, but it was too far away for us to know what it was I saw nothing more for about 10 minutes, then the officer of the watch, the chief officer, and the third officer, who were on the bridge, reported the captain that there was a ship on fire. Evidently it was a motor vessel, and within a very few minutes flames were seen rising from the surface of the water as well as from the vessel, which was then ablaze. " Our course was changed, and the Louis Sheid proceeded to the assistance of the vessel in distress. It was just about daylight when picked the first boat, which contained the chief officer of the Dutch ship and 22 of the crew.

TORPEDOED? I do not know for certain but I am told that our captain asked the chief officer of the Tajandoen if his vessel were mined or submarined. I understand that the chief officer declared that the Tajandoen was torpedoed by a submarine without warning. The second boat that we picked up contained six people. Meanwhile, before they were picked, the Louis Sheid had sent out a message of warning to ships in the vicinity apprising them of the mishap to the Tajandoen. Then an Italian steamer came on the scene and picked up more of the passengers and crew of the Dutch vessel This made a total of 62, of whom 14 were passengers, including four women and a child of about nine or ten years old. They were put on board our vessel soon after daylight, and then until 11 o'clock were searching the vicinity in the hope of picking up the men who were reported to be missing. The Italian vessel transferred her people to us. She was bound south, while the Louis Sheid was making for her home port, Antwerp

TERRIFYING SCENE. -The scene was a terrifying one, as the fuel which had escaped from the bunkers the Dutch motor vessel caught fire and threatened even the lifeboats, the crews of which had to pull desperately to get away from the flames. It was first intended to land the Dutch people, as we were anxious to get them ashore as speedily as possible, as they were scantily clad most of them being only their night clothes. I heard from them that following the explosion, which was of the most violent description, doors of the cabins were jammed and it was with the greatest difficulty that many of the survivors were able to escape and reach the deck

STRUCK SANDBANK. "We apparently got out of our course, and at about 20 minutes past on Thursday evening, when it was quite dark, we struck a sandbank. The engines were kept going an effort to free the Louis Sheid, first ahead, then astern, then slow, but eventually as we found she was hard and fast aground they were stopped. "The night was an anxious one as there was a nasty sea running, and it seemed impossible for the lifeboats to reach us from the shore, but we could see that assistance was at hand. At one time it seemed probable that we should be on board only an hour or two, but ultimately it was decided that as the ship appeared to be in no immediate danger we should remain until daylight.

RAPID ASSISTANCE. "Later the steamer was so much closer inshore that it was decided even in the darkness to have recourse to the life-saving apparatus. Soon after 4 o'clock the first man was sent ashore the breeches buoy. I feel that we are all deeply indebted to the life-saving apparatus and to the wonderful assistance and kindness extended us on reaching the land. It has been a great help to us when you consider that most of us have come ashore with the loss of practically all our worldly possessions, but how much worse was the plight of the unfortunate Dutch crew and the passengers, who found themselves in open boats within very few minutes of their vessel being destroyed by an explosion. "I should like also, to pay tribute to the rapidity with which assistance came when we sent out a message announcing the plight of the Taiandoen. " As far as I understand, the disaster to the Taiandoen occurred in the English Channel. She was bound from Antwerp to Batavia, Dutch East Indies. Six men, so I am told, lost their lives in ' the vessel, three of the number having been on duty in the engine-room at the time."

DRIFTED INSHORE. Mr. W. G. Hodge said on Thursday he was looking seawards when he saw a ship in the bay. For some time before she had been noticed by local fishermen, who regarded her as being off her course. When saw her," he added. " the Louis Sheid was aground, then she appeared to come nearer, and later she drifted or was driven further inshore almost underneath the hotel. Immediately I saw the plight of the vessel I reported the circumstances to the coastguards and the lifeboat. I understand another lifeboat was also informed and the assistance of tugs was requisitioned, but so far as know no tugs left for the scene." Chief Officer Michael Cogghe of the Louis Sheid, was on the bridge of his vessel at the time of the explosion. " Without any warning," he said, " I understand the Dutch vessel was struck in the engine room on the starboard side. So far as I know it was a torpedo. That is for the officers of the Tajandoen to say.

MASS OF FLAMES. "It was about a quarter past five on Thursday morning when I had my attention attracted a mass of flames. It was about 7 or 8 miles away. Realizing that it must be a vessel on fire I altered course and steered for the scene. There we found lifeboats had already been manned, while all around them the sea, rough as it was a mass of fire as a result of the escape of oil from the bunkers. This had caught fire following the explosion. Describing his own experience, Mr. Cogghe said the Louis Sheid got out of her course, and despite the keenness of the look-out she touched the bottom. It was thought at first that she would be able to get clear of the sandbank under her own steam, but in the end it was found impossible, and she was driven closer inshore. In the end it became necessary to avail themselves of the services of the rocket apparatus crew.

1939 Dec 11 Western Morning News

LOUIS SHEID HOPE Efforts May Be Made To Refloat Vessel No attempt has yet been made to save the Belgian steamer Louis Sheid, which ran ashore on the South-West Coast England after she had picked the bulk of the crew the Dutch liner Tajandoen. If weather conditions are favourable efforts will made to refloat the vessel during the next spring tides. Members the crew are taking turns in the vicinity the stranded craft.

