

# 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 (48), GLOUCESTER RD, CORSE ALEX ALBERT BULLOCK (40), 134 BOURNE ST, GLOUCESTER.

MALCOLM HART (17), 115 HIGH ST, GLOUCESTER.

PERCY BISHOP (35), 22 WESTMEAD, GLOUCESTER.

ROBERT JOHN NIBLETT (20), CAVEL BANK, HARDWICKE.

One man, black with oil, was brought ashore in a

dinghy at Lydney this morning.

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

The boat headed back to Lydney, and guided the dinghy, led by Mr. B. Price of High St, and Mr. L. Gammie of Harbour-nd, 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 tidal fog.

## 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 two stranded bulkers of the two tankers the Wastdale (229 tons) and the Arkendale (231 tons) both belonging to John Hinde Ltd., and making for Gloucester with cargoes of spirit and crude oil still smouldered 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), H.D.C.

SON-ST. BURNHAM-ON-SEA: GEORGE THOMPSON (35), BISLEY-RD., GLOUCESTER;

JACK COOPER (43), HUCKSHAMTS RD., CIN-DEW-ROD.

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 oil, and Mr. Dew had lacerations.

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 being rescued.

The missing man, Mr. Niblett, is mate of the Wastdale, Mr. Bullock is engineer, and Mr. Hart the deckhand.

Mr. Simmonds is mate of the Arkendale, and Mr. Niblett the second engineer.

The rescued men, Mr. Dew

### "Our hearts sank"

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

"Our hearts sank, we instinctively knew that disaster had struck," a workman told a press reporter.

The barges waiting to enter the dock on the high tide, had missed the entrance to the dock.

Wastdale, 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, located with heavy oil. At the height of the blaze, flames were almost completely across the river.

But firemen reported that the Arkendale could not be reached because they were unable to reach the stricken vessel.

Sharpness people, roused in their sleep by the explosions, and voices from the river, were明白 that the voices were electrical clear," said a resident. "They were not shouts of panic but were clearly calling for help".

Stroud born, Mr. H. R. Solars, a bridgeman at the dock, was 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 crew."

"Among those who saw the fire were the first to be seen, two friends of one of a crew. They had thrown caution to the wind".

At midnight amid the confusion, there was a shout that a boat had been carried downstream from the river immediately below Poulton Court, occupied by Mr. Peter Warner.

Both Mr. Warner and Sergeant Cottle responded to the spot and were in time to help the man to the shore.

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

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

### 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 RIVER AND SMOKE SWELLING OVER THE GREY WATERS.

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

it was realized 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 that, the 'go to it' do it'."

In Blakeney and in the nearby hamlets of Elton, Gathcombe and Awre the thud of the explosion shortly after ten o'clock brought people to their doors.

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

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

PEOPLE WHO THREW THEMSELVES INTO THE RIVER DANIELS WATCHED HORRIFIED AS THE RED TONGUES OF FLAME SPREAD RELENTLESSLY OVER THE WATER UNTIL IT APPEARED THAT THE WHOLE OF THE RIVER IN 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 riverbank at Elton heard these shouts from up river towards Newsham.

At that time the tide was up stream and was flowing upstream.

Sergeant Cottle together with motor patrol and police from Lydney, Newthbury and Newham organised search parties with boats.

At midnight amid the confusion, there was a shout that a boat had been carried downstream from the river immediately below Poulton Court, occupied by Mr. Peter Warner.

Both Mr. Warner and Sergeant Cottle responded to the spot and were in time to help the man to the shore.

For hours ambulances stood by 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 police water tenders 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.

## 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 biscuit 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, just 250 were sent 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 meter.

These 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警报.

This 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 consumers at Lydney and Cinderford, 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 the gas main supporting the railway bridge at Sharpness."

"The bridge also carries gas mains supplying Forest of Dean. As a result one caisson section, 250 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 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 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

## 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 from Worcester.

He told "The Citizen": "I was on my way to the bridge when I found 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."

