

Petrol tanker crashes, wrecks rail bridge

FIVE MISSING: THREE SURVIVORS

River a sheet of flame: cries for help heard from the banks

IN DENSE FOG, BLANKETING DOWN SUDDENLY OVER THE SWIRLING WATERS OF THE RIVER SEVERN LATE LAST NIGHT, AN OIL TANKER EXPLODED AND SET FIRE TO A SECOND, AFTER A COLLISION UNDER THE SEVERN BRIDGE—AND FIVE LOCAL MEN DIED.

In a few moments the river was ablaze for almost the whole of its half mile width. Two spans of the mile long railway bridge and one of its supporting piers collapsed. From the river banks cries for help could be heard by people on the banks. Three men were pulled from the muddy waters by volunteers who risked their lives to go out in small boats.

This morning, at daybreak, the search was resumed for five missing members of the crews of the tankers. They are:

HERBERT JACK
DUFFIELD (46), GLOUCESTER.
ALEX ALBERT
LOCK (40), 184 MELBOURNE-ST., GLOUCESTER.
MALCOLM HART (17), 115 HIGH-ST., GLOUCESTER.
PERCY BROWN (35), 25 WESTERN, GLOUCESTER.
ROBERT JOHN NIBLETT (30), CANAL BANK, HARDWICK.
One black with oil, was brought ashore in a

slightly at Lydney this morning.

A searching helicopter spotted it floating some distance down stream from Lydney.

The body was brought back to Lydney and guided the dingy by Mr. B. Price of 101 High-st. and Mr. J. Gardner of Habbert-rd., to the spot.

Their journey was extremely hazardous but they recovered the body and brought it ashore.

(CONTINUED IN PAGE 8)

"I swam for my life from flames"

THE skipper of the Arkendale, Mr. George Thompson, thought he was going to die as he swam with all his strength from the flames which encircled the two barges.

"I jumped from the Arkendale over the flames and as I hit the water I heard an explosion," he said. "I jumped into thick black oil

"The Wastdale was just one mass of flames. As I swam away a great perimeter of fire spread out, following me all the time, just behind me.

"I don't know how long I was swimming but I knew that I swam from one bank to the other (the river is about a mile wide at this point). The fire was driving me into mid-stream.

"I swam out of the way of the flames then I thought I saw somebody floating in the water. I swam towards him

but I don't think it was anybody. I think it was something from the boat.

"I swam round near the fire, as near as I could, shouting but I could hear no-one. I could see the stern of our vessel with the propeller showing."

Later in hospital the skipper of the other boat Mr. Dew, told Mr. Thompson that the force of the current took the Arkendale's head down and lifted the stern up so that the propeller was trying to 'dig' the vessel.

CONTINUED IN BACK PAGE

THE RIVER SEVERN AFLAME AFTER TANKER EXPLOSION



The scene shortly after the disaster. The burning tanker is in the centre of the glow on the right. Blazing petrol on the river penetrates through the thick fog.

SEVERED GAS MAIN A THREAT TO 6,000

THE tragedy cut off the gas supplies of 6,000 consumers in the Forest of Dean. At Cinderford it brought about a complete breakdown of production at the Lisacit factory of Meredith and Drew.

The J. Allen Rubber Company Ltd. of the Industrial Estate, Lydney, was brought to a standstill. Of the firm's 450 employees, none 250 were sent back home today.

From five a.m. this morning police cars were out in the towns and villages of the Forest warning householders not to use gas and to turn off supplies at the mains. They were followed by a small army of gas board employees who went round from door to door knocking up the people who may have missed the loud speaker warnings.

They explained that because the pipe carrying gas across the river along the Severn Bridge had been severed there was a risk of air being sucked into the supplies in containers. Lydney and Cinderford so making an explosive mixture. A spokesman of the Gas Board made this statement today.