1939 Dec 12 Western Morning News

STRANDED STEAMER Salvage Of Louis Sheid To Be Attempted Insured at Lloyd's, the Belgian steamer Louis Sheid. which stranded on the south-west coast of England on her way to Antwerp after rescuing the survivors of the Dutch liner Tajandoen was stated yesterday to be in a more sheltered position than on Sunday. The vessel is partly resting on sand and partly on rocks. Her cargo consists of about 7,500 tons of mixed grain. Arrangements are being made to save the vessel, but it is probable that she will be lightened before tugs are sent to the scene. The wreck has been visited by Lloyd's agent and a representative" of the Salvage Association.

1939 Dec 13 Western Morning News

BELGIAN STEAMER Salvage Work To Begin Soon It was stated yesterday that preliminary salvage work on the Belgian steamer Louis Sheid, aground on the South-West Coast, would probably begin within the next 36 hours." This preliminary work will be the taking off of the vessel's cargo. A report on the steamer's condition has been forwarded to Lloyd's, where she is' insured. The Louis Sheid stranded last week on her way to Antwerp, after rescuing the survivors the Dutch liner Tajandoen.

1939 Dec 14 Western Morning News

SALVAGE BEGUN Belgian Steamer On The South-West Coast There are very hopeful prospects of the Belgian steamer Louis Sheid being refloated. When homeward bound to Antwerp from South America the Louis Sheid, after rescuing the survivors of the Dutch liner Tajandoen, which was sunk off the South Coast, was herself stranded on the South-West Coast of England The crew were landed by the rocket apparatus. Yesterday salvage operations started Men were placed on board the

steamer and arrangements have been made for the discharge of a large quantity the cargo in liehters When the Louis Sheid is sufficiently lightened tugs will be utilized to haul her off the rocks and the sand she cannot be refloated under her own steam At present, according to yesterday's report, the steamer has not sustained any very serious damage.



1939 Dec 15 Kingsbridge Gazette (source: Kingsbridge Cookworthy Museum microfiche)

Out and About (Editorial)

Wartime Drama.

The grounding of the Belgian steamer, Louis Sheid, on the rock bound South Devon coast last Thursday night, brought home to people in this more or less isolated part of the country the intensity and ruthlessness of sea warfare much more vividly than newspaper or broadcast accounts. True, the Louis Sheid was not a victim of any attack, but the fact that she had on board survivors of a Dutch freighter which had been sunk in the Channel but a few hours before indirectly linked her with that disaster.

Perilous Voyage

Yet the full drama that stormy night was not in the actual wrecking, nor the plight of those on board, but was in the courage shown by the crew of the lifeboat which went to her assistance. A rigorous censorship prevents the publication of the name of the boat, of those who manned her and even the complete story of their perilous trip, but what they accomplished will not readily be forgotten; terrific seas were met with, yet the coxswain drove his boat at full speed through the darkness and driving rain and displayed magnificent seamanship by taking 62 people off the stranded vessel from the weather side – a feat which only those closely connected with the sea can appreciate to the full. Their bravery, however, will not be passed unrecognised, for they are to be the guests tomorrow evening of the President and Committee of their particular branch of the Lifeboat Institution

1939 Dec 19 Western Morning News

Salvage Preparations Salvage operations in connection with the Belgian steamer Louis Sheid. which stranded after effecting the rescue of the crew of the Dutch liner Tajandoen, are proceeding apace. As rapidly as possible the cargo is being transferred to lighters before an effort is made to refloat the vessel.

1939 Dec 22 Kingsbridge Gazette

Out and About (Editorial)

Lifeboat Crews Exploit.

Although a matter of common knowledge it may now be officially revealed that the lifeboat which went to the rescue of the Belgian ship which ran aground on the South Devon coast a few weeks ago was the Samuel and Marie Parkhouse of Salcombe. The gallant exploit of the crew under coxswain Eddy Distin on that wild and stormy night was to have been recognised by a supper given by the President and Committee last Saturday, but duty, in the shape of an SOS from an axillary schooner which was in difficulties, called out before the celebrations had barely commenced. It is whispered, however, that their bravery may be tangibly and deservedly rewarded by a summons to Buckingham Palace.

1939 Dec 28 Gloucester Citizen

GIFT TO LIFEBOATS The officers, passengers and crew of the Dutch steamer Tajandoen. who were rescued by the Belgian steamer Louis Schied when their own steamer was sunk by enemy action, and were then wrecked second time when the Louis Schied went ashore have given to the Royal National Lifeboat Institution, in gratitude to the lifeboat which rescued them from the Louis Schied. They have made this gift, although in the two wrecks they had lost nearly all their belongings.

1940 Jan 6 Western Morning News

Salvage Bid Continuing Salvage operations are being continued on the Belgian steamer Louis Sheid, which went ashore on the West Coast on December after rescuing the survivors of the Dutch liner Tajandoen.

