

DAVEY JONES VERSUS CIRCUM MORASSO

By Circum Alfred O. Morasso

(Few men have gone down into the sea with ships in the manner within the experience of Circum Alfred Morasso and lived to tell the tale. With the single exception of Circum Morasso, his ship went down with all hands . . . forty—nine men from Captain to Deck Hands—in a heavy storm off the coast of Sweden in January, 1920. Captain Morasso, then a young and spry Second Officer aboard the Macona, held on for dear life to the mast-tip of the sunken ship during that bitter cold and wind-blown night. . . .)

But let the documents, which Captain Morasso entrusted to *The Log* at the suggestion of Circumpresidential Arthur M. Todd, tell their own story. The plain, straight language of the ship's log plus the Consul General's report (copy of which was sent to Captain Morasso's mother) tells the story more forcefully than all the writing efforts of even a Jack London could achieve. Here is the story as it unfolded.—The Editor.)

“Dear Circumeditorhans—
Thank you for your airmail letter of April 14th, and please excuse my delay in answering.

“As I look at that mast, after these many years, I am more than ever convinced that my training of three years on a full rigged ship had a lot to do with my being a survivor. The reason I mention this is that in sail you are often working with the braces with water coming aboard and it is practically second nature to you after a while to be able to make either a lifeline or the rigging just before the sea hits you. It was probably this instinct that made it possible for me to make the weather rigging of the foremast just before she went.”

(Following is the report submitted by Consul General Sholes, mainly on information given him by young Morasso who after 48 hours of rest and hospitalization had recovered sufficiently to face the disagreeable task of giving a report, as sole survivor, by telephone):

“I have the honor to report with regret the loss of the American steamer, ‘Macona’ of the Barber Line, 17 Battery Place, New York, at 4:30 P. M., January 18th, 1920, in stormy weather 3 miles north northwest of Nidingarne Light 30 miles more or less from Gotenborg. The entire crew of 50 (38 Chinese and 12 white men, all shipped in New York except one signed on at Copenhagen) with the exception of Second Mate Alfred Morasso, of Gibraltar, Spain, a British subject, was lost.

“From Morasso, the only survivor, was obtained the following story of the disaster over the long distance telephone today:

“The ‘Macona’ left Copenhagen on January 16th, 1:15 P. M., 1920, in ballast bound for the United States. Axel Willenson, a naturalized American, a native of Riga, Russia, was Master. Bunker coal was to be obtained at Mathil, Scotland, and the ship's course was laid for that point.

“Thick weather was encountered immediately upon leaving Copenhagen, necessitating the ship to

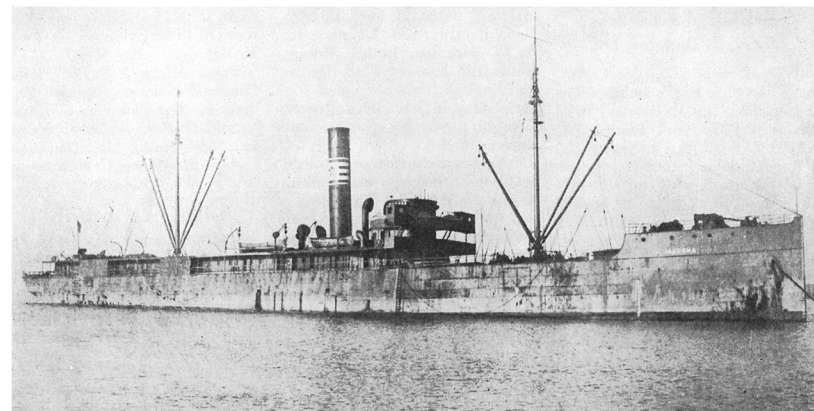
cast anchor when but a short distance from that port. The voyage, however, was continued later to a point near Helsingborg, where the pilot was put ashore. Shortly thereafter it was necessary for a second time to put over an anchor. This was done at 11:50 A. M. on Saturday, January 17th, in 17 fathoms of water as the nearby mine fields also constituted a danger to the safety of the ship.

“The Macona remained anchored about 12 hours.

“At 11:30 P. M., January 17th, the fog lifted. High winds and stormy weather followed immediately. While raising the anchor, the ‘Macona’ struck a submerged rock. Water immediately flooded the engine and boiler rooms putting out the fires. Distress signals were sent by wireless and the Captain ordered all members of the crew to stand by the ship.