"During the night of October 25-26, barges, transporting oil from Avonmouth to Gloucester collided in thick fog with a steam locomotive supporting the railway bridge at Sharpness."

"The bridge also carries gas mains serving the Forest of Dean. As a result one cantilever section of the bridge, some 260 feet in length collapsed, severing the gas main. Arrangements were immediately put in hand for all consumers of gas in the Forest of Dean, approximately 6,000 in number, to be visited today to ensure that gas supplies to their homes were turned off for the time being."

"The police are also co-operating with radio vans touring the Forest of Dean."

South Western Gas Board engineers have been working on the site since shortly after the occurrence and everything is being done to restore gas supplies to the Forest of Dean with the minimum of delay."

Production stopped

Mr. Ashcroft, the works manager of Meredith and Drew, told "The Citizen" that although production which was dependent on the gas ovens, had been stopped, employees had not been sent back home, but had been retained on some ancillary processes.

"How long can we keep them employed I cannot say," Mr. Ashcroft said, "we

are awaiting further news from the Gas Board."

Even at the factory the largest user of gas in the area are usually ignited at about 3 o'clock in readiness for the early morning shift.

Cold meals
School dinners for the children at Lydney and district schools who are normally supplied by the Gloucester Education Central Supply Kitchen at Lydney were today having cold meals sent to them.

The Lydney Grammar School where kitchens serve approximately 400 dinners per day, will also put on a cold salad. The headmaster said, this morning, that in from tomorrow, children will be bringing sandwiches.

Sharpness schoolchildren who daily use the train service over the Severn bridge, to the Lydney Grammar and secondary schools, were this morning diverted via Gloucester, with a special train put on by British Railways.

TRAIN JUST MISSED DISASTER

SEVEN minutes before the explosion occurred and the bridge collapsed a train passed over it.

One of the first to reach the bridge after the disaster was Mr. W. Hill, a railway ganger foreman.

He told a "Citizen" reporter: "When I got out there I found two spans of the bridge were gone and the boats were on fire in the water."

"One train had just gone over the bridge, seven minutes before it all happened."

Rescuers out as cries come from flames

(FROM PAGE 1)

Later another report was received at the Sharpness Docks Office that what appeared to be a body had been seen floating a considerable way downstream.

It is feared that the rest of the missing men may have been swept down river on the ebb tide.

The stranded hulks of the two tankers, the Westdale (229 tons) and the Arkendale (231 tons) both belonging to John Harker Ltd. and making for Gloucester with cargoes of spirit and crude oil, still snored on the mud flats.

The thick fog which hampered rescue operations last night had been dispelled by steady rain.

The survivors

The three survivors were stated by police today to be: JAMES DEW (42), HUD-

SON-ST. BURNHAM-ON-SEVA;
GEORGE THOMPSON (35), HINLEY-ROD, GLOUCESTER;

JACK COOPER (42), BUCKSHAFTS-ROD, CINDERFORD.

Later today it was stated that both Mr. Cooper and Mr. Dew had received shock and exposure. It was thought Mr. Cooper might have swallowed the darkness. It shook Berkeley and Sharpness. It was followed by a series of sharp bangs.

Both are in good condition and would be discharged from Lydney and District Hospital either today or tomorrow.

Mr. Thompson left during the night after treatment. On the men missing, Mr. Duffield is mate of the Westdale, Mr. Bullock the engineer, and Mr. Hart the deckhand. Mr. Shummonds is mate of the Arkendale and Mr. Niblett the second engineer.

Of the rescued men, Mr. Dew

Thompson skipper of the is skipper of the Westdale, Mr. Arkendale, and Mr. Cooper chief engineer.

"Our hearts sank"

The disaster happened at about half past six at night. Workmen on duty at Sharpness Dock heard an explosion like a thunderclap through the darkness. It shook Berkeley and Sharpness. It was followed by a series of sharp bangs.

"Our hearts sank, for we instinctively knew that disaster had struck," a workman told "The Citizen."