1940 Feb 8 Western Morning News

ASHORE IN SOUTH-WEST Little Hope Of Saving Steamer Louis Sheid Early December the Dutch motorship Tajandoen was torpedoed in the English Channel while outward bound from Amsterdam for the Netherlands, East Indies. Six lives were lost, and the Tajandoen was in flames before she foundered, the sea being ablaze from the oil that escaped from her fuel tanks. To the rescue of the crew came an Italian steamer and the Belgian steamer Louis Sheid. The latter, with cargo of over 8,000 tons, was homeward bound to Antwerp In the mist and rain, following her stoppage to pick up the survivors of Tajandoen. the Louis Sheid got out of her course and grounded the South-West coast in such an area that lifeboats from Salcombe and Plymouth were dispatched to her succour. Salvage operations on the Louis Sheid have been persisted in. and the bulk of the valuable cargo was got on shore. Just when it was hoped that a little further lightening of the steamer by jettisoning some of the cargo enable her to be refloated weather conditions interfered with the operations. Seas pounded the stranded craft, and yesterday when the salvage crew arrived on the scene it was to find that the Louis Sheid plight had changed for the worse. Now there is little or no prospect the steamer being salvaged.

1940 Feb 17 Western Morning News

GALLANTRY AWARDS Salcombe, Torbay, Falmouth Lifeboat Men Honoured The Royal National Lifeboat Institution has awarded 14 medals for gallantry, 11 vellums inscribed with its thanks, and money awards amounting to £115 to lifeboat men at Salcombe, Torbay, and Falmouth. Coxswain E. W. Distin, of Salcombe, has received the silver medal, each of the seven members of his crew the bronze medal, the coxswain and each of the crew £5 16s. 6d., and Capt. L. Ames. Hon. secretary the station, an inscribed barometer for the rescue of 62 men and women of the Dutch steamer Taiandoen on the night of December 7. The Tajandoen had been sunk by enemy action and her survivors rescued by the Belgian ship Louis Sheid. The Louis Sheid later herself went ashore, and from her the lifeboat made the rescues.

1940 June 6 Western Morning News

GALLANT RESCUE Medals Presented Salcombe Lifeboat Crew Gallant rescue of the passengers and crew on board the Louis Sheid when she went aground on the South Devon coast last December was recalled Salcombe Monday, when Col- Glover presented medals and certificates awarded by the National Lifeboat Institution to the crew of the Salcombe lifeboat. Mr. E. C. Cure, president of the Salcombe branch, presided, and tb.2 awards were: Silver medal and certificate. Mr. Distin, coxswain: bronze medals and certificates. Messrs E. Chant. G. Stetterd, J. Allen. P. Chant G Lake. Field, and T. Cheeseman. The secretary. Capt. J. L. Ames, was presented' with a barometer.



2. RNLI Lifeboat Service Record (Salcombe Lifeboat Station Archive)

Report of service on the seventh and eighth day of December 1939. Lifeboat 805 stationed at Salcombe – Samuel and Marie Parkhouse. Case of the Louis Sheid of Antwerp.

At 7:35 PM coxswain received a report from Mr J Jarvis Hope Cove (late coxswain) vessel ashore east of Bigbury Bay. Lifeboat launched 7:45 PM. Arrived at casualty about 9:20 PM anchored on the weather side and dropped back. Failed to reach vessel. Coxswain then weighed anchor and came alongside. Vessel lying north and south, bows to sea. Lifeboat fetched up on port side and took off 40 persons. Coxswain obtained information by signal from the shore that survivors could land at Hope Cove. Landed 40 by means of Hope Cove fishing boats. Then returned to the wreck, about 2 miles, and took off 22 more and landed them the same way. Coxswain obtained assistance from Mr J Jarvis who went with the lifeboat again to the casualty and found no further assistance was required at present. Lifeboat stood by to daylight at 8 AM. A fourth trip was made but again no assistance was required as remainder of crew being brought ashore by breeches buoy. Lifeboat then returned to station.

Louis Sheid, Antwerp, 6057 gross, loaded with cargo for Antwerp

Owner: Cie Nationale Belge de Transports

Position of casualty: Books Rocks, Bigbury Bay, just under links hotel Thurlstone.

Nature of casualty: still aground

Direction And Force of Wind at launching place: Southwest strong

direction and force of wind at casualty: south-west very strong

condition of sea at casualty: very rough

condition of weather: very dark, heavy rain schools

state of tide at launching: four hours ebb number of lives rescue from shipwreck by the lifeboat

how did the boat behave?: Splendid

Number of persons on board: 107

Warning received: 7.35pm

Launched: 7.45pm

Reached wreck: 9.20pm

Returned to moorings: 10.30am 8th Dec

Returned ashore: 11am

crew: E. Distant coxswain, E. Chant, second coxswain, G Shepherd Bowman, J. Allen mechanic, D Chant second mechanic, J Lane signalman, J Field, T Cheesman.

Number of hours on duty: 18½

Rewards: £21 2s 6d, additional awards £44

Remarks by the President of the Local Branch: Considering the state of the weather, the difficulties of locating the vessel, the getting alongside in such a tremendous sea and taking off the passengers I am of the opinion that the coxswain and his crew showed remarkable seamanship worthy of recognition and should welcome a visit from someone in the head office who would appreciate the difficulties. Ernest Capel Cure president of local branch

1. Crew:
2. E. Distant coxswain
3. E. Chant 2nd coxswain
4. G. Shepherd bowman
5. J. Allen mechanic
6. D. Chant 2nd mechanic
7. J. Lane signalman
8. J. Field
9. T. Cheesman

Louis Sheid of Antwerp. Owners: Cie nationale Belgie de Transports. Number of persons on board: 107. Tonnage 6057 gross. Loaded with a mix cargo for Antwerp. Position: Boots? Rocks, Bigbury Bay, just under links Hotel, Thurlestone. Nature of casualty: still aground. Wind South West strong at launching place, South West very strong at scene of casualty. Sea very rough at scene of casualty. Weather: very dark heavy rain squalls. State of tide at time of dispatch: four hours ebb. No coastguard communication with lifeboat. Telephone or telegraph not used. Hon sec authorise launch. First warning: 7:35 PM from Mr Jarvis, Hope Cove. Time of launching 7:45 PM. Time reached wreck 9:20 PM. Time of arrival on return ashore: 11 AM 8th December. Time of returning lifeboat to moorings: 10:30 AM. Number of lives rescued: 62. Number of lives lost: nil. Service done under motive power. How did the boats behave? Splendid. Was any damage done to the boat? Nil, three fenders lost.

