

**ACTIVITY:** Sea disaster

**CASE:** **GSF 1909.11.14**

**DATE:** Sunday November 14, 1909

**LOCATION:** The incident took place in the Rho Strait, 30 miles from Singapore.

### **BACKGROUND**

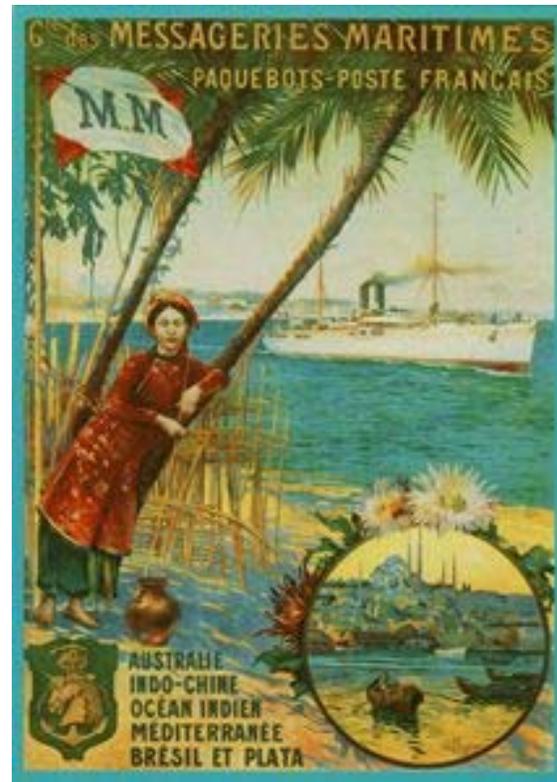
**MOON PHASE:** New Moon, November 13, 1909

**SHIP:** The 2,379-ton white-hulled *La Seyne* was a feeder vessel owned by Messageries Maritimes that carried passengers from smaller ports to the main ports in the Far East.

**NARRATIVE:** The *La Seyne* was on the Bataan — Singapore service when she collided with the British India Steam Navigation Company ship *Onda* and sank in two minutes with the loss of 101 lives, including her captain, Joseph Couailhac.

Passengers threw themselves into the sea, expecting to be picked up by the *Onda's* boats. According to *The Sun*, July 13, 1913 edition: "The first of the passengers had scarcely touched the water before a shoal of sharks was circling the scene and dragging down scores of men and women who never came up again. These facts were sworn to by dozens of eyewitnesses to the spectacle." Of the 61 survivors, many were injured by sharks.

**SOURCES:** Boston Globe, November 15, 1909, page 1; Hawera & Normanby Star, November 16, 1909, Page 5; Merchant Fleets, Vol.36 by Duncan Haws; Dictionary of Disasters at Sea by C. Hocking; *The Sun*, July 13, 1913 edition



### **COLLISION AT SEA.**

**STEAMER LAASEYNE FOUNDERS**

**100 LIVES LOST.**

**MANY MAULED BY SHARKS.**

[PRESS ASSOCIATION.]

SINGAPORE, November 15.

The Messageries Maritimes steamer *Laaseyne* foundered in Rho Straits, two minutes after colliding with the British-India liner *Onda*. The latter rescued and landed 61 at Singapore.

Many were badly mauled by sharks.

Seven of the *Laaseyne's* European and fifty of the Asiatic passengers, with the captain, five officers, and 37 of the Asiatic crew, were drowned.

# 101 LIVES LOST AS VESSEL SINKS

## Sharks Attack Those Clinging to Pieces of Wreckage.

### Oriental Steamer Goes Down in Two Minutes After Collision.

SINGAPORE, Nov 14—The mail steamer *La Seyne* of the Messageries maritime service, running between Java and Singapore, and on her way to this port, was in collision early this morning with the steamer *Onda* of the British-India line, and sank within two minutes.

Seven European passengers, including Baron and Baroness Beniczky, the captain of *La Seyne*, five European officers and 88 others, comprising native passengers and members of the crew, were drowned.

The accident occurred about 4 o'clock in the morning in a thick haze. The vessels were steaming at good speed and the *Seyne* was cut almost in half.

There was no time for panic nor for any attempt on the part of the officers of the foundering steamer to get out the boats. The majority of those on board were caught in their berths and carried down with the vessel.

