

(No. 4440.)

"MOSELLE" (S.S.)

The Merchant Shipping Acts, 1854 to 1887.

In the matter of a formal Investigation held at Westminster on the 4th and 5th, and at Greenwich on the 8th day of January 1892, before R. H. B. MARSHAM, Esquire, assisted by Captain KNOX, R.N., and Captains RONALDSON and BAKER, into the circumstances attending the stranding and loss of the British steamship "MOSELLE," near Point Toro, near Colon, on the 29th October last, whereby loss of life ensued.

Report of Court.

The Court, having carefully inquired into the circumstances attending the above-mentioned shipping casualty, finds, for the reasons stated in the annex hereto, that the cause of the stranding of the said vessel was that sufficient allowance was not made for the current, which appears to have been an unusually strong one, and set the vessel in towards the shore, that the lead was not used, and that the chief officer, Mr. William Ogle Wolton, did not take prompt and proper measures when land was reported. The Court finds the chief officer in default, but does not deal with his certificate.

Dated this 9th day of January 1892.

(Signed) R. H. B. MARSHAM, Judge.

We concur in the above report.

(Signed)	HENRY KNOX, Captain, R.N.,	} Assessors.
	A. RONALDSON,	
	C. H. J. BAKER,	

Annex to the Report.

This inquiry was heard at Westminster on the 4th and 5th, and at Greenwich on the 8th of January 1892; Mr. Baden Powell appearing for the solicitor to the Board of Trade, and Mr. Mansel Jones and Mr. Reader Harris for the owners and officers.

Mr. Eneor watched the case on behalf of the widow of the captain.

The "Moselle," official number 65,617, was a screw-steamship, built of iron, by Messrs. John Elder & Company, at Fairfield, Govan, County Lanark, in 1871.

She was registered at the port of London, her gross tonnage being 3,279.60 tons, and registered tonnage 1,876.18 tons.

She had a pair of compound-vertical direct-acting engines of 600 horse-power nominal, and her dimensions were as follows: length, 358.2 ft.; breadth, 41.05 ft.; and depth of hold 33.6 ft.

The "Moselle" was the property of the Royal Mail Steam Packet Company, of 55 Moorgate Street, London, Mr. Walter Chapman, of Westwood Park, Southampton, being the manager, and was employed in the mail service between England and the West Indies.

She left Port Limon, Costa Rica, about 4 p.m. on October 28th for Colon, under the command of Mr. Philip Rowsell, with a crew of 106 men, and 52 passengers, and with a general cargo of about 150 tons, her draught of water being 18 ft. 8 in. forward and 19 ft. 10 in. aft.

The vessel was supplied with five compasses and twelve boats, and all the life-saving appliances required by the Act of Parliament, she being well found in every respect.

At 4.25 p.m. Grape Cay bore south, true, distant about half a mile.

The course was then set S. 82 E. by the after standard compass, which course would take her about 5 miles north of Toro Point, near Colon, distant 185 miles, and Walker's taffrail log was then set. The weather at the time was cloudy, with a light W.N.W. wind, and there

was a heavy swell on. The engines made about 48 revolutions, which would give her a speed of about 12 knots.

At 8 p.m. the master, on account of its being very dark and his not having seen anything, hauled out 2³, making the course S. 84 E. Nothing of importance occurred, and at 4 a.m. of the 29th October, the chief officer, Mr. William Ogle Watson, took charge of the watch, being assisted by Mr. William Barrott, the fourth officer, the patent log at 4 a.m. having shown 129 miles.

At 1 bell the latter officer went aft on the quarter deck to hurry up the hands to wash decks, and he states when he left the bridge he took up the glasses but could not see any land.

About 4.43 a.m. the chief officer thought he saw the land very indistinctly on their starboard beam, and took up the glasses to look at it. About the same time the look-out on the fore-castle reported land right ahead, and received an answer back from the chief officer "All right." Shortly after he again reported land ahead, and received a similar answer; and the look-out states he again reported land ahead, receiving the same reply. The fourth officer, who had also seen the land, went on to the bridge, and reported it to the chief, who was then looking at it with his glasses. The chief officer said "Hard-a-starboard," went to the telegraph to stop the engines and reverse them, and at the same time ordered the fourth officer to call the captain. Directly afterwards, and within five minutes of the first report of land right ahead, the vessel took the ground, having, according to the chief officer, gone off four points under the hard-a-starboard helm, but according to the helmsman one point only. The vessel listed over to port or seaward, and the captain arriving immediately after he was called on the bridge, the engines were stopped, and all hands were called to boat stations.

The boats were then lowered into the water, and the whole of the passengers and crew got into them, the chief officer being the last to leave. The captain refused to leave the ship, and ordered the chief officer to get in the last boat and shove off. All the boats got away safely, four of them going to Colon, the rest (five) landing on the rocks abreast of the ship about 200 yards off.