1942 April 29.

Report of service. Eight men stranded on Book Rock, Thurlestone.

At 1225 coastguard Hope Cove reported 8 men with a 16 foot boat stranded on Book Rock near Thurlestone. As no other suitable boat was available at Hope Cove the sea being stormy the lifeboat was launched. All eight men were taken off the rock and with their boats were taken to Hope Cove. The lifeboat then returned to station. Book Rock is about a mile offshore and awash at half tide. The wind was off shore and it was impossible for these men to get back under oars? They were employed at work on the wreck of the Louis Sheid

3. Salcombe and Hope Cove Lifeboat Stations, Roger Barrett, RNLI Station History Series, 2019

1939 The Belgian freighter *Louis Sheid* – a Silver Medal rescue

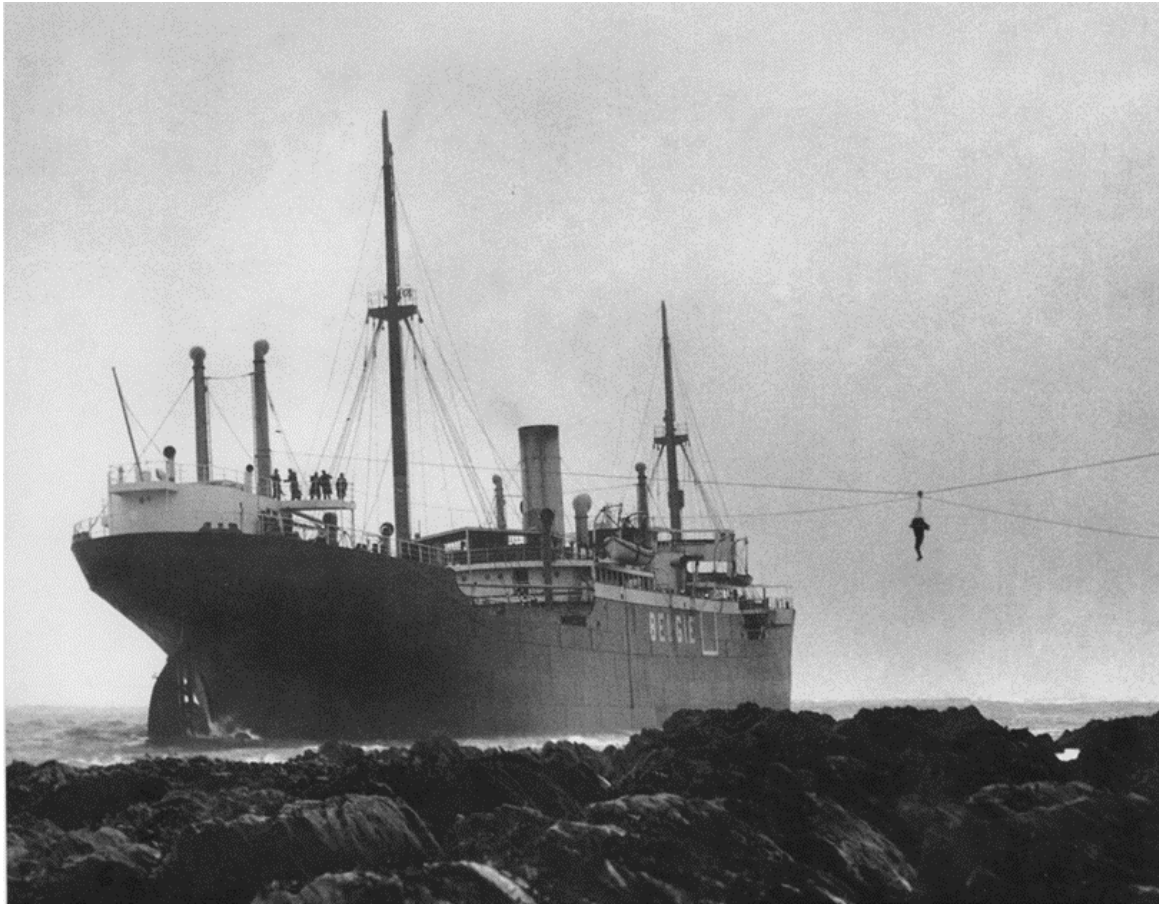


49. The Belgian Steamer *Louis Sheid* aground in Leas Bay, Thurlestone

Photo: Salcombe Maritime Museum

The most dramatic rescue carried out during the Second World War by Eddie Distin and his crew took place before the military build-up in the town had gathered momentum. Just 3 months into the war, on 7 December 1939, the neutral Dutch cargo-liner *Tajandoen* was torpedoed in the English Channel by a German U-boat. The 62 survivors took to the lifeboats and, fortunately for them, the 6,057-ton Belgian ship *Louis Sheid* was nearby and was able to pick them up. The *Louis Sheid's* captain, fearing that his ship, also a neutral, might soon meet with the same fate as the *Tajandoen*, made for the safety of shallow coastal waters, only to run aground in Leas Bay, just below Thurlestone Golf Club.