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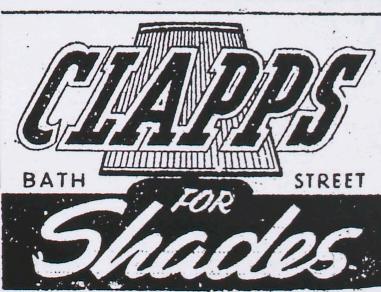
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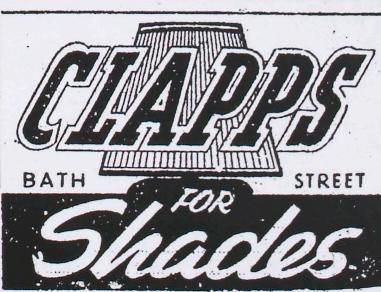
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# The Citizen

WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 26, 1960

## SWEPT THREE MILES UP RIVER

(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



Mr. Thompson, resting in bed at his home in Bisley-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.

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.

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## 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 (5-1).

### 1.30—DALHAM STAKES

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

Betting: March, 100; 100 to 6 E Vision, 20 Jeanne 1 King, Spri

Fagus, 25 King's 1 Fulshaw 1 otria, 28 Lucky Gu 33 to 1 Hard and SUMMER Court, Pa others.

Fulshaw Vinner Hastings-E Dist.—H Tote: W f2/4/8, f3/

### 2.0—RICHMOND NURSY HCP. 5 f.

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

Runners: Sybil's Comb, Tudor Warning, Gittern, Pretty Jo, 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; 1-1 fav Wise Love.

Dist.—Head; neck. Tote: W f5/1/0; places: f1/8/8, f2/3/10, 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 SI

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Betting:

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100 to 6 E

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Bridge a  
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Severn Tunnel

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E. NORVILLE

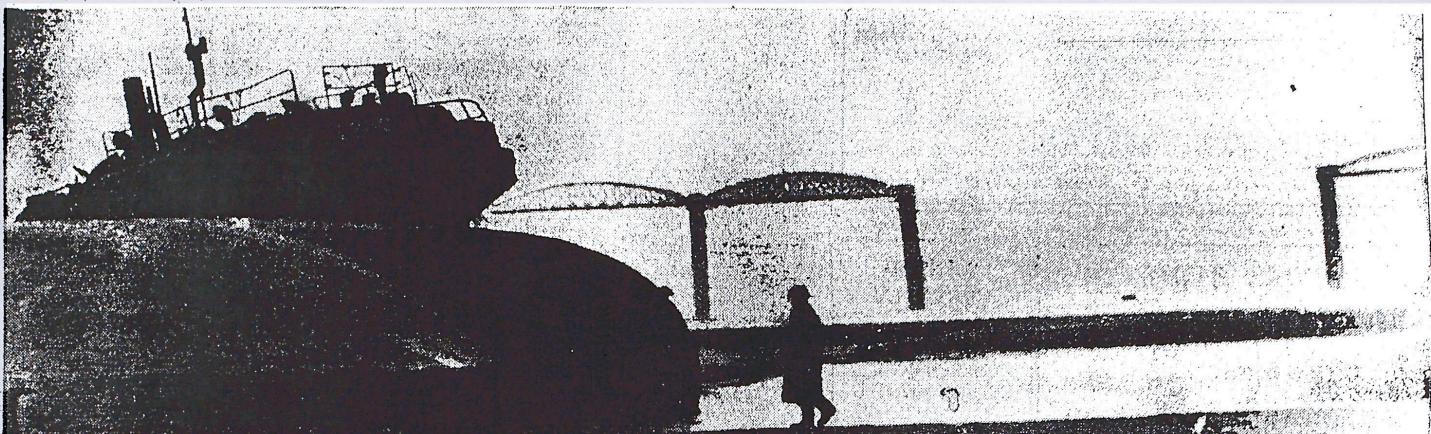
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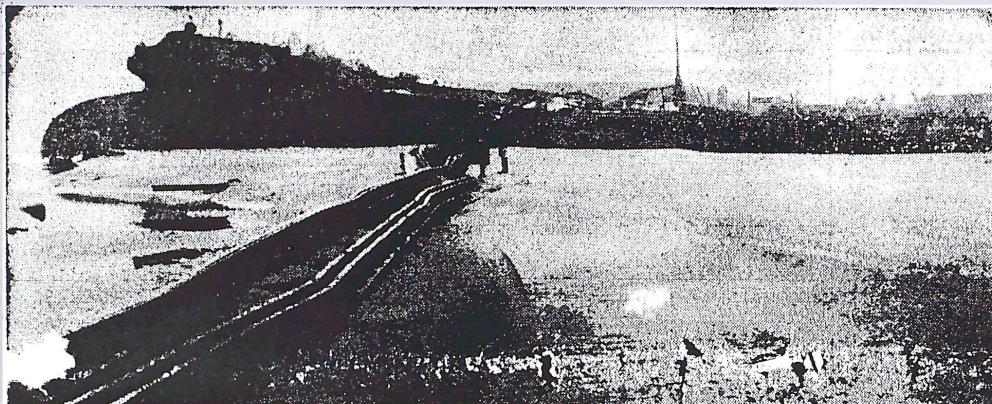
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# The Citizen