The buzzer, failing to enter the dock on the high tide, had missed the entrance to the dock. Westdale, which was carrying a cargo of petroleum spirit, collided head-on with the Lydney-Sharpness railway bridge and it was she which had exploded.

Flames quickly spread across the water and it is thought that they set fire to the Arkendale, loaded with heavy oil. At the height of the blaze, flames were almost completely across the river. But, flames reported that there was little they could do because they were unable to reach the stricken vessels. Sharpness people, roused in their sleep by the explosion, heard voices from the river.

"The voices were crystal clear," said a resident. "They were not shouts of panic but were clearly calling for help."

Stroud born, Mr. H. R. Sollars, a brigadier at the dock, was one of the first to hear the explosion. He said: "Within minutes people were gathering on the shore and several put out boats to try to rescue the crews."

"Among those I saw rowing towards the flames were two friends of one of a crew. They had thrown caution to the wind."

THE MIST VOICES IN

There was frenzied activity on the Lydney side of the river until nearly three o'clock this morning as police and others threw themselves into an exhaustive search for survivors.

AT FIRST THEY WERE URGED ON BY THE SOUND OF VOICES CRYING FOR HELP FROM THE MIST AND SMOKE SWIRLING OVER THE GREY WATERS.

Some survivors were picked up, but as the hours went by

it was realised that the tide would have taken any others in the water too far downstream.

Police Sergeant Roy Stanley Cottle, of Blakeney, said "The calls for help we heard last night sounded for all the world like those terrible cries we heard when on convoy duty during the war and after a boat had gone down."

In Blakeney and in the nearby hamlets of Eldon, Gatcombe and Avon the thud of the explosion shortly after ten o'clock brought people to their doors.

"The explosion was immediately followed by a brilliant red glare in the sky and there were periodic explosions after that," said one householder.

Awe inspiring

From the Blakeney side of the river the flames across the waters made a terrifying and awe-inspiring spectacle.

PEOPLE WHO THROGGED TO THE BANKS WATCHED HORRIFIED AS THE RED TONGUES OF FLAME SPREAD RELENTLESSLY OVER THE WATER UNTIL IT APPEARED THAT A MILE LONG LENGTH OF THE OPPOSITE BANK WAS BLAZING FURIOUSLY.

And all this time reports were coming of those pitiful cries for help from the water.

Parties in boats

Police and others who rushed to the riverside at Eldon heard these shouts first up river towards Newnham. For at that time the tide was full and was flowing upstream.

Police Sergeant Cottle together with motor petrol officers and police from Lydney, Wottonville and Newnham, organised search parties with boats.

Boat Mr. Warner and Sergeant Cottle rushed to the spot and were in time to give a helping hand to the skipper of the tanker carrying crude oil after he had stumbled, spent and exhausted, from the water.

Wearing his life jacket and covered in crude oil he said following the explosion he had been carried upstream for some time after swimming away from the flames on the water.

Then when the tide started to turn he was washed down until he reached the bank just below Poole Court. Suffering from shock and exposure he was taken into Poulton Court and given first aid, before being removed by ambulance to hospital.

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Out of reach

Out on the waters in their rowing boat were Mr. Colin Cadogan a local fisherman, and his brother, while in another boat fitted with an outboard motor two other men searched in the Lydney direction.

Among the stories of rescue one concerns Mr. Basil Freeman, living near the scene, who heard the shout of a man in the water.

He flashed his torch and shouted encouragement and then as he realised a man was being carried by the current he scrambled across the rocks and mud along the bank for over half a mile, at great risk to himself, till finally he was able to pull the man out.

The search in the Blakeney area was called off shortly before three o'clock after it was realised that any survivors would have been carried downstream out of reach.

Three hours in the water

IT IS UNDERSTOOD ONE OF THE CREW, A CINDERFORD MAN, MR. JACK COOPER OF CORNISH HOUSES, BUCKSHAFT-ROD WAS DOCKED TO SAFETY AT THE DOCKS AFTER BEING IN THE WATER FOR THREE HOURS.

