

(No. 4791.)

“NEWFIELD” (S.S.)

FINDING of a Court of Inquiry held into the stranding of the Canadian Government steamship “NEWFIELD,” of 509 tons.

The Court, having carefully considered the evidence brought forward, and all the circumstances connected with this case, finds that the stranding of the Government steamer “Newfield” at North Canso on the 22nd August 1892 is to be attributed to a sudden increase of wind from N.N.E., on or about one o'clock in the morning of that date.

This, combined with the strong tide running into the Gut of Canso at the northern entrance, caused the vessel to sheer about considerably, whereby a heavy strain came upon the chain and shank of the anchor, twisting the flukes on the rocky bottom, and the crown pin was consequently broken and fell out.

The flukes having become disconnected from the shank, nothing was left to hold the vessel, and she drifted on to the rocky beach near the lighthouse before the engines were of any service to her.

The action of the master in leaving a safe anchorage at Port Hood to take up a position in an open roadstead at North Canso on Sunday, which was not a working day, shows a great want of sound judgment on his part, when he was informed that the storm-warning signal was hoisted at Port Hood for an approaching cyclone, and it was known to him that there was a good and sheltered harbour at Port Hastings, within a very short distance of North Canso Lighthouse, where he could have taken the steamer, and she would have been able to ride out any gale in safety.

The Court also finds that no regular and proper officers' watch was kept while the vessel was at anchor at North Canso, which was a contravention of clause 11 of the written instructions to masters of Government vessels.

Had an officer been upon watch on the deck of the steamer after midnight of the 21st, he would no doubt have observed the movement of the vessel and noticed the anchor dragging in time to let go the second anchor, and have given orders immediately to the engineer on watch to move the engines in sufficient time to avoid the casualty.

The Court, while not desiring to deal with Captain Atkins's Imperial certificate as master, considers there is sufficient grounds to severely censure him for his conduct and lack of proper vigilance and care while the vessel was anchored at the entrance to the Straits of Canso; and the fact of his leaving Port Hood with the steamer and proceeding to North Canso under the above circumstances, taken in conjunction with his failure to carry out the written instructions of the Government, which states that an officer shall be on deck when the vessel is at anchor, might justify the Department in reprimanding him or in dealing with his position as master of the steamer “Newfield” in any manner the Department may deem necessary or proper.

(Signed) W. H. SMITH, Commissioner.