Jack Jarvis, the son of the last coxswain of the Hope Cove lifeboat, witnessed the grounding and immediately telephoned the Honorary Secretary of the Salcombe Lifeboat Station, Captain Ames. Ten minutes later, at 7.45pm, the *Samuel and Marie Parkhouse* slipped her moorings with Coxswain Distin at the helm. The night was pitch black, with heavy, driving rain. It was 2 hours before low water and, with a strong south-west wind, heavy seas were breaking over the Bar. Captain Ames knew that crossing it would be a stern test for the new lifeboat as she headed out on her first rescue mission, so he had a shore boat standing by in case of an accident. Fortunately, the lifeboat, with its special modifications, was able to cope with the conditions and, in the experienced hands of Eddie Distin, she plunged through the breakers into the open water beyond.



After 62 survivors had been taken off by Salcombe lifeboat, the remaining crew of the *Louis Sheid* were hauled ashore by breeches buoy

Photo: RNLI

As the lifeboat rounded Bolt Head and headed north-westward for Bigbury Bay, it met the full force of the gale broadside on and its crew was soon drenched by the waves, spray and rain. It was not until 9.20pm that they found the steamer firmly grounded, at low water, on the Book Rocks reef half a mile off shore and almost head-on to the sea. The coxswain dropped anchor to windward and

veered down to get along the steamer's starboard side but, thwarted by nearby rocks, was forced to retrieve the anchor and fetch up on the other side. Although this gave the lifeboat some shelter, it was still rising and falling between 6 and 9 metres (20–30ft) and, in the driving rain and total darkness, the crew struggled to keep her alongside. The *Louis Sheid's* captain meanwhile had given the order that the survivors from the *Tajandoen* were to be taken off first and so, each time the lifeboat surged up towards the steamer's deck, they were thrust with crucial timing, one at a time, into the lifeboatmen's outstretched arms.

When 40 of the survivors had been taken onboard, Coxswain Distin pulled away and, as he did so, he received a signal from the shore that they could land at Hope Cove. Jack Jarvis, who had been the first to raise the alarm, together with two other local fishermen, R Hurrell and H Thornton, went out in a 5 metre (16ft) rowing boat and met the lifeboat just inside Bolt Tail and took the survivors ashore, eight at a time. The fishermen were unable to land at the old lifeboat slipway because of the heavy surf and so they made for Quay Sands on the north shore of Bolt Tail. Once ashore the survivors, many of whom were only scantily dressed and without footwear, had to be assisted up the steep cliff in the dark and rain. Most were taken to the Cottage Hotel.

When the lifeboat returned to pick up more survivors from the grounded ship, the coxswain found that she had shifted her position and, as there was no longer any shelter to be found on her port side, he came in on the starboard side which was now free of the rocks. Once alongside the remaining 22 survivors from the Dutch ship *Tajandoen* scrambled aboard. Eddie Distin later said: 'They had to jump with ropes around them, and so high were the seas that it was with the greatest difficulty that we got them all safely onboard. There was as much as a 30ft [9m] rise and fall in the waves. I am happy to say that no one went into the sea.' They too were taken to Hope Cove, about 2 miles away, where they were rowed ashore by the three local fishermen.

Sixty-two survivors, including five women and two children, had now been rescued but the *Louis Sheid's* 45 officers and men were still aboard her and so the lifeboat went back a third time, only to find that she had moved again. The rising tide had lifted the steamer clear of the reef and she was now much closer and broadside-on to the shore. The Hope Cove Life Saving Apparatus Company had already fired a line across her, but the *Louis Sheid's* captain, hoping that his vessel might be towed off at high tide, kept his crew onboard and asked the lifeboat to stand by in case of accident. By now, the Plymouth lifeboat, *Robert and Marcella Beck*, had arrived and together the two lifeboats stood-by through the long, cold, rainswept night. By 4am, the ship had drifted closer inshore and so the Life Saving Company's breeches buoy was rigged and the *Louis Sheid's* crew hauled off. The span from the stranded ship to the shore was about 180 metres (600ft), which meant a considerable haul on the buoy, and even though there were numerous helpers, the task was not completed until after 10am. Once ashore the survivors were taken to the nearby Links Hotel.

The two lifeboats remained in attendance until 8am. Heavy seas were still breaking along the coast and so, before risking a return across the Salcombe Bar, Coxswain Distin put in to Hope Cove and sent Second Coxswain Edwin Chant by car to Salcombe to check on conditions. On receiving confirmation that it was safe to cross, the lifeboat returned to Salcombe. The crew finally got ashore at 11am after having been out in atrocious conditions for over 15 hours.

For his truly outstanding skill and courage, Coxswain Eddie Distin was awarded the Silver Medal by the RNLI and, in recognition of the vital part they played in the long and arduous rescue, the Bronze Medal was awarded to the other seven members of his crew: Edwin Chant Second Coxswain, Gerald Shepherd Bowman, John Allen Mechanic, Philip Chant Second Mechanic, J Lane signalman, Jack Field and Thomas Cheeseman. The Honorary Secretary, Captain JL Ames was presented with a barometer. Jack Jarvis of Hope Cove was also given a barometer and he and the other two fishermen also received £3 each for their help.

