

# **SAGINAW BAY TRAGEDY**

## **AUGUST 2, 1942**

### **CRUISER SINKS WHEN IT HITS ROCKS OFF THE CHARITIES. ONE OF A GROUP OF 13 SAVED.**

**BAY CITY WOMAN SWIMS SEVEN MILES TO SAVE  
SELF FOR SIX MONTHS OLD BABY. ENDURES  
SERIOUS HARDSHIPS FOR NINE HOURS.**

**CECIL DAY 46, WHITE'S BEACH, OWNER AND PILOT  
OF FATEFUL BOAT, MR. AND MRS. RAYMOND  
BADOUR, AUGRES, ARE VICTIMS. EIGHT BODIES  
RECOVERED FROM MONDAY TO TUESDAY  
AFTERNOON. STILL SEEKING FOUR MORE.**

Saginaw Bay's worst tragedy claimed the lives of 12 people Sunday when the 20' cruiser, "Miss Arlene" piloted by its owner, Cecil Day, of White's Beach, ran into a rock near the Big Charities last Sunday, foundered and sank as its passengers unsuccessfully attempted to save their lives. One of the members of the party of 13 on the boat was successful in this effort to save her life and that Mrs. Louis Repkie, 22, Bay City, who was in the water nine hours and swam seven perilous miles to shore and safety. Strong surging waves made her attempt almost unsuccessful, but the beckoning knowledge of a six months old baby back home kept her going in her effort.

At 4:30 Tuesday afternoon eight of the 12 bodies of the victims had been recovered by searching parties who had worked from Monday afternoon in their efforts to find them.

**The bodies of the eight victims who had been discovered before 4:30 Tuesday afternoon were:**

**Cecil Day, 46, White's Beach, east and south of Standish, owner and pilot of the 30 foot converted fishing tug, "Miss Arlene". First body discovered off Pt. AuGres Tuesday morning at about 8:00 o'clock.**

Mrs. John A. Zametzer, 37, Linwood Beach and Bay City.

Mrs. Raymond Badour, 20, AuGres, mother of four small children and niece of the boat owner.

Louis Repkie, 29 husband of the lone survivor and first aid official of the DeFoe Shipbuilding Co. of Bay City.

The last three victims were found shortly before noon Tuesday.

Four more victims were discovered a few miles off Pt. AuGres.

Mrs. Badour's husband, Raymond, 42, Bay City, Welder in the Defoe Plant.

Mrs. Zametzer's husband, John, 42, Bay City, General foreman of Bay Mfg. Co.

William Hatcher, 32, and Wife, Martha, 27, Kawkawlin. Mrs. Hatcher is a sister of Badour.

Still missing, and believed to have drifted across the bay to Sebewaing, and for whom intensive searching is continuing today (Wednesday).

Eugene Sauve, 27, and his wife, Fern, 21 of Kawkawlin.

Abraham LaBean, 32, and his wife, Dorothy, 26, Bay City.

Because of a slight illness, Charles Sauve, a brother of Eugene Sauve, remained at home. Had he been well, he would have accompanied the group and perhaps would have made the 13<sup>th</sup> victim.

#### Intensive Search Started Monday Afternoon.

It was not until Monday afternoon that a search was instituted for the victims of the tragedy. No one was aware of the loss of the "Miss Arlene" until Mrs. Repkie came ashore and reported the tragedy to Sheriff John Johannes at Standish late Monday afternoon. Mrs. Repkie, the lone survivor, told a horrifying story of her escape and hardships. She related how the party of people was enjoying the trip when the boat apparently hit a submerged rock.

#### Left White's Beach Early in Morning.

The six couples and the pilot of the "Miss Arlene" left White's Beach early in the morning, planning to return late in the afternoon. When they didn't report at 4:00 o'clock Monday morning, Day's wife notified the Coast Guard at East Tawas. But even as late as Monday noon little genuine concern was apparent, it being felt that because of Day's knowledge of the bay he perhaps had encountered trouble and was laying safely at anchor.

It was not until late in the afternoon when Mrs. Repkie, barefooted and wearing clothes she had found in a duck hunting shack where she spent the night, stumbled into the house of the "Rifle River Fur Ranch and told of her horrifying experience that the full import of the tragedy developed.

**Mrs. Repkie told Sheriff Johannes the story of her ordeal:**

“The cruiser floundered about 2:00 p.m. Sunday while we were returning from the Charity Islands to White’s Beach, she said. “Ten of the party clung to the partly submerged cabin. Three of us--- Mrs. Badour, my husband and I---had life belts on and decided to swim for the shore”.

**Voices Die Out.**

“The three of us kept quite close together for several hours, but toward dark we became separated. I could hear my husband and Mrs. Badour calling to each other in the darkness behind me. I didn’t turn back. I thought they could reach land safely. But their voices became more faint, and finally died out altogether.”

“I kept on for hours. I fist used trees for my guide and when nightfall came I used a star. At about 11:00 p.m. I swam into some reeds and struggled through them until I could climb up on some higher land. I was so exhausted that I fell and lay there a few minutes. I was very cold. I started to walk along the shore.”

“When I felt I couldn’t go on any further, I saw a little shack through the darkness. I smashed a window and crawled inside. There were blankets there, and I took off my wet clothing and wrapped the blankets around me. That’s all I remember until almost noon the next day (Monday), when I awoke. I found a few crackers to eat and a bottle of iodine with which I treated some cuts.”