## SEVERN DISASTER : LOCAL MEN DIE



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



The railway line from the bridge lying across the sandbank and straddling the burnt out Arkendale.

## Petrol tanker crashes, wrecks rail bridge

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MALCOLM HARRY (17), 118 HIGH-ST., CHELTENHAM.

PEERY KIRKWOOD (25), 22 WESTBROOK, GLOUCESTER; JOHN NIRELL (21), DAVID BANE, HARDWICK. One boat, black with oil, was broken ashore in a

drift at Lydney this morning.

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

The boat had turned back to Gloucester and guided the alarm to the coastguard.

Mr. B. Price of Gloucester Harbour-nd. 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 "Wastdale" was just one Arkendale, Mr. George away a great perimeter of fire spread out, following me all the time, just behind me.

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fire was driving me into the flames then I heard an explosion," he said. "I jumped into thick black oil.

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 not be heard. I could see the stern of the vessel with the propeller showing."

Later in hospital the skipper of the other boat, Mr. Dew, told Mr. Thompson that the force of the blast sent the Arkendale's head down and lifted the stern up so that the propeller

was trying to dig the vessel into the water. I swam towards him

CONTINUED IN BACK PAGE

### Missing man was going to new City home today

ONE of the missing men, Mr. John Timm, on large oil tanker "Wastdale" of 32 tankers. He lives with his wife, Mrs. Thompson, in a flat situated in Gloucester, but has arranged to take over the key. A third missing man is Mr. of his new home in Kitchener—Herbert Jack Dudfield (46), of Gloucester, today. He is Wyndham, Gloucester—a married man with five children. He comes from an old family.

One of the survivors, Mr. George Thompson, skipper of one of the barges, reached his home, 18, Bishop's Court, early this morning after being released from hospital.

He was badly upset by the tragedy, said his wife.

Another of the missing men is Mr. Herbert John Nirell (21), who lives at the Canal Bank, Hardwicke. He only recently joined the barges which he was skipper of for a

narrow escape at Swansea last year when the vessel went aground.