The *Louis Sheid* later broke her back and split into two sections. Salvage crews set to work on her and, on 29 April 1942, Salcombe lifeboat was again called out to save eight of the salvage-men after they had been stranded in a small boat on Book Rock in a gale.



51. The *Louis Sheid* after she had broken her back

Photo: Salcombe Maritime Museum

4. Jeff Morris Story of Salcombe Lifeboat, unpublished RNLI Poole Archive notes

Early on the morning of December 7th. 1939, as the 6,000 ton Belgian steamer "*Louis Sheid*" made her way up channel towards Antwerp, she sighted the 8,000 ton Dutch steamer "*Tajandoen*", which had either been torpedoed or mined. The "*Louis Sheid*" picked up 62 survivors from the sinking vessel and then proceeded on her way. But, the weather grew steadily worse and early that evening, the "*Louis Sheid*" was driven ashore in Bigbury Bay. The "*Samuel & Marie Parkhouse*" slipped her moorings at 7.45 p.m.

The tide was at four hours ebb, with a strong southerly wind, causing a very heavy breaking sea on Salcombe Bar. Conditions were at their very worst for crossing the Bar and Capt. Ames, the Honorary Secretary of the Salcombe Lifeboat Station, arranged for a shore-boat to stand-by, just in case of an accident as the lifeboat put out. But, Coxswain Edwin Distin, calling on all his vast experience and knowledge of the local conditions, safely brought the lifeboat through the turbulent waves, out into deeper water and set course for Bigbury Bay.

In the tremendous seas, it took the lifeboat two hours to reach the "*Louis Sheid*", by which time the wind had increased to a full gale. It was dead low-water as Coxswain Distin approached the stranded steamer, which was aground half-a-mile off-shore, almost head-on to the wind and sea. The Coxswain dropped anchor to windward and veered down towards the steamer, but he found that his way was barred by submerged rocks and so he had to weigh anchor and try from the other side. Then the steamer gave him a little shelter and, with superb seamanship, he took the lifeboat alongside the vessel's port quarter. The lifeboat was being thrown about most violently in the heavy seas; rising and falling some 20 to 30 feet and the work of the crew of the lifeboat was made all the

more difficult because of the very heavy, continuous rain and total darkness. But, one by one, 40 of the survivors from the "Tajandoen" were rescued and Coxswain Distin decided to put them ashore.

Rather than sail all the way to Salcombe and back again, he decided to land the men at nearby Hope Cove and signalled his intention to the Coastguard. At Hope Cove, a tremendous sea was crashing onto the beach, but some of the local fishermen braved the heavy surf and launched a small boat, which was manned by 3 men, Mr. J. Jarvis, the son of the last Coxswain of the Hope Cove Lifeboat Station, which had been closed in 1930 and who had first telephoned news of the casualty that night to Salcombe, Mr. R. Hurrell and Mr. H. Thornton. Coxswain Distin met the small boat off Key Sands and eight of the survivors were taken ashore in the rowing boat. In all, the 3 Hope Cove men made 5 trips out to the lifeboat to land the rescued men, after which the "Samuel & Marie Parkhouse" returned to the "Louis Sheid".

Coxswain Distin found that during his absence, the steamer had moved and was now lying dead head-on to the heavy seas, offering no shelter at all for the lifeboat. Despite this added difficulty, Coxswain Distin again took the lifeboat alongside and rescued the remaining 22 members of the crew of the "Tanjandoen", these men also being landed by the small rowing boat at Hope Cove.

Then, for the third time, Coxswain Distin headed for the "Louis Sheid", being accompanied this time by Mr. Jarvis. It was thought that his expert local knowledge might be of considerable help. But when they reached the steamer, they found that she had been driven right over the reef on which she had first grounded and was then lying very close to the cliffs. The Coastguard had already got a line aboard her and the Captain and crew of the "Louis Sheid" decided that they would be taken ashore by breeches buoy. But they asked the lifeboat to stand-by while this was being done, just in case of an accident. The Plymouth lifeboat which had also been called out, then reached the scene and the two lifeboats stood-by until daylight, when their help was no longer required.

In the heavy seas, Coxswain Distin was anxious about crossing the Bar at Salcombe and so he put in to Hope Cove again, where Second Coxswain Chant went ashore and was driven to Salcombe by Capt. Ames, to check on conditions. After assuring himself that they would be able to cross the Bar safely, Second Coxswain Chant returned to the waiting lifeboat and Coxswain Distin brought the "Samuel & Marie Parkhouse" round to Salcombe, crossing the Bar safely just before 11 o'clock that morning. The lifeboat-men had then been at sea for over 15 hours, in the most appalling conditions and for his truly outstanding skill and courage, Coxswain Edwin Distin was awarded the Silver Medal by the RNLI. The other 7 members of his crew, who had played such a vital part in the rescue, working under extremely dangerous and difficult conditions, each received the RNLI's Bronze Medal.

5. Salcombe Maritime Museum Notes

The large ship's wheel in the Wreck Room was salvaged from the wreck of the Belgian vessel Louis Sheid in 1940 for a local resident, whose son donated it to the Museum in 2006. The ship was an indirect casualty of the Second World War which had started on 3 September 1939.

