

(No. 7010.)

“ELIXIR” (S.S.).

REPORT of a Court of Inquiry held at St. John's Newfoundland, on the 1st and 2nd days of November, 1906, to investigate the circumstances attending the stranding and total loss of the s.s. “ELIXIR,” of West Hartlepool, official number 115164, off Cape Ballard, on the 29th day of October, 1906.

The s.s. “Elixir” was an iron steamer, of West Hartlepool, net tonnage 1770, classed A1 at Lloyd's, owned and managed by Thomas Appleby, of that port.

Her captain was George Higginbotham, her chief officer Mr. Andrew, second officer Mr. Jackson (Richard), chief engineer Mr. Smith, second engineer Mr. Stewart.

The crew comprised 22 all told.

The watch at the time of the casualty consisted of Richard Jackson, second officer, William Alfred Turner, third engineer, James Skelton, look-out, Robert Hodgson, helmsman, and the captain, who had been on the bridge from 6 p.m. the previous evening.

All the ship's papers were lost with the vessel.

It is shown to the satisfaction of the Court that the “Elixir” was a good ship, well found and fully manned, and supplied with sufficient boats and life-saving apparatus; that her three compasses were in good condition for safe navigation and carefully watched by the master, the errors correctly ascertained and applied, and that she was amply furnished with charts and sailing directions.

The “Elixir” was on a voyage from Hamburg, which port she left on the 12th October, to Charleston, S.C., with a cargo of kainite.

She met boisterous weather all the time across. The captain was able to take occasional observations, at intervals sometimes of two or three days. His last observation was on the 27th October at noon, when his position was ascertained to be lat. 50° 21' N., long. 47° 01' W.

The captain thereupon steered a course of S. 70° W. by the Standard compass, with an error—determined that day—of 24° W., which was allowed for; and on that course he put the ship at full speed.

He expected that his course would bring him just within the range of Cape Race light. Nothing was sighted on that day. It was more or less hazy during the afternoon of the 27th and through the night, but not foggy.

On Sunday morning it was a little foggy—the whistle blowing—and no observation could be obtained.

There was a light breeze from the S.S.W. and a little swell from the south. The estimated run on the S. 70° W. course was 200 miles.

His course was altered on Sunday, the 28th, to S. 65° W. by the Standard compass.

At 2.56 p.m. on that day the sun came out for a few minutes, just time enough to get its bearing, which gave the error on that course 24 degrees.

At midnight the course was altered to S. 62° W., the error being allowed at 24 degrees as before; and, running at the same speed on this course for an estimated distance of about 16 miles, the ship struck at 2.5 a.m. on the 29th. The captain thought that he had struck Cape Race. He put out two lifeboats

and stood by the ship till daylight. It was by the drifting of the lifeboats that he discovered the set of the current. The ship was listed 25 degrees to port, her deck to sea, and the boats, going with the current, were beached at Broad Cove at about 9 a.m. of the 29th.

To return to the 28th. On that day the captain took two soundings, one at a little before 8 p.m., when no bottom was found at 85 fathoms, and the next at midnight, when bottom