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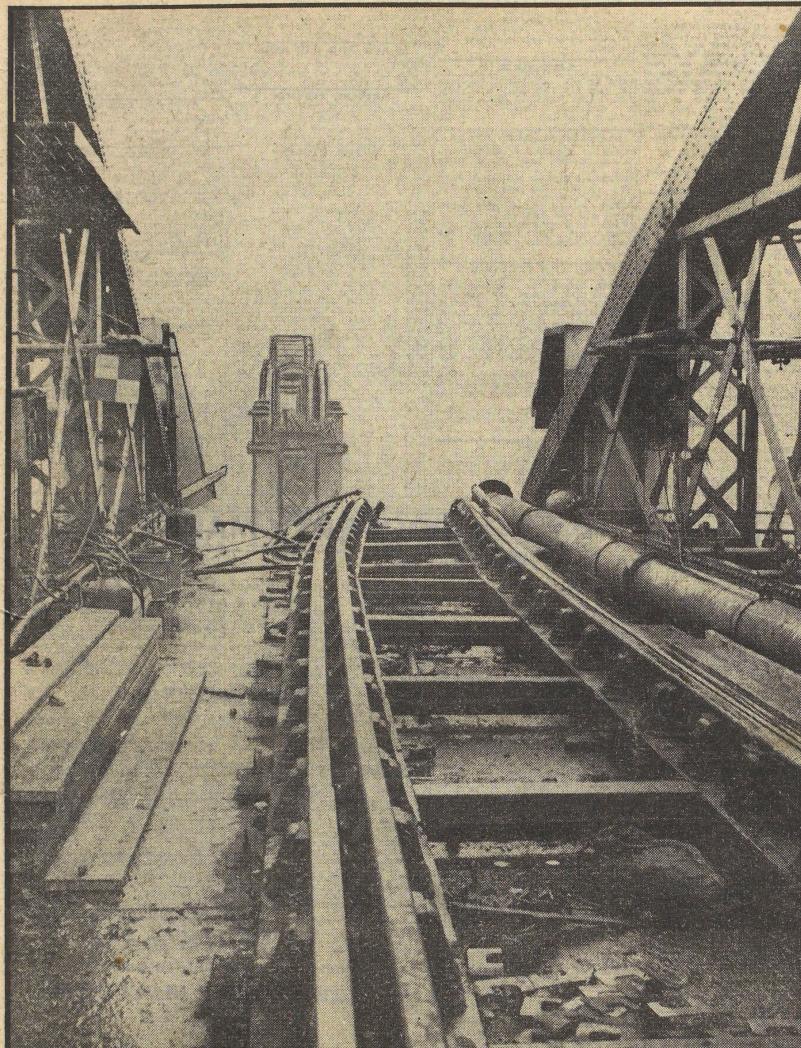
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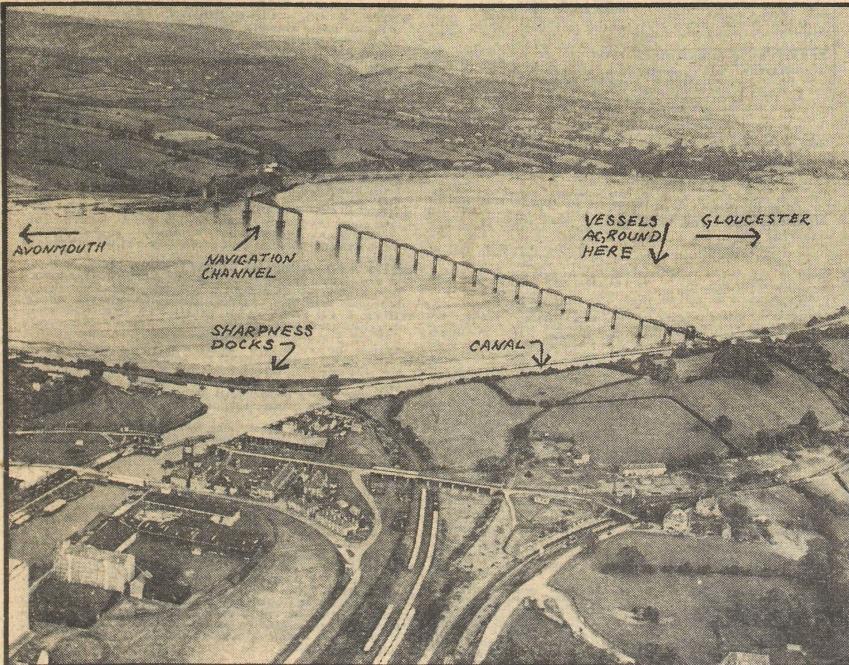


# THE SEVERN BRIDGE DISASTER

TRAIN MISSED THIS GAP BY SEVEN MINUTES



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 into 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.