Nazi Germany quickly conquered Poland in its first campaign and there then followed a period of inactivity nicknamed the 'phoney war' by the American press. This was rudely interrupted on 10 May 1940 by the opening of the German spring offensive in the west against neutral Belgium and Holland and its principal enemy France. There was, however, to be no 'phoney war' at sea. On 3 September at 2100 hours the outward bound 13,581 ton British liner Athenia had been torpedoed and sunk by the German submarine U-30 with heavy loss of life. Other U-boat sinkings followed and a few weeks later on 14 October 1939 U-47, commanded by Korvettenkapitan Gunter Prien, forced its way into the Royal Navy's base at Scapa Flow in the Orkney Islands. The battleship Royal Oak was sunk with the loss of 833 members of her crew.

By early December Prien's U-47, was back on patrol in the English Channel. At 0530 on the morning of 7 December the Dutch cargo-liner Tajandoen on passage from Amsterdam to Batavia was sighted and torpedoed, despite the fact that Germany was not yet at war with Holland. Tajandoen started to sink at once but fortunately for the survivors of the crew the Belgian ship Louis Sheid was nearby and managed to save all but the six who had died when the torpedo struck.

Fearing that his ship could soon meet with the same fate as the Tajandoen, the Shied's captain made for the nearest land at full speed hoping that she would be safe in the shallower coastal water. By nightfall on the short winter's day the Louis Sheid was approaching the South Devon coast. The wind had freshened to a full southerly gale, visibility was poor with heavy rain and the wartime blackout ensured that there were no lights on land. The ship gradually closed the shore and finally ran aground on 8 December 1939 in the tiny Leas Bay just below Thurlestone Golf Club.

Fortunately the stranding was seen from the shore by the former coxswain of the old Hope Cove lifeboat who telephoned for the Salcombe lifeboat at once. The Samuel and Marie Parkhouse had a hard fight to round Bolt Head on her westward voyage but managed to arrive alongside the Louis Sheid some two hours after the grounding. The first forty men rescued were all Dutchmen from the Tajandoen. They were taken to Hope Cove where they were helped ashore through the breakers by local fishermen. The lifeboat returned to the wreck for a second group of men who were also taken to the Cove. By the time the lifeboat returned for the rest of the crew the Louis Sheid had shifted on the falling tide and the boat could no longer get alongside. All those left on board were eventually rescued by coastguards who had managed to get a line to the ship with their rocket apparatus.

The RNLI awarded a silver medal to coxswain Eddy Distin and bronze medals to the other members of his crew for this service. Despite several salvage attempts, the Louis Sheid never moved again. Part of her cargo was saved before she broke in two during the south westerly gales of February 1940. In 1942 some of the metal from her hull was brought ashore to help the war effort and more was reclaimed after the war. Remnants of the ship can still be seen at low spring tides.

7. Kingsbridge Gazette, Sept 17 2010, Delving into the Past

SOME of the lowest tides of the year have enabled wreck-watchers to see the Louis Sheid from South Milton and Thurlestone beaches, and also from the coastal path. What is left of the Belgian ship lies in 30ft of water just off the shore, but at exceptionally low tides she protrudes 15ft above the waves.

The wreck has been a mecca for divers for decades, and on Saturday Garth Gregory, who lives in South Milton, got up close and personal with his camera.

He said: 'I swam out to the wreck and the worst thing was the zip on my wetsuit broke, so I had to carry out my quest in swimming trunks! Visibility was very poor. I had checked out the scene at the morning's very high tide and the swell had churned up all the sand from the seabed. 'So I ended up taking surface rather than underwater shots. Also, I was not helped by my thumb often obscuring the lens as I focussed more on not getting scraped across the barnacles by the swell.'

The Louis Sheid, a cargo ship, ran aground on December 8, 1939, but thanks to the bravery of Salcombe lifeboatmen — coxswain Eddie Distin received the RNLI silver medal and each of his crew a bronze — more than 100 people were taken off safely. Cox'n Distin and his men had to battle big seas and strong winds around Bolt Head and Bolt Tail to reach the stricken vessel after being alerted by Jack Jarvis, coxswain of the old Hope Cove lifeboat

The first 40 to be saved, and taken to Hope Cove, were among 62 who were being rescued for the second time in a matter of hours. They were passengers and crew from the Dutch cargo-liner

Tajandoen that had been hit by a torpedo in the Channel. The Louis Sheid was also in the area and, on hearing the explosion, made her way to pick up the survivors — six were lost — as they rowed across a burning sea.

Mission accomplished, the 6,057-ton Louis Sheid came close in to shore in the hope of avoiding a similar torpedo attack, but on a terrible night and with the wartime blackout offering no on-shore lights to guide her, she struck the rocks off Leas Foot Beach.

Garth Gregory's picture of what is believed to be the remains of the boiler of the Louis Sheid

When it returned to the scene the lifeboat took more people off, but by the time it went back again the Louis Sheid had been moved by the wind and tide, making it too dangerous to get close. Instead, the coastguards moved swiftly to set up their rocket apparatus and get a line aboard so that the remaining people could be rescued.

Salvage operations removed much of the metal, but eventually the wreck, which broke in two, was left to its watery grave — and the divers.



