

Wahine: The Wreck of the Wahine, 1968

Approach: Station

Level: Year 8 only

Resources: Copy of an historical radio program presented on video (no pictures).

Questions/instructions

Listen carefully to this tape of an old news story. You will hear some people talking about their experience of the wreck of the inter-island ferry steamer which happened on April 10, 1968.

You may only play the tape once.

Play the tape now.

On the 10 of April, 1968, the interisland ferry Wahine was wrecked in Wellington harbour with the loss of 51 lives. In a day of savage weather, rescuers worked to save the 734 passengers and crew.

“A few hundred yards offshore the interisland ferry, Wahine, is drifting helplessly backwards up the harbour. Most of the time it is obscured by driving rain and sleet and spray whipped up from the sea. A few moments ago it was visible, clearly visible, from the shore and it appeared to be moving slowly backwards towards the rocks a few hundred yards from the shore. Crafts of every description are heading out, and have been heading out for the past quarter hour from Worsler Bay. There have been surf life saving boats from the surf club along here, dinghies, launches, motor boats, whole truckloads of inflatable life rafts came through ten minutes ago, they’ve all gone out to help.”

“How could I feel?” [Sailor to interviewer]

“Yeah. How many boats got away?”

“All the starboard side boats got away; portside was all up [static] the air - she was leaning over to the starboard side-”

“On too acute an angle?”

“Yeah”

“Most of the people have got off?”

“I couldn’t say. Most of them did get off but there’s still boats out there picking them up.”

“Do you know where the captain is at this time?”

“No. I saw him on the bridge. We got away with all the ship’s papers but they all went down, we couldn’t save them: our boat overturned and we were sitting up on top.”

“The survivors we have seen so far have been mainly women. Has this been the case, was it pretty much an orderly sort of evacuation?”

“It was. The elderly women were marvellous, all the time they were really terrific.”

“Everyone was running around, it wasn’t organised, if it wasn’t for the passengers I don’t think it would have turned out that way.”

[Probably a passenger to interviewer]

“Was there much panic?”

“Oh, there was a fair bit.”

The inquiry into the loss found that the master, Captain Robertson, was without blame. “My immediate reaction is one of humility. I feel very, very humble, thankful that my feeling of a clear conscious has now been vindicated.” Captain Robertson of the Wahine which was wrecked on the 10th of April 1968.

	% responses	
	y4	y8
1. In which harbour was the Wahine wrecked?	Wellington	70
2. About how many people lost their lives?	none less than 20 about 50 about 100 over 700	59
3. Why couldn't the people on the shore see what was going on?	any 2 of rain/spray/sleet 1 of rain/spray/sleet bad weather conditions	10 17 23
4. Why couldn't all the ship's lifeboats be used to get the passengers off safely?	clear explanation partially correct	5 21
5. What happened to the ship's papers?	taken off ship, but then sank taken off ship or sank	7 30
6. Who were described as being "marvellous"?	elderly women elderly or women Total (out of 10): 7-10 4-6 0-3	36 15 10 43 47

Commentary

The students were asked to extract information from an old radio story. Their level of success was low, with only ten percent of students extracting most pieces of information in detail. Some of the difficulty students had with question 5 may have arisen from the poor sound quality in the interviews.