

(No. 6774.)

"INVERNESS" (S.S.).

FINDING and Order of a Naval Court held at the British Consulate-General, Yokohama, on the 21st day of December, 1904, to investigate the circumstances attending the stranding of the British s.s. "INVERNESS," at Muroran, on November 25, 1904.

The s.s. "Inverness" is a British merchant vessel of 2101·31 tons, registered tonnage; official number 114423; built at Sunderland in 1902 and belonging to the port of Newcastle.

It appears from the evidence given before this Court that she sailed from Tacoma on October 15, 1904, bound for Yokohama with a general cargo. On the passage she encountered very heavy weather, the steering gear carrying away on October 17 and again on the 29th; other damage being done on October 21 and 24, November 2 and 3, and very slow and difficult progress being made. On November 18, owing to the continued bad weather, it became necessary to make for Muroran, where the vessel arrived at 10 a.m. on November 24. At 4.30 p.m. on the 25th she finished coaling, and at 5.45 p.m. sailed for Yokohama in fine and calm weather with a crew of 30 all told and a cargo of lumber, flour, steel rails, and machinery, and two logs on deck; mean draught 22 ft. 3½ ins. No pilot was obtainable at Muroran, and the master, Ernest Happer (Board of Trade master's certificate number 019949, dated September 14, 1888), who has had considerable experience of this run, accordingly took charge and remained on the bridge issuing orders until the stranding occurred. For the first ten minutes the vessel proceeded slow and half speed, then increased to full speed, but had not gathered way at the moment of stranding at about 6.03 p.m., after proceeding on a N.W. course barely half a mile, during which course the vessel had had to deviate to clear a Norwegian ship. She stranded not more than half a mile from the shore on a shoal on the west of Muroran harbour, inside the Imboru Point. On stranding the vessel was lying easy and upright, and soundings showed a depth round her of 3½ to 4 fathoms, the vessel heading N.W. ½ N., lighthouse bearing W.N.W., landmark on hill bearing S. by W. ½ W., easterly end of island N.W. ½ W., deviation on vessel's head 7° W.

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After the stranding steps were taken to get the vessel off, but on November 28 it was realised that it would be necessary to lighten her before a successful attempt could be made. Discharging operations proceeded until at 2.30 p.m. on the 8th December the vessel floated off, and at 4 p.m. on the 10th proceeded into harbour. At 5.30 p.m. on the 15th, having reshipped the discharged cargo, the vessel sailed for Yokohama, arriving at 11 a.m. on December 19, 1904.

On the circumstances above stated the Court finds as follows:—The stranding was due to the vessel being taken a course imprudently close to the west shore of Muroran harbour. The casualty was due to the wrongful act of the master, but, having regard to all the circumstances of the case, more particularly to the fact that the damage done was slight—so far as is known the hull is undamaged—the Court does not deal with his certificate, but cautions him to be more careful in future. It appears from the master's evidence that he has been in poor health for a year past and that the difficult passage from Tacoma and the subsequent events have shaken his nerve, and he has expressed a desire to retire from his present command.

The other officers and the crew of the vessel are found free from blame.

The expenses of this Court, fixed at £6 9s., are approved.

In pursuance of the powers vested in it by Section 493 of 57 & 58 Vict. c. 60, the Court orders that this sum of £6 9s., being the costs of these proceedings, be paid by the master, one of the parties thereto, and he is hereby ordered to pay the said amount accordingly.

Dated at Yokohama this 21st day of December, 1904.

E. M. HOBART HAMPDEN,
British Vice-Consul, Yokohama,
President of Naval Court.

W. J. MILBURN,
Master of the British merchant
ship "Heathdene," of New-
castle, official number
114408.

ST. JOHN GEORGE,
Master of the British merchant
ship "Macquaire," of Barrow,
official number 68220.

} Members.

(Issued in London by the Board of Trade, on the
21st day of February, 1905.)