

(No. 5408.)

“SCOTTISH DALES.”

REPORT of a Court of Inquiry as to the loss of the British Ship “SCOTTISH DALES,” on the 15th day of June 1896, on the Vuata Vatoa Reef, off the Island of Vatoa, Fiji, before the Chief Police Magistrate, Collector of Customs, the Harbour Master, Hon. A. M. T. DUNCAN, Member of the Marine Board, with Captain HEDSTROM, Master Mariner, and Captain HENDERSON, Master of the Barque “Excelsior.”

Mr. Shaw, solicitor, appears on behalf of the master, Timothy M<sup>c</sup>Carthy. Mr. Shaw waives any right as to notice, and asks that inquiry be proceeded with.

In accordance with the provisions of the Marine Board Ordinance, No. III. of 1888, an inquiry was held on the 25th and 26th days of June 1896, at the Suva Police Court, concerning the loss of the British ship “Scottish Dales,” of Liverpool, No. 87,902, of 1999 tons, and owned by W. H. Ross & Co., of Liverpool.

In accordance with the provisions of Section 36 of the above-named ordinance the services of John Henderson, master of the British barque “Excelsior,” and N. S. Hedstrom, master mariner, were obtained as nautical assessors to such inquiry.

After taking the evidence of Timothy M<sup>c</sup>Carthy, master, James Chapman, first mate, Frank Wilkinson, second mate, John Patterson, John Guthrie, and John Lundquist, able seamen, of the ship “Scottish Dales,” we have to report for the information of the Board of Trade as follows:—

That the ship “Scottish Dales,” in charge of Timothy M<sup>c</sup>Carthy, holding a master's certificate of competency, No. 95,777, issued in Hull, England, about 23 years ago (certificate lost in wreck), while on a voyage from Tacoma, Puget Sound, to Port Pirie, South Australia, stranded on the 15th June 1896 on the Vuata Vatoa Reef, off the Island of Vatoa, Fiji, and became a total wreck.

The cargo was lumber, and the master was unable to say whether either the ship or cargo were insured.

The ship left Tacoma on the 28th April last, the first land sighted was the Russon Island, about 10° South and 161° West, where the chronometer was found correct. About 3 a.m. on the 15th the Island of Vatoa was sighted by the master, who at once kept the ship off two points, calculating that the island was ten miles distant. Between that time and 4 a.m. bearings were taken by the master, by which he was satisfied that the land was at least eight miles distant. There were two men on the look-out. A little before 5 a.m. the ship was struck by a heavy squall after the wind had moderated, the master saw breakers ahead, the helm was at once put down and the head sheets let go to bring her to the wind as much as possible, she altered her course two points and then struck; the well was sounded, only four inches reported. In a short time the carpenter reported twelve feet. Soundings were taken, 2½ fathoms under the bow, 5 fathoms at the waist, and no bottom at 25 fathoms aft. At daybreak the sea was breaking over the ship, and the master ordered the boats to be provisioned and then abandoned her, proceeding with his crew in boats to Suva. The chart used was a South Pacific track chart of 1891.

The master was exonerated from any charge of careless navigation, as he appeared to have taken all the necessary precautions on nearing land. The Court of Inquiry found that the master had committed an error of judgment and ordered him to pay the costs of the inquiry.

(Signed) HAMILTON HUNTER,  
President.

I concur.

(Signed) JOHN ROSS,  
President Marine Board.

I concur.

(Signed) C. WOOLEY,  
Member of Marine Board.

I concur.

(Signed) A. DUNCAN,  
Member of Marine Board.

I concur.

(Signed) N. S. HEDSTROM,  
Assessor.

I concur.

(Signed) JOHN HENDERSON,  
Assessor.

NAUTICAL Assessors' Report on the loss of the Ship “SCOTTISH DALES,” 1999 tons, of Liverpool, Captain M<sup>c</sup>Carthy, on the Reef Vuata Vatoa, Fiji Islands, Lat. S. 19° 55', Long. E. 178° 15'.

