

HUNTRESS "A FLOATING WRECK"

"NOT WORTH PRICE OF STAMPS ON BILL OF SALE"

SHIPPING DEPARTMENT ACCUSED OF GROSS NEGLIGENCE

"FIT ONLY FOR SCRAP"

GREEK CAPTAIN'S INDICTMENT OF SHIP'S CONDITION

SENSATIONAL disclosures were made yesterday to "The Natal Mercury" in connection with the SS. Huntress, which is now in Durban Harbour. The Huntress, a ship of 9,000 tons, owned by the Union Government, is in the market for sale, and yesterday she was inspected by Captain Fafoutakis, of Rethymnis and Kulukundis, Ltd., a well known Greek shipping company, with a view to purchase. As a result of his inspection the deal is definitely off, and he called on "The Natal Mercury" last night to let the South African public know his reasons.

SCANDALOUS NEGLIGENCE

Without hesitation, Captain Fafoutakis described the ship as being in a scandalous state of neglect—"A floating wreck" was the precise words he used.

He stated that he had made a thorough examination of the ship, and he attributed her condition not to the captain and officers but to the neglect of the Shipping Department of the Railways and Harbours Administration, by whom the Huntress is controlled and managed. He declared further that the whole matter, in the interests of Union taxpayers, called for a most searching inquiry.

OFFICERS NOT TO BLAME

Captain Fafoutakis, in the course of his interview, spoke with the utmost frankness, and obviously with a sense of the responsibility attaching to his statements.

"I feel it a public duty as a master mariner," he said, "to say that in my opinion it would be a crime for any captain, proud of himself and jealous of his profession, to take the Huntress to sea. I have seen her in dry dock and examined her thoroughly, and I have no hesitation in describing her as a floating wreck. I am amazed that a ship owned by a responsible Government should be in such a shocking state. It is due, not to the officers who have been in charge of her, but obviously to the neglect of those who have been responsible for her management—the Shipping Department of the Railway and Harbours Administration."

Captain Fafoutakis, who at one time was Superintendent of Maritime Transport for the Greek Government, explained that his Company was induced to consider the purchase of the Huntress as the result of a circular distributed in shipping circles by the Union High Commissioner in London, and he was sent by his company to Durban, with his Chief Engineer, to inspect the vessel.

The Huntress arrived in Durban from Singapore early in July. While in Singapore Harbour important repairs were carried out, costing over £12,000. These repairs, "The Natal Mercury" understands, were in no way due to any accident at sea, but were necessitated by defects which developed while the vessel was actually in port. She was at that time loaded with timber and rice, all of which was discharged before it was possible to dock the vessel and proceed with the repairs. On the completion

of the repairs the Huntress reloaded and, without further incident, returned to Durban.

It is further learned that as a result of inspections made officially yesterday by experts it was stated that it would cost at least £30,000 to recondition the ship and that these repairs would take probably five months.

Captain Fafoutakis declared emphatically last night that the Huntress was certainly not worth that huge outlay. "Considering," he added, "that the ship is only 16 years old, such repairs should certainly not be necessary, and it undoubtedly points to the fact that there has been gross neglect on the part of the Government's Shipping Department. If that is the way the Government looks after its ships, the sooner that Department is closed down the better it will be for the taxpayers of South Africa."

"At the present moment the Huntress is not worth the price of the stamps that would be required on the bill of sale. She is fit for scrap, but there is no market for that in the Union, and the only course I can suggest is that she be used as a target for bombing practice from the air. It seems to me that the public have a strong case for calling for a searching inquiry into the whole administration."

The Huntress has had an interesting career. She was originally the Frisia, belonging to the Hamburg-Amerika Line, and she made her maiden voyage in 1914. She was captured during the Great War in 1915 at Hong-Kong, and was then used as an Admiralty transport ship. After the War she was handed over to the Union Government, and has since been engaged by the Railway Administration in transporting timber and other cargoes for railway purposes.