

MARINE NEWS

It has been many years since there has been a really serious tanker accident on the Great Lakes, but perhaps the worst the lakes ever have seen occurred at Bay City, Michigan, on Sunday, September 16th. That morning, the Cleveland Tankers Inc. stemwinder, "barge-canal-type" tanker JUPITER (U.S.571820) was lying at the Total terminal on the Saginaw River, having unloaded some 30,000 barrels of her 50,000-barrel cargo of gasoline. At approximately 8:45 a.m., shortly after the American Steamship Company self-unloader BUFFALO had passed by slowly (and apparently without undue wake), JUPITER parted her stern moorings, possibly because of some dock pilings giving way. The unloading hose connection ruptured, a tremendous explosion occurred and there followed a fire which engulfed the tanker as her stern swung out across the river. Of the eighteen crewmembers aboard JUPITER, eleven were taken to hospital with burns (and one with a heart attack), most of them having leapt into the river from the ship's stern. One crewman, Tom Sexton, 46, who was running forward to tend the forward winches when the explosion occurred, was killed and his body was found in the river on September 19th. Although the Governor of Michigan declared a state of emergency and the area was cloaked in heavy smoke, the fire was allowed to burn and, with the gasoline being consumed at a rate of three inches depth per hour, it was hoped that the fire would burn itself out. On Monday, however, JUPITER's hull began to sag amidships and, in order to prevent the tanker from breaking apart, firefighters brought from Texas went into action with foam nozzles placed aboard U.S.C.G. BRAMBLE. Foam was spread over JUPITER and the fire was out at about 2:00 p.m., September 17. Unfortunately, however, the fire erupted again at about 10:00 that same evening and it was not until 2:30 p.m. on Tuesday, the 18th, that it was extinguished. BRAMBLE then moored alongside JUPITER and spent the night pumping foam over her to ensure that the fire was out. When the conflagration was over, it could be seen that JUPITER had broken her back, so that she was lying with her bow and stern up and her deck amidships under water. Only a small amount of cargo was spilled into the Saginaw River during the fire, and this either evaporated quickly or was caught in containment booms. JUPITER, however, would appear to be a total loss and there seems little doubt that only the scrapyards await her when salvagers manage to refloat her and she is hauled away from the accident scene. JUPITER, 382.4 x 60.0 x 22.5, 4264 Gross and 3764 Net Tons, was built in 1976 as Hull 227 of S.B.A. Shipyards Inc., of Jennings, Louisiana. She was commissioned two years later than her slightly smaller, near-sister SATURN. Her loss leaves only SATURN and GEMINI in the Cleveland Tankers fleet.

In the Mid-Summer issue, we mentioned the uncertainty which had arisen concerning when or if the 1990 Canadian autumn grain movement would begin. By mid-September, the situation had not been clarified, with the Canadian Wheat Board indicating that it would not solicit grain sales but rather would let U.S. and European vendors beat their brains out by selling at discount prices. Hence the Canadian bulk fleet had not yet begun to fit out after the summer doldrums and there remained the possibility that there would be no fall grain rush at all. During September, most of the remaining operating straight-deckers were going into lay-up. Amongst these was the ULS steamer CANADIAN MARINER, which had been lying on the north side of Toronto's Pier 35, alongside BAIE ST. PAUL, from the second week of July until she went back into service on August 7th. She arrived back at the same spot on September 13th, and once again let down steam. At the time of this report, the ULS bulker SEAWAY QUEEN remained idle at Toronto, but CANADIAN EXPLORER went back into service on September 27th.

We have been advised that the former Misener Shipping steam-powered bulk carrier SCOTT MISENER (III) departed Sorel on June 7th, 1990, in tow of the Soviet-flag tug LEOPARD, which set off with her charge en route to Alang, India. It was our understanding that CANADOC was to accompany her on the scrap tow, but CANADOC is still lying at Sorel along with VANDOC.