

Big repair job begins as Australis passengers shipped out



THE AUSTRALIS' staff captain, Captain A. Psalidas, stands amid the charred wreckage of the ship's main galley. In front of him is the deep-freezer unit believed to have been the cause of the fire.

Cameras confiscated

About a dozen cameras were confiscated from passengers during and after the Australis fire, the ship's master said on Saturday.

Captain D. Challioris said he ordered them taken because the passengers were impeding fire-fighting and mopping-up operations.

The ship's staff captain, Captain A. Psalidas, said that the cameras were later returned to their owners. In some cases, over-zealous crew-members had removed the film from the cameras.

Replying to criticism that there had been a lack of information during the fire, they said the ship had been better to make few announcements about progress because a commentary might have caused panic.

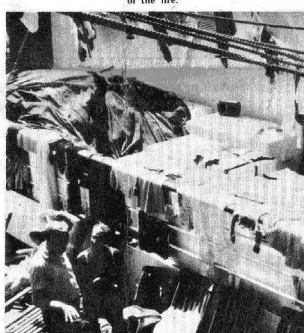
NO HAZARD

The Fiji Director of Medical Services, Dr. C. H. Gardiner, said the ship on Saturday to investigate complaints that conditions on board were unhealthy.

He said yesterday that the ship was being kept under twice daily surveillance by health officials, but that there had been no hazard to health during its inspection.

The Director of Marine, Captain P. G. Hough, inspected the ship on Saturday after passengers complained through the British High Commissioner, Mr. J. R. Williams, that the ship was "unsafe."

He said yesterday the Fiji marine regulations required that the ship comply with the safety rules for her country of registration, Panama, and she was also subject to safety regulations imposed by the American Bureau of Shipping, which had flown two surveyors to Suva from Australia.



SODDEN and smoke-stained clothes hung out by passengers to dry for space with ruined bedding on the Australis' deck. The picture was taken by a passenger on Friday, while the ship was heading for Suva.

CREW, PASSENGERS PRAISED

The Australis could have been lost, said the master, Captain D. Challioris, at a news conference on board the fire-damaged liner in Suva on Saturday.

"It was a miracle no-one was injured," added the owners' Auckland manager, Captain F. Ilany.

Both men were praising the efforts of crew and the calmness with which the passengers faced the situation after being awakened at 4am and sent to emergency stations in their lifejackets.

"There was no panic at all," Captain Challioris said. "In no more than 10 minutes all the passengers reached

their stations on the open decks. There had been daily lifejacket drill and all the passengers had been mustered at assembly stations during drills.

"Everybody knew what to do, and that was the main reason there was no panic."

The general alarm was given at 4am and there were no passengers below decks by 4.30. At that point, fire-proof doors were closed on all

Fire-damaged liner to stay until Friday

The Greek liner Australis, with her galley and more than 50 cabins out of commission following a fire at sea on Thursday, will remain in Suva at least until Friday.

A massive air-and-sea lift began yesterday to get about one-third of her 2123 passengers to their destinations in America and Britain.

The remaining passengers, about 1400 of them, are expected to complete their voyages in the Chandris Line ship.

All of the passengers for whom alternative air or sea passages have been arranged were in cabins which were either gutted or rendered uninhabitable by smoke, heat or water damage.

CROWDED

The Australis' galley, amidships on A deck and as large in area as an average house, was gutted by the fire, which spread quickly to cabin areas on the main and upper decks immediately above it.

For more than 36 hours, until the ship reached Suva, the only source of meals for the 2700 people on board was the comparatively small crew galley, designed to feed about 550.

Hundreds of exhausted passengers slept in crowded lounges and foyers at sea on Thursday night after spending more than 12 hours on deck.

Many more returned to land, still in air and smoke-stained cabins in otherwise undamaged areas of the midships section.

ASHORE

In Suva on Friday and Saturday night, 400 people from the worst-damaged cabins filled all of the available hotel space ashore, where they waited for arrangements to be made to get them to their destinations by other means.

As they moved out of the hotels, some of them to board the P. and O. liner Oronsay on a voyage to the UK and others to join the first of four chartered aircraft at Nadi, passengers from the barely habitable cabins moved in.

Meanwhile, all of the passengers were being fed ashore in hotels, ferried to and from their meals by a fleet of chartered buses.

TOURS

Chandris Line's Australian representative, Captain J. L. Arlaud, who flew to Suva from Sydney on Friday morning, estimated on Saturday that feeding and accommodating passengers ashore was costing his company about \$30,000 a day.

Shore tours were arranged for the passengers yesterday morning.

In response to a suggestion that it might be necessary to find alternative sea or air transport for all of the passengers, because of the delay, Captain Arlaud replied that the possibility had been considered.

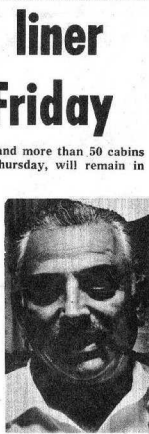
However, it would cost the line about \$800,000, and the company considered repairs could be made swiftly enough to make it unnecessary.

AIRCRAFT

Almost 150 passengers were found berths in the Oronsay, which sailed for Southampton yesterday evening.

A further 171 adults and five children travelled by coach to Nadi yesterday morning to join a chartered Qantas Boeing 707 bound for Toronto, from where they are to change to another chartered aircraft for Gatwick, London.

Two more 707s will each carry a similar number of



CAPT. CHALLIORIS people to the UK, one today and the other tomorrow.

Yesterday, arrangements were still being made for a fourth aircraft to carry 110 US-bound passengers to their destinations.

Special baggage arrangements were made for passengers travelling on by air.

A circular issued on the ship yesterday said that each passenger would be permitted to take 88lb of baggage, twice the normal limit.

Chandris Line undertook to get any extra baggage to individual passengers' original destinations "as quickly as possible."

At a news conference on board the Australis on Saturday, line officials said it was hoped that the ship could leave Suva by tomorrow night, following repairs and refitting of the main galley.

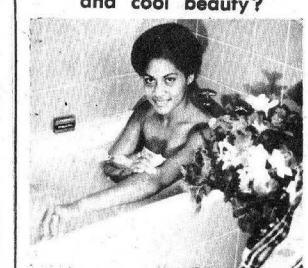
EXPERTS

"However, following a full survey of the damage, the ship's agents said yesterday the repairs would take until Friday.

A team of technical specialists and surveyors arrived in Suva from overseas on Saturday night and made the detailed survey.

Specialist electrical technicians are being flown to Suva from Greece to help in the repair work and several tons of electrical cable have been airfreighted from Australia, New Zealand and Greece.

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FLOTSAM

JETSAM

Meeting of the Suva branch of the Fiji Society for the Intellectually Handicapped

caped said the first task for the organisation was to educate the public to accept mentally-retarded people as citizens deserving as much help and support from their countrymen and Government as any other citizen.

He is definitely right, when you consider only about 10 people turned up at the first Suva branch meeting.

—*the Beachcombers*

Our man at the CWM Hospital watch operations on closed-circuit television (see Page 3) was a confirmed TV addict in Australia before coming to Fiji.

He's been showing withdrawal symptoms since his arrival, but he was cured yesterday by a successful of open mouth and dental instruments.

A speaker at last week's

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