“At 1:30 A. M. the ship's back broke and three life boats were destroyed. The davits of another were badly damaged, three men in the after part of the vessel disappeared in the water.

“Heavy seas continued to endanger the forepart of the ship. They completed the destruction by



The SS Macona which sank with all hands, save Circum Morasso, sole survivor among crew of 50.

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sweeping what remained off the rock and into deep water at 4:30 A. M. In 2 minutes nothing remained but the foremast projecting above the Kattegat 15 feet above the water. Morasso was lashed to the mast.

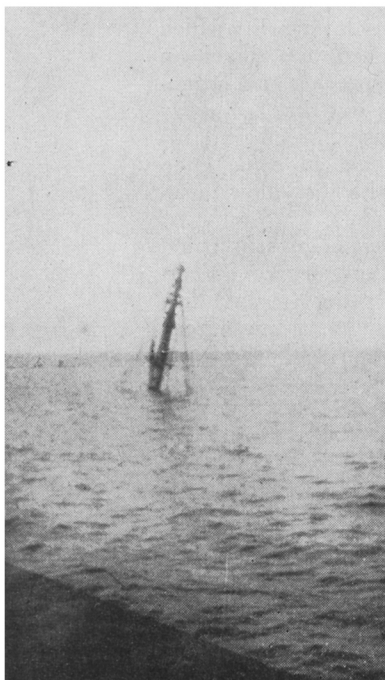
“Morasso with rare presence of mind had run for the foremast immediately upon the ship’s sliding movement. He expected others to do the same but there were none to be found when he finally looked about him. He was rescued 12 hours later by a customs boat. With the exception of a swelling of the feet, caused by frost bite, he seems none the worse for the experience.

“In Morasso’s opinion it was impossible for the men to live in so cold water for more than 10 minutes. He holds out no hope for his shipmates.

“The dead bodies of five men, four Chinese and one white man, have been recovered.

“I have requested Morasso to remain on the scene of the catastrophe to identify and bury the dead when found. He has been given explicit instructions regarding the care of whatever valuables that may be found, and the marking of the graves.

“The ship, in the opinion of Morasso, is a complete loss, except for what may be obtained for it as wreckage. The after part of the Macona is still visible.”



Top: The S/S Macona which sank with all hands, save Circum Morasso, sole survivor. Bottom: Tragic monument to victims of the sea. Macona’s foremast to which Circum Morasso clung for many hours during cold and windy night before he was rescued.

The photograph of the mast standing out of the water was taken by one of the many friends of Circum Morasso made during his stay in Sweden. It was taken, of course, after the weather moderated.

Marseillaise

I am transmitting material Circumcountvonluckner left with me entitled, “Birth of MARSEILLAISE,” and which I had never been aware of before. It just occurred to me that this might make an interesting LOC item.—ARTHUR M. TODE.

“The history of the birth of the MARSEILLAISE is very intimately related with the background of Count Felix Von Luckner. This famous National Anthem was written and composed by an Officer of engineers named Rouget de Lisle, who was born in 1760 and died in 1836. In composing the anthem it was dedicated to the Marshall of France, the Count Nicolaus de Luckner, whose position at that time was General Commander-in-Chief of the army of the Rhine. The original edition of the MARSEILLAISE is conserved at the present time at Strasbourg, Alsace-Lorraine. “Allons enfants de la patrie” which you know is the opening line of the MARSEILLAISE, and became the song of war of the Army of the Rhine. Specifically, the composition was composed during the night of the 24th to the 25th of April 1792. On the 25th of April, Rouget de Lisle

sang the song for the first time to the Mayor of Strasbourg, Monsieur Dietrich, and the same day he sent a copy of the composition and its dedication to Marshal de Luckner.

“At the end of May or beginning of June in 1792, this song appeared in print. It is further recorded that on the thirteenth of July 1792 the Federal troops of Marseille sang this song upon their entrance to Paris, and since then, the Name of “La Marseillaise” has been the designation.

“The Count Nicolaus de Luckner, to whom the song was dedicated, was born in 1722. As a matter of interest, in 1778 he was naturalized a Danish Citizen and bestowed the title of Baron de Luckner, where he acquired possession of vast domains. Count Nicolaus de Luckner returned from Denmark during the French revolution and was condemned to death by French tribunal. He was offered his life by Robespierre in return for changing his allegiance to the King and Queen, which he refused, and was executed on the guillotine in 1794. This Count Nicolaus de Luckner was Count Felix Von Luckner’s great-grandfather.”