Admirable discipline was preserved in lowering and manning the boats, and every possible attention was paid to the passengers, a considerable number of whom were ladies.

Soon after the boats had all left the "Moselle" the sea increased, and those on the rocks observed the "Moselle" listing more and more over to sea, and although they tried several times to launch one of the boats, they were always unsuccessful on account of the breakers. In the course of the afternoon Captain Russell was seen to come down the gangway ladder, without a lifebelt, and try to swim ashore. The fifth officer, Mr. Miller, made several attempts to reach him, but was repeatedly thrown back by the surf; he attempted to dive under the breakers, but was again thrown back, and he then saw the captain suddenly sink within 20 yards of the rocks. They afterwards searched for the body, but it was never discovered.

The third officer, Mr. Charles Laws, who left in the starboard-quarter boat and landed some of the passengers at Colon, called for a volunteer crew, and endeavoured to get back to the wreck, but the sea and currents were too strong, and the boat was carried to the east of Colon. He walked back to that place where the Company's agent had tried to get a tug to proceed to the "Moselle," but, owing to the heavy sea which had increased, the owner of the tug refused to let her go out.

About 4 p.m. the Company's steamship "Avon," from Cartagena, arrived off the lighthouse, where she was stopped by signal, and Mr. Laws, with a local pilot, went on board with orders from the agent for her to proceed to the wreck. On arrival there, just before dark, she was found stranded about 2½ miles W.S.W. from Point Toro. A boat was lowered with Mr. Laws in charge; he approached to within 20 yards of her, not being able to get closer in on account of the heavy surf breaking over her. The vessel had listed more out to sea and nobody was seen on board, in which he

was confirmed by Captain Ford, of the "Avon," who took the glasses up and examined her well.

The "Avon" was unable to assist those on the rocks owing to the great surf.

The "Moselle" has since broken in half and become a total wreck.

A statement was put in, made by a diver, that on the 3rd November last, he examined the patent tail-rail log, and found the distance registered to be 139 miles. Captain H. W. Ford, of the royal mail steamer "Avon," arrived at Colon on the 29th of October, 7 hours late; Captain John Coward of the s.s. "Yucatan," from St. Thomas to Colon, arrived on the same day some 5½ hours late, having been driven 31 miles eastward of his course; and a statement was put in, made by Captain Lockwood of the s.s. "City of Java" which arrived very late on the 28th. These facts show that the current had been running unusually strong about this time to the eastward, and that it must have been experienced by the "Moselle."

These were the facts of the case, and on the conclusion of the evidence, Mr. Baden Powell, on behalf of the Board of Trade, put to the Court the following questions:—

1. Whether, upon leaving Port Limon, safe and proper courses were set and thereafter steered, and whether due and proper allowance was made for tide and currents?
2. Whether proper measures were taken to ascertain and verify the position of the vessel from time to time, and particularly at 4 a.m. of the 29th October last?
3. Whether the chief officer took any measures to ascertain and verify the position of the vessel, by the lead or otherwise, during his watch from 4 a.m. of the 29th October?
4. Whether a good and proper look-out was kept?
5. Whether, when land was reported ahead, prompt and proper measures were taken to avoid it?
6. Whether the vessel was navigated with proper and seamanlike care?
7. What was the cause of the stranding of the vessel?
8. What were the circumstances in which the master lost his life, and was every possible effort made to render him assistance?
9. Whether the chief officer is in default?

Mr. Baden Powell and Mr. Mansel Jones then respectively addressed the Court, and judgment was given as follows:—

1. The courses set and steered were safe and proper, and they would have been made good had there not been an unusually strong current.
2. The only measure taken was the examination of Walker's patent log at 4 a.m.
3. The chief officer took no other measures than the above to ascertain and verify the position of the vessel during his watch from 4 a.m. of the 29th.
4. A good and proper look-out appears to have been kept.
5. Sufficiently prompt and proper measures were not taken to avoid the land when it was reported ahead.
6. The vessel was navigated with proper and seamanlike care until land was reported.
7. The cause of the stranding of the vessel was that sufficient allowance was not made for the current, which appears to have been an unusually strong one, and set the vessel in towards the shore; that the lead was not used; and that the chief officer did not take prompt and proper measures when land was reported.
8. The master refused to leave the ship in a boat; he subsequently attempted to swim to a reef, but, notwithstanding the gallant efforts made by Mr. Paul Miller, the fifth officer, to swim through the strong surf to him, he sank within 20 yards of the reef, being probably seized by a shark.
Every possible effort was made to render him assistance.
9. The chief officer is in default.
The Court severely censures him, but, looking to the fact that he was only the chief officer and did not take charge of the vessel until 4 a.m., and that the current of the 29th was unusually strong, they do not deal with his certificate.

(Signed) R. H. B. MARSHAM, Judge.

We concur.

(Signed) HENRY KNOX,
Captain R.N.,
A. RONALDSON,
C. H. J. BAKER, } Assessors.