Suffering from burns, shock and exhaustion he was taken to Lydney Hospital.

Another member of the crew, Mr. Dew, of Hudson-st., Burnham-on-Seva, also managed to reach the shore near the Severn Bridge Hotel and was taken to Gloucestershire Royal Hospital, as was a Mr. Thompson of Tuffley, Gloucester.

For hours ambulances stood by on both banks of the river as the search for survivors continued, while precautions also had to be taken in case the burning oil spread over the water.

At Lydney docks the water tender stood by, while firemen from Bristol were also alerted in case the flames reached Avonmouth. Observers from the Forest side of the river said that the fog was patchy but did not appear to be very thick.

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The scene early this morning when both barges were still burning.

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The Citizen

WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 26, 1960

SWEPT THREE MILES UP RIVER



Mr. Thompson, resting in bed at his home in Blisley-rd. today, recounts his experiences to Mr. D. C. Jones who lost his leg in an accident on board the tanker "Southdale" at Sharpness a month ago.

(FROM PAGE 1)
over the other. The current was absolutely terrific.

"After I had swum around shouting for a bit I remember the river took me upstream towards Gloucester. The tide took me through the bridge itself. I knew that the tide turned again at 18 minutes past 11. I was picked up three miles from where it happened."

Mr. Thompson said he finished up on the Lydney side, where he found steps in the bank. "I sat there and started hollering," he went on. "I heard shouts from the other side above the noise of the sea-gulls

Thick oil

"I thought when I was in the water that I had had it. I was swimming in thick oil. My clothes are one mass of oil. I was fully dressed, except for shoes.

"I was still hollering out when I heard someone shout 'Help' from the other side. I shouted back: 'Is it Bob?' I could not make out what they said because it was too far. I was cold and couldn't straighten up. I got cramp in my right calf about 20 yards from shore.

"I watched an arc of flame about a mile long."

Mr. Thompson said that a nearby farmer heard cries for help from the Severn and ran to the bank and helped him to his farmhouse.

Girder crashes

In hospital Mr. Dew, told him that a girder—from the bridge fell on the wheelhouse of the Wastdale, just missing him.

Mr. Thompson said that his vessel was carrying 295 tons of crude oil and the Wastdale was loaded with 320 tons of petrol.

Explaining how the collision occurred, he said that they approached Sharpness Docks

in dense fog. One of the crew said that he could hear a tug blowing, indicating that it was leaving the docks.

They were carried back by the current further than they expected and they picked up lights from the old, disused entrance to the docks. At first they thought they were behind the piers they wanted.

Locked together

Mr. Thompson said he went to get full steam to punch back against the current. Then they saw the other vessel and he shouted to Mr. Dew that he thought they were at the old entrance.

"I could hear his engines ticking over," he said. "Then the suction drew us together and the vessels locked together. We were helpless. Then they sheered round to starboard. I could see the compass going north."

Mr. Thompson said that the

vessels went on to hit a pier supporting the bridge and he saw Mr. Dew climbing from his vessel on to the Arkendale so that he could jump into the water away from the flames.



Malcolm Hart, 17-years-old Gloucester crew member, who is one of the missing.

**Bridge a
relief for the
Severn Tunnel**

40-1 Cambri

IN pouring rain, and with the going very heavy, Midsummer Night II, a 40-1 chance, won the Cambridgeshire at Newmarket this afternoon in a photo-finish.

Beaten into second place was Fougalle, also an outsider at 33-1. Third was the hot favourite, Ides of March March (5-1).

1.30-DALHAM STAKES.