Louis Shied hard aground. <https://www.submerged.co.uk/louisshied/>



The crew. <https://www.submerged.co.uk/louisshied/>



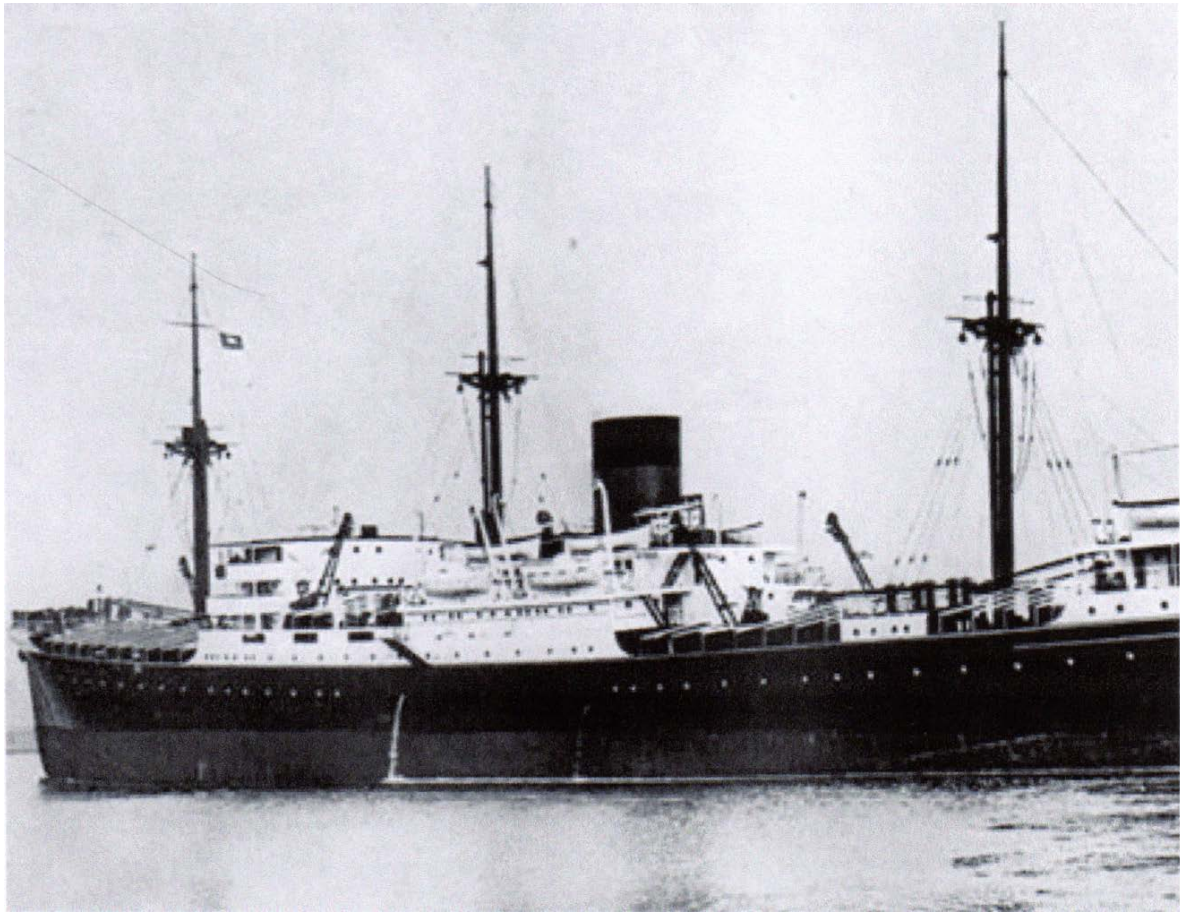
At first there was hope of a successful salvage job. <https://www.submerged.co.uk/louisshied/>



The beginning of the end. <https://www.submerged.co.uk/louisshied/>

Tajandoen 1939

www.uboot.net



Type: Motor merchant

Tonnage: 8.159 tons

Completed: 1931 - Nederlandsche Scheepsbouw Mij NV, Amsterdam

Owner: NV Stoomvaart Mij 'Nederland ', Amsterdam Homeport: Amsterdam

Date of attack: 7 Dec, 1939 Nationality: Dutch

Route: Amsterdam - Antwerp - Batavia

Cargo: 14 passengers and gen cargo, cement, iron, steel sheets

Fate: Sunk by U-47 (Gunther Prien)

Date and time: 07.12. 1939 at 0524hrs,

Position: 49.09N, 04.51W - Grid BF 2819

Complement: 68 (6 dead and 62 survivors).

Notes on loss: At 05.24 hours on 7 Dec, 1939, the neutral Tajandoen (Master J.B. Roederink) was hit amidships by one torpedo from U-47 and sank in flames after a heavy detonation, only a few minute after the hit. Six crew members were lost. The U-boat had spotted the ship only four minutes

before firing and misidentified the type as tanker. The master, 47 crew member! and 14 passengers abandoned ship in the lifeboats and had to avoid burning fuel on the water surface. The Belgian steamer merchant Louis Sheid (6057 grt) witnessed the attack and picked up the survivors, despite of the fear of her master of being torpedoed. After the men were picked up, the ship immediately headed on full speed for the nearest land and by dusk she found herself off the Devon coast in heavy rainfall and a gale. The Louis Sheid struck a hidden rock near Warren Point in the early hours of 8 December and was destroyed by the seas. The Salcombe lifeboat made several dangerous trips and rescued all survivors from both ships.

Compiled by Roger Barrett

30.6.19