

*To be an Additional Officer of the Civil Division of the Most Excellent Order of the British Empire:—*

Captain George BLACK, Master, s.s. "Empire Portia" (Common Bros. Ltd.).

*To be Additional Members of the Civil Division of the Most Excellent Order of the British Empire:—*

William Mason WOODMAN, Esq., Chief Officer, s.s. "Empire Portia" (Common Bros. Ltd.).

Alan Gray, Esq., Fourth Engineer Officer, s.s. "Empire Portia" (Common Bros. Ltd.).

Whilst the s.s. "Empire Portia" was lying at Murmansk, she was attacked by enemy aircraft and received a direct hit. The bomb exploded, pierced the shell plating below the waterline and set fire to the cargo in the 'tween decks. Although the ship's fire-fighting appliances were manned immediately, the fire rapidly got beyond control and Russian fire-fighting tugs were called to assist. As the fire spread the decks became hot and all explosives in the vicinity were jettisoned by members of the crew. The outbreak was eventually got under control and was finally extinguished two days later with the help of the Russian tugs.

The Master displayed conspicuous courage and coolness throughout. He remained on board his ship the whole time despite the sustained danger from the fire and the grave risk of explosion. He led the fire-fighting and helped in dumping the explosives and ammunition.

The Chief Officer also showed great courage and devotion to duty. Without regard for his own safety, he played a leading part in the fire-fighting and assisted in the dumping of the explosives when the fire got out of control.

The Fourth Engineer Officer also made courageous and praiseworthy efforts below and assisted in getting up steam and in bringing the ship upright by pumping out the ballast. The dangers and risks were great but despite these he remained on board throughout.

*To be an Additional Member of the Civil Division of the Most Excellent Order of the British Empire:—*

John ALLERTON, Esq., Chief Officer, s.s. "Sampa" (Houlder Brothers & Company Ltd.).

The s.s. "Sampa," returning in convoy from Antwerp, was mined. The Master was blown overboard by the explosion and all the Officers were either killed or severely injured. The ship was badly damaged and her back was broken. Notwithstanding this, she was anchored immediately after the explosion. Later a destroyer came alongside and took off the crew, which included 24 stretcher cases. The ship sank shortly afterwards. The Chief Officer displayed outstanding gallantry and resourcefulness throughout. Although badly injured and temporarily stunned he immediately organised a rescue party to get the injured on deck. He went round the entire ship to search for and ensure

the safe removal of the wounded. This included going down into the wrecked engine-room and, in many cases, breaking into wrecked cabins and bringing the injured on deck in blankets. In addition to this, Mr. Allerton went forward and dropped anchor to prevent the ship dragging back into the buoyed channel and so becoming a danger to other shipping. There is no doubt that it was mainly due to the courage and leadership displayed by Mr. Allerton that the majority of the injured men were safely got away from the ship. Even then, although in considerable pain, he continued to do his utmost for the injured until they were landed in the United Kingdom five hours later.

*Awarded the British Empire Medal (Civil Division):—*

Harry Marshall FORTUNE, Apprentice, s.s. "Ascot" (Britain Steam Ship Company Ltd.).

The s.s. "Ascot," sailing alone in the Indian Ocean, was torpedoed by a Japanese submarine. The ship began to sink and the crew got away in the boats and on rafts. The submarine surfaced, shelled the ship and then rammed the boats and rafts, machine-gunning the occupants, of whom all but eight were killed. Seven of the survivors clambered back on to one of the rafts. Two days later another survivor, who was found in one of the boats, was taken on board the raft and after a further three days, the eight survivors were rescued by a friendly steamer.

Apprentice Fortune showed conspicuous courage and qualities of leadership throughout. In spite of his overwhelming experiences he took charge of the raft and, under his direction, the injured were made as comfortable as possible, an awning was rigged, food and water rationed and life on the raft organised. There is no doubt that it was greatly due to Fortune's courage, resourcefulness and inspiring example that the survivors were eventually brought to safety.

Ernest John Denis GILL, Second Steward, s.s. "Largs Bay" (Aberdeen & Commonwealth Line Ltd.).

The s.s. "Largs Bay," with troops on board, arrived at Naples. The weather was too bad to enter the harbour so the ship was anchored. On the following day one cable carried away and it was decided to heave up the other anchor. While the vessel was cruising round the bay she was mined and the explosion blew a large hole in her side. The troop deck was wrecked and many of the troops were killed and injured. The ship was so badly damaged that it was decided to anchor her again, this time in shallow water. Later, with help from tugs, the ship was taken into the harbour. Second Steward Gill displayed outstanding courage and initiative and played a leading part in the rescue operations. This work was undertaken regardless of personal danger, as it could not be known at the time how seriously the ship was damaged or the chances of her foundering rapidly. In addition, access to and from the troop deck was by rope only, as all ladders and other means of access had been demolished.