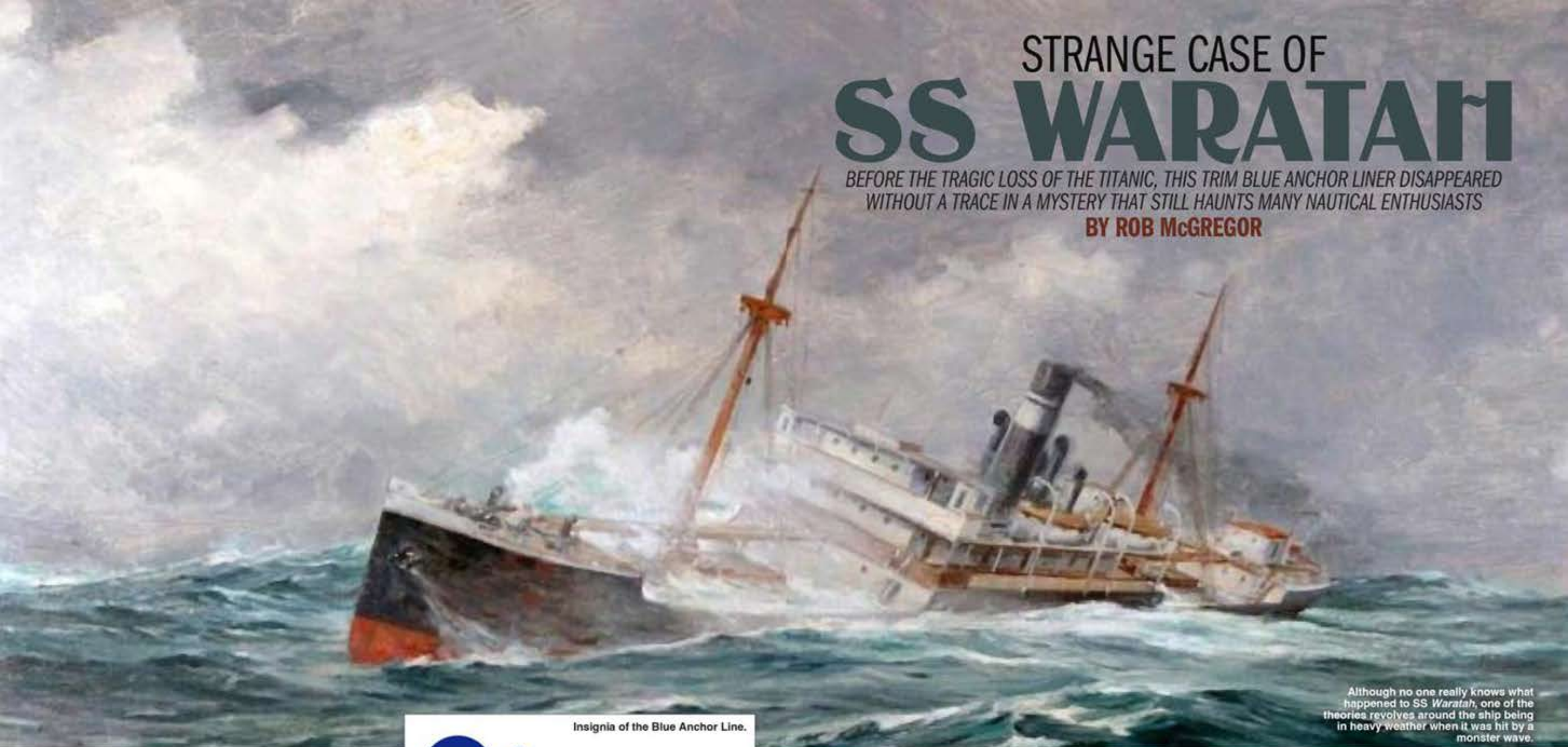


# STRANGE CASE OF SS WARATAH

BEFORE THE TRAGIC LOSS OF THE TITANIC, THIS TRIM BLUE ANCHOR LINER DISAPPEARED WITHOUT A TRACE IN A MYSTERY THAT STILL HAUNTS MANY NAUTICAL ENTHUSIASTS

BY ROB MCGREGOR



Although no one really knows what happened to SS *Waratah*, one of the theories revolves around the ship being in heavy weather when it was hit by a monster wave.

Insignia of the Blue Anchor Line.



Sightings of other ships at sea were not uncommon but they were interesting enough to break up the daily tedium aboard the steamer *Clan MacIntyre*. A lookout drew attention to an approaching vessel at approximately 0400 on the pleasant morning of 27 July 1909. The captain of the Clan Line ship was already up and going about his duties. Grabbing his binoculars, he spotted the other ship astern and on the starboard side of his vessel and he could see that it was slowly overtaking him. Around 0600, the ship had drawn close enough to *Clan MacIntyre* that they could start communicating by signal lamp and the captain was

pleased to know that it was the SS *Waratah*, a new liner plying her way from Durban to Cape Town. Customary messages of goodwill and information were exchanged and the captain of the *Waratah* stated he was running about 13 knots and that this was the new ship's second voyage. *Waratah* overtook *Clan MacIntyre* about abeam of the mouth of the

Bashee River, which was on the southeast coast of the Colony of Natal (today's South Africa). She then passed *Clan MacIntyre* and disappeared over

the horizon at about 0930. This was the last confirmed sighting of the new liner and its 211 passengers and crew.

As the day went on, the weather deteriorated rapidly as it often does in that part of the world. On 28 July, a hurricane sprang up in the area and the *Clan MacIntyre's* captain would later say it was the worst weather he had experienced in his 13 years at sea with winds of exceptional strength and tremendous seas.

## BIRTH OF A LINER

During September 1907, W. Lund & Sons placed an order with Barclay, Curle & Company of

Glasgow, Scotland, for a new cargo and passenger ship. It was specified the vessel would be delivered within twelve months and it was especially designed for the company's Blue

Anchor Line operations between the United Kingdom, South Africa, and Australia. The owners wanted the ship to be based on the existing SS *Geelong* so most of the specifications



Launch of the Blue Anchor liner *Waratah*.