The force of the collision brought the *Onda* to almost a dead stop and her boats were quickly lowered. The rescue work proved thrilling, for not only were the rescuing parties impeded by the dark, but shoals of sharks were already attacking those clinging to pieces of wreckage in the water. Sixty-one persons from the ill-fated steamer were finally dragged into the boats and brought by the *Onda* to this port. Many of them had been bitten by sharks and several are severely injured.

### THE RHIO COLLISION.

The files received by the steamer Guthrie, which arrived from Singapore yesterday, also give an account of a disastrous collision between the steamers Lazeyne and Onda on 14th November. The collision occurred in the Straits of Rhio, about 28 miles from Singapore. When the two ships collided the French steamer went to the bottom in less than five minutes, and out of 154 people on board 93 perished. She went down by the head, and the survivors were left in the water with the only clothes they happened to be wearing. Commander Captain Conailhoe lost his life. There was no time for orders to be given, or for the boats to be lowered. All of those rescued were picked up by three boats which were promptly put out by the Onda. Sharks abound in these waters, and it is believed that some of those people who got clear of the ship were attacked by sharks. Just as a Malay seaman was being dragged into one of the Onda's boats a shark seized his foot, but the second engineer beat the brute off with a boat hook.

*The Hawaiian Gazette  
November 16, 1909, page 5*

*Zeehan and Dundas Herald (Tasmania),  
Thursday December 9, 1909, page 3*

### HUNGRY SHARKS REND SHIPWRECK VICTIMS

**Lazeyne Collides With Steamer  
Onda and Sinks in Two  
Minutes.**

(By Associated Press.)

SINGAPORE, November 15.—The Lazeyne collided yesterday with the British steamship Onda and sank within two minutes of the time she struck the larger vessel. One hundred persons were lost, only sixty-one being rescued. Many of those who were saved were badly bitten by the sharks that swarmed about the place where the Lazeyne went down.

The Onda is a British steamship of 3410 tons. She was reported in the New York Marine Register last as having sailed from Madras for Calcutta and arrived at the latter place on August 26.

### **FRIGHTFUL SHIPPING DISASTER.**

The mail steamer *Empire* arrived at Sydney on Wednesday bringing the latest files containing full particulars of the terrible disaster which occurred to the Messageries Maritimes steamer *La Seyne* in the Rhio Straits, brief particulars of which were received here by cable on November 15th last.

It appears that the steamer *La Seyne*, commanded by Captain Conailhoe, and one of the best equipped of the company's fleet, was two days out from Batavia, bound for Singapore. When near Pulo Sau, and some 30 miles from Singapore, another steamer, the *Onda*, of the British India fleet, crashed into her during the darkness. The *La Seyne* was so badly damaged that she settled down immediately, and the passengers and crew, numbering over 150 souls, suddenly found themselves in the turbulent waters of the Rhio Straits, which are infested with man eating sharks. Had it been a matter only of shipwreck many might have been saved, but, horrible scenes were enacted, the drowning people being seized by the sharks and dragged under, amidst heartrending scenes. Meanwhile, the *Onda*, a vessel of 3409 tons, which was bound in ballast for Tegal, in Java, stood by, and great promptitude was shown in getting away three boats to the rescue; the French steamer having been unable to lower away any at all. The crew of the *Onda* worked with superhuman energy, and were successful in picking up seven of the passengers, among whom were four British paid-off seamen who were being sent to Singapore second class, 12 of the officers and European crew, 14 native passengers, and 28 native crew, or a total of 61 in all. The escape of steam from the ship's boilers, which seemed to open the boat up, scalded to death many of those on board. The survivors describe it as a frightful scene, but so terribly soon was it all over that there must have been many who went to their death without having time even to attempt to save themselves.

A passenger who was saved states that the sharks were very ferocious, attacking the women and children as well as the men. He saw a Chinaman fighting one of the huge monsters. After beating him off with a boat hook the Chinaman tried to get into the *Onda's* boat, but the shark returned to the attack and bit off the man's foot. The captain, surgeon, and purser, as well as the chief cook of *La Seyne*, were amongst those drowned or eaten alive.

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*Singleton Argus, January 1, 1910, page 4*