**Borrowed Clothes.**

“My clothes were still damp. There were some men’s clothes in the shack, and I put them on, leaving a note telling the owner I would return them and what I had done. Near the cabin, I found a trail road and followed it for almost four miles.”

The trail led to the Rifle Fur Ranch, near AuGres. It was late afternoon when Mrs. Repkie reached it. William Woldering, of Ionia, a guard at the Michigan Reformatory, and his wife were vacationing at the ranch. They gave Mrs. Repkie some food and then took her to the Sheriff’s office at Standish. After she related her story there, Edward White, son in law of Cecil Day, took Mrs. Repkie to the home of her mother in Bay City.

Sheriff Johannes and Allan Hoffman, manager of the municipal airport in Bay City, flew Monday evening over the section of the bay described by Mrs. Repkie, about five miles south of Pt. AuGres, and from an altitude of 6,000 feet sighted a white-hulled craft that they believed was the sunken cruiser. Apparently it lay in deep water.

**No trace of it could be seen when Sheriff Johannes and Coast Guards from Bay City and Harbor Beach reached the spot later by boat. Later Tuesday, the boat was recovered and brought to Booth's Landing at Pt AuGres.**

**The only evidence of the tragedy found on the surface was a blue coat, later identified as belonging to Zametzer.**

**Johannes and Hoffman flew over the bay again Tuesday, while Coast Guards and land parties from Standish, Pine River and other points carried on the search by land and water. They discovered four bodies late in the afternoon.**

**The party of 13 left White's Beach early Sunday for a day's fishing trip to the Charity Islands. The return trip was begun shortly after noon.**

**The boat struck a rocky reef, slashing a hole in the bottom. Water poured in as the boat pushed against a heavy sea on the return trip. The bilge pumps failed to operate and the vessel started to sink. All members of the party put on life belts and climbed out of the floundering craft, but clung to the sides.**

**An accomplished swimmer, Mrs. Repke won prizes in high school for proficiency in water sports. She has taught first aid classes at Bay City in recent years.**

## **BAY TRAGEDY HIGHLIGHTS**

THE PARTY...had fished around the Charities with little success and were about to go toward shore for a little perch fishing before returning to Whites Beach when the boat floundered.

A COAST GUARD BOAT.... came upon the first victims. Louise Repkie and Mrs. Raymond Badourt, and later a crew aboard the Wallace Lentz boat discovered the body of Mrs. John Zametzer. All victims had life preservers on.

IT IS BELIEVED.....that if the "Miss Arlene" was damaged when it struck the rocks that the seams probably were unable to withstand the strong, steady spanking of the heavy waters which it encountered on its attempted homeward trip.

ALLAN HOFFMAN....of the James Clements airport of Bay City gave the use of planes for the search over the bay waters and it was through this method that the first discovery of the sunken boat was made. It lay submerged about six miles southeast of Pt AuGres. Darkness interfered with its recovery Monday night. It was recovered Tuesday and brought in to the Booth landing.

EIGHT CHILDREN.....were made orphans through Sunday's tragedy. Four of the smallest are those of the Badours of AuGres. They include, William 4, Patricia 3, Glenn 2, and Jerry 3 months. Mrs. Badour was a niece of Cecil Day and a daughter of Mr. And Mrs. Glenn Day of Pt. AuGres. Mr. And Mrs. Wesley Badour of AuGres are the parents of Mr Badour. The Badours were married October 1938.

MRS. DOROTHY REPKIE'S .....story of her experiences in saving her own life reads like those of the early days when old time pioneers fought desperately to live for those they loved. "My only thought was to live for my baby", she related to Sheriff John Johannes.. Her early training at school when she learned to swim was the only reason why she could muster up enough strength to withstand the onslaughts of the water.

WHILE THE PARTY.....sensed trouble on the boat, according to Mrs. Repkie, Individuals did not become nervous until Day went down to the bilge and started to investigate the bilge floor. Soon the boat began to list. Water swirled around and someone hollered "put on the life belts" and they all did. A big wave struck and the boat started to turn over and soon the boat began to break up. Then was the time she made up her mind to swim for shore.

SHERIFF JOHN JOHANNES .....is appreciative of the fine cooperation he received from local and shore people and the Coast Guardsman in making up searching parties for the victims. Every boat owner along the shore or in towns of the county gave unstintingly of their equipment and many sleepless hours were put in by those who could best aid in the searching of victims. To give any one individual or group and definite praise would not be fair. " They all did fine and their efforts are appreciated, even though we did not gain the results we hoped might be ours," said Sheriff John Johannes Tuesday evening.

"MISS ARLENE".....was seen by two Standish boat operators Sunday. Andy Dudek observed the boat shortly past 1:00 o'clock in the afternoon, stating it was close to the rock-lined shore of the Charities, then back away and turn south. He figured that Day was swinging around to get to the east side or the lee of the island and thought it might have struck upon some rocks as the motor was running hard. He concluded the propeller had been damaged. Dudek was informed of the missing boat Monday, but did not consider the incident alarming, inasmuch as Day was an experienced boatman and felt that he had probably encountered some trouble and was laying at anchor around one of the islands. Dudek and Lentz both participated in the search for the "Miss Arlene"