

WHAT BECAME OF TARA HALL?

- by Capt. Gerry Ouderkirk -
with The Editor

There is nothing which frosts, and yet stimulates, marine historians more than an unsolved riddle. However, we have put forward a number of such puzzles over the years and, in most cases, our members have come forward with the answers that we were seeking. In the autumn of 1997, Lloyd's Register removed the large tug TARA HALL from its list, with the notation "Entry deleted - vessel's continued existence in doubt". The ship was last reported as owned by the Carrick Corp. Ltd., of Panama. All attempts to find out what became of TARA HALL have proven fruitless, so her story must be told without its proper ending. Perhaps a T.M.H.S. member will be able to write for us the final chapter in the history of this venerable tug.

The story of TARA HALL began back on Wednesday, April 26th, 1911, when H.M.S. WATCHFUL was launched by Hall, Russell & Company Ltd., at Aberdeen, Scotland, as the yard's Hull No. 486. She was built for The Lords Commissioners of the Admiralty as a fisheries patrol vessel intended for coast guard service. She was built to Lloyd's Register classification, as also was her sistership, H.M.S. SAFEGUARD, which later became the Canadian Department of Transport buoy tender SAFEGARDER, and which also had been built for British coast guard service. During World War One, WATCHFUL was taken over by the Royal Navy and was armed with two three-pound guns. She served from 1914 to 1918 as flagship of the Senior Officer, Minesweepers, based at Sheerness, England.

WATCHFUL had a rakish profile, designed to make her look rather like a stern trawler but capable of substantial speed as befitted a fisheries patrol vessel. She had a straight stem and a deeply undercut counter stern with a fully topgallant forecastle and a graceful sheer to her decks. There was an open rail around most of the forecastle head, except for the extreme forward section where there was a protective closed bulwark. A closed steel bulwark ran all around the spar deck to provide protection from boarding seas.

Just forward of midships was a steel texas cabin whose roof formed the bridge deck and extended out to the ship's sides to form bridge wings. A steel pilothouse was placed on the bridge deck, and it had five windows in its face and an open navigation bridge above on the monkey's island, with ample provision for weather cloths to be raised on the bridge deck and monkey's island open rails. A tall, fairly heavy and well-raked smokestack rose just abaft the bridge structure, with two prominent ventilator cowls providing fresh air for the boiler room below.

Abaft the stack was an open deck area, undoubtedly used for coal bunkers (as was the hatch in the foredeck), with two large lifeboats carried on high radial davits, one boat on each side of the deck. Just abaft the boat davits was another deckhouse, this one low and carrying on its roof a very large electric arc searchlight. Another lifeboat was suspended from radial davits on the port side of the open deck abaft this low cabin, and right aft was the kind of arched rig which stern trawlers generally used to haul their nets.

The masts were raked in proportion with the funnel, and were equipped with ratlines and wireless antenna. The foremast was stepped just abaft the break of the forecastle, while the main was positioned just back of the after deckhouse.

We have no description of the WATCHFUL's colours, but photographs of her seem to show her with dark hull and cabins, and a light (probably buff) smokestack. Of course, when she served the Royal Navy, she probably was painted all grey.