CRACKSMAN (E. Smith) 1; Sovrango (J. Mercer) 2; Fontana di Trevi (A. Breasley) 3. Runners: Fontana di Trevi, Margaux, Latin Lover, Aloft, Cracksmán, Dahabeah, Entanglement, Shelley's Boy, Burrington, Burnt Sugar, Sovrango, Queen Boadicea, The Headrow, Hilda Mary, Abundance, Aphrodite, Barsac, Welsh Huntress, Ferryman's Flash, Devon Crown.

Betting: 100-6, 100-6, 3-1; 5-2 fav Welsh Huntress. Tote: Win: £4/19/4; places: 11/5/8, £2/4/0, 8/6. Dist.—Neck; 4.

2.0-RICHMOND NURS'Y HCP. 5 f.

MOLLYMAWK (A. Klimscha) 1; Tudor Warning (E. Smith) 2; Niello (A. Breasley) 3.

Runners: Sybil's Comb, Tudor Warning, Gittern, Pretty Joy, Miss Wong, Red Sky, Clematis, Speed Bird, Caption, Palatable, Niello, Gold Appeal, Very Valuable, Perneo, Mollymawk, Indian Policy, Wise Love, Maybe.

Betting: 100-7, 100-8, 10-1; -1 fav Wise Love. Dist.—Head; neck. Tote: Win: £5/1/0; places: £1/8/8, £2/3/10, 12/4.

RIVER RISE

BRINGS MORE FLOODING

A FURTHER rise in the height of the Severn overnight caused more flooding of low lying fields in Gloucester and district.

Today the river was bank full and steady at 19 feet 7 inches—nearly ten feet above normal.

Above Worcester the river was still rising, said a River Board spokesman, but better news, forthcoming from the Teme and Avon, suggested there would not be any widespread flooding below Tewkesbury.

Much, however, depended on

2.40

MIDSUMMER NIGHT II (D. Keltch) 1; Fougalle (L. Piggott) 2; Ides of March (5-1).

Runners: March, King's M.

Blue, Har Cross, D. St. Marl

Jeanne M King's M

Night II, Vision, Mc

-in-Doubt, Vine, Joh

Me, Var Princess A

Tehranita, Decision,

Gramercy, Boyden, E

Syrinx. Betting: March, 100

100 to 6 E Vision, 20

Jeanne 1 King, Spri

Fagus, 25 King's I

Fulshaw C otra, 28 1

Lucky Gu 33 to 1

Hard and SUMMER

Court, Pa others.

Fulshaw Winner

Hastings-E Dist.—H

Tote: W £2/4/8, £3/

3.15 HC AUGUST 1

Pytho Maiden (J

Runners of Cincho

Moss Maid Chagall, C

gustine. Betting: j.f. Aurum.

3.45-L HC

Runners: Goa, Ben

Violetta I Court Kai

Nithsdale, Blues, Squ

Mag, Dem Fao.

LI 1.30-N

WILD C Pudson Ba

Dluvienna Runners

vienna, Sw Triplicate,

Grouse, Te don II, Cha

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F. NORVILLE

Ophthalmic Optician

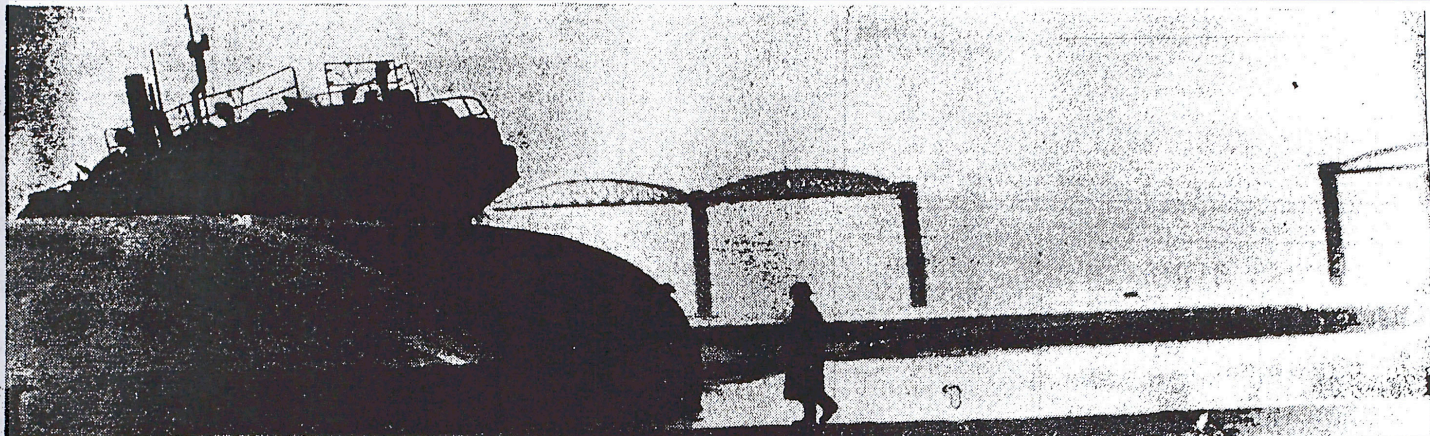
7 Barton Street

Gloucester

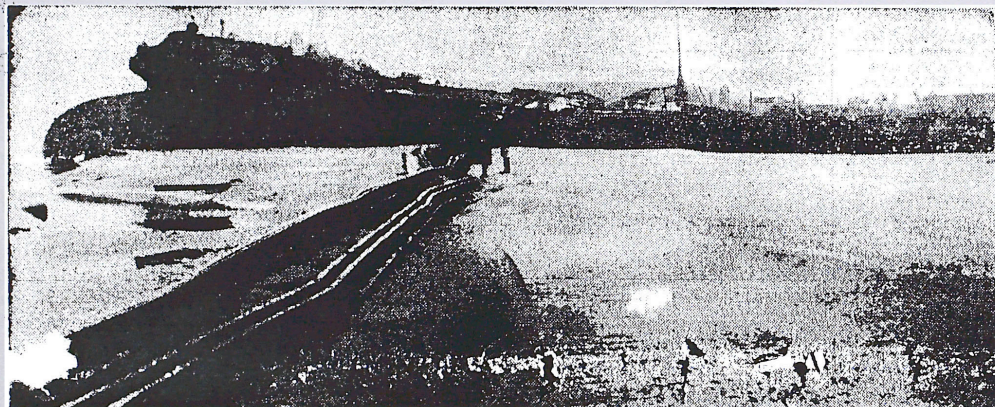
Telephone No. 22043

The Citizen

SEVERN DISASTER : LOCAL MEN DIE



The scene at daybreak. The burnt out Arkendale is seen behind the hull of the overturned Wastdale. On the right can be seen the gap in the bridge. The remains of the station demolished by the explosion can be seen in the centre of the gap.



The railway lines flung from the bridge lying across the sands and straddling the burnt out Arkendale.

Petrol tanker crashes, wrecks rail bridge

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ALEX. ALBERT
LOOK (4), 154, ELIC
ROUSE ST., GLOUCESTER
MAULOOM HART (17)
115 HIGH ST., GLOUCESTER
YEDDY KIRK (25)
23 WESTERN ST., GLOUCESTER
ROBERT JOHN
LEWIS, GAVEL BANK
HARDWICK

They were last seen at Lydney this morning. A searching helicopter spotted it floating some distance down stream from Lydney. It was then that the danger was realised. The journey was extremely hazardous but they recovered the body and brought it ashore.

(CONTINUED IN PAGE 5)

"I swam for my life from flames"

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Missing man was going to new City home today

ONE of the missing men, Mr. George Thompson, 42, of Westwood, Gloucester, had sister arranged to take over the keys. A third missing man is Mr. of his new home in Kitchener Herbert Jack Duffield (16), of ave, Gloucester, today. He is Wyndale, Gloucester, of a married man with five children. George, who comes from an old ren the eldest about 13. He is Turley family. One of the survivors, Mr. George Thompson, skipper of one of the barges, reached his home, 18, Halsey rd., Turley, early this morning after being released from hospital. He was badly upset by the tragedy, said his wife. Mr. Thompson had a (25), who lives at the Canal last year when the vessel of recently joined the barges which he was skipper went after working abroad for ground.

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THE SEVERN BRIDGE DISASTER

TRAIN MISSED THIS GAP BY SEVEN MINUTES

FIVE LOCAL MEN were missing — two bodies have since been found — after one of the worst-ever disasters in the River Severn.

Two tankers on the way to Gloucester from Avonmouth failed to enter the Docks at Sharpness in the dense fog on Tuesday night.

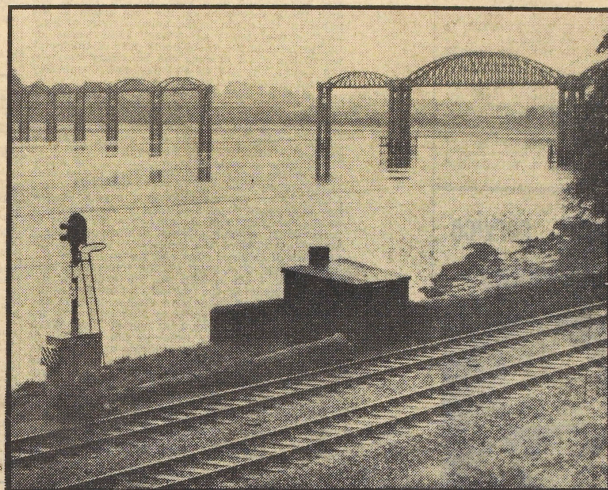
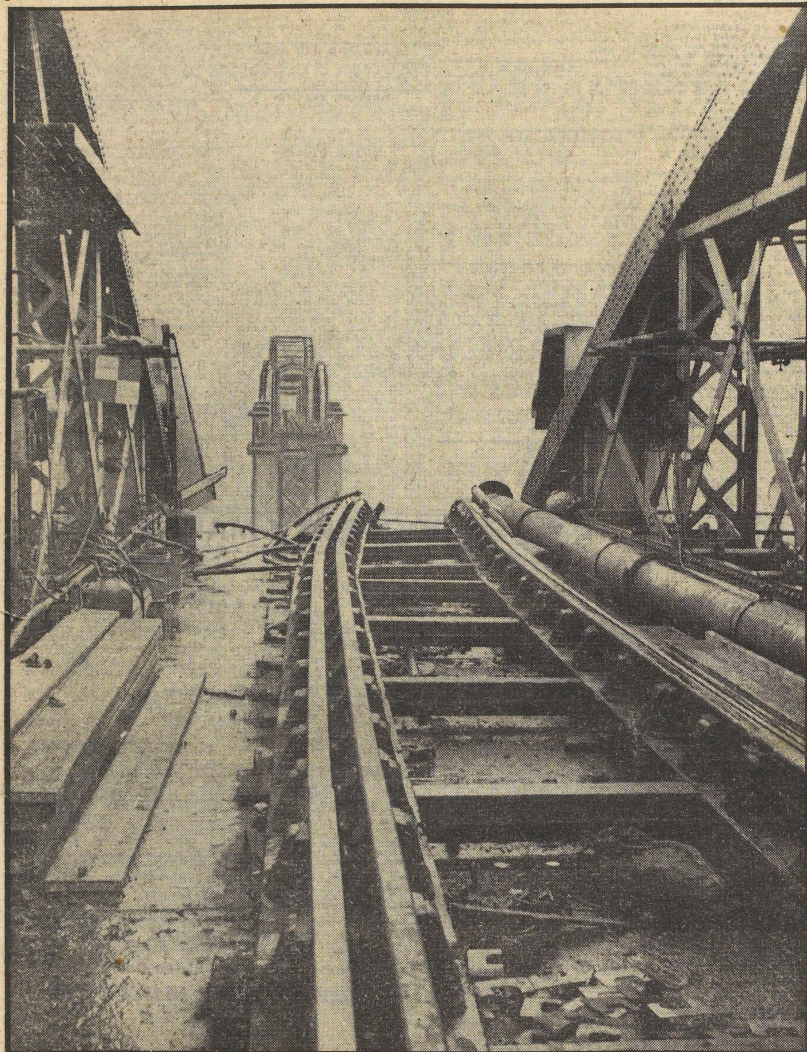
They were carried by the roaring tide to the Severn Bridge.

One of the tankers exploded, the pier collapsed and two arches of the bridge and

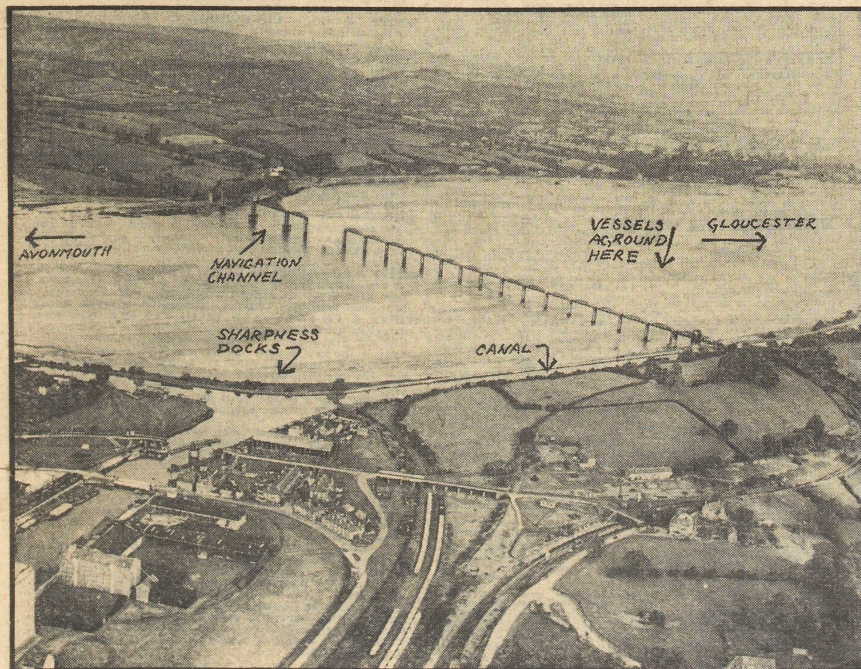
the railway lines it carried crashed onto the blazing tankers.

The Severn became a sea of flames. The picture on the left shows the gap in the bridge across which a train passed only seven minutes before the disaster. The gas main — now out of action — which supplied the Forest of Dean — can be seen on the right.

Below is the scene of the disaster viewed from the Forest of Dean side of the Severn. At the bottom are the two vessels lying aground with railway lines from the bridge straddling them.



AIR PICTURES THAT SHOW COURSE OF DOOMED VESSELS IN TREACHEROUS SEVERN



These two air pictures show where the disaster happened.

In the picture below, Sharpness Docks can be seen on the V-shaped projection in the Severn.

The entrance to the docks which the tankers should have entered is clearly shown. Also shown is the old and now disused docks entrance past which the tankers were carried by the tide up to the bridge (on the left of the picture).

In the air picture on the left the demolished pier and spans have

been obliterated to show how the bridge appears today.

The area where the vessels went aground is marked with an arrow.

It will be seen that the doomed tankers were borne towards the deep channel under the bridge on the Forest of Dean side.

The Severn between Sharpness and Gloucester is hardly used at all for navigation. The canal takes the traffic. In the picture can also be seen a part of Sharpness Docks and the canal which links it with Gloucester.