From the evidence taken at the official inquiry before the Marine Board of Fiji on the 25th day of June 1896, and from the mate's log-book (the undersigned being present as nautical assessor), it appears that the above-named ship left Tacoma, Puget Sound, on or about the 28th April 1896 with a cargo of lumber bound for Port Pirie, South Australia. That she passed Pearson Island about the 14th June, when her chronometers were found correct. Proceeding on her voyage to the noon of the (14) fourteenth June, when the ship, according to mate's log, was in lat. S. and long. E., the vessel continued her passage during the afternoon and the night up to 3 a.m. on the 15th, the wind between E. and S.E. with strong breeze and squally weather. About 3 a.m. Vatoa or Turtle Island was sighted little abaft the lee beam. The ship continued on a course, supposed by the captain to take her clear, to the windward of the above-named reef, but about half-past four or a quarter to five breakers are visible across the bows. The helm is, as ordered, to be put down, head sheet to be let go, &c., but naturally with a ship of her size in a heavy sea way, and going about eight miles per hour, these measures had little or no effect, and in a few minutes after the reef was sighted the ship was hard and fast on it, and shortly after striking she cants over on her lee on starboard side, being full of water. The ship in this condition, the captain, officers, and crew were compelled to leave her in two boats, there being no chance to save the vessel or anything on board. This is a resumé of circumstances which transpired before and at the stranding of the “Scottish Dales.”

I have simply quoted from memory, I would I could see my way clear to exonerate all concerned, but as nautical assessor I must point out where I think the captain showed error of judgment.

The chart the captain produced in Court as being the one by which he navigated the ship is only a general chart, including within its compass, I think, the two Pacific's on the ordinary small scale, and, as he called it, a “track” chart, which is well enough when the ship is in an open or clear part of the ocean, but entirely insufficient when the ship is in among islands and reefs. If the captain had had the ordinary section sheet charts, which are on a larger scale, or even a chart over Fiji and adjacent islands as I have before me now, I do not believe he for a moment would have thought of going to windward of such an extensive reef as the one in question, which extends about five miles to the south of the south end of Vatoa or Turtle Island. If when the captain took what he called the “four points bearings” he had put them down on a chart that showed the full extent of the reef, he would have seen that his vessel would be brought too close to the dangerous reef on the ship's lee, and with squally weather he would have undoubtedly, in my opinion, instead of trying to weather the reef, kept the ship off and gone to leeward of both reef and island, where he would have had plenty of clear water and no danger; but the chart he used shows only a very small reef, and thereby deceived the captain, in addition to a probable strong westerly current, which as a rule follows the setting-in of the Trade winds. These, in my opinion, are the principal causes which brought on the loss of the ship “Scottish Dales.”

I have, &c.,  
(Signed) N. S. HEDSTROM,  
Nautical Assessor.

The Fiji Marine Board, Suva.

Suva, 25th June 1896.

I, John Henderson, master of the British barque "Excelsior," was this day called by the Collector of Customs to act as nautical assessor at a magisterial inquiry on the loss of the British ship "Scottish Dales."

I now beg to report that after hearing the evidence of the master, chief officer, second officer, the man at the wheel, and the man on the look-out, I find the evidence given to be corroborative, and also believe the discipline on the ship to have been good, from the fact that every man was at his post; I also consider that everything was done for the safe navigation of the ship, also that the current set the ship twenty miles out of her course in one hundred and forty miles run from position by observation the preceding noon. I

consider it very difficult to judge the distance from a small island on a dark night, as all who gave evidence were of opinion that the ship was further from the island than the result proved. In my opinion the ship stranded on the reef off Vatoa Island through an error in judgment of all who saw the land.

I cannot find any default on the part of the master or the chief officer, who was in charge of the deck.

I consider an "error in judgment" ought to meet the merits of the case.

(Signed) JOHN HENDERSON.

(Issued in London by the Board of Trade on the 27th day of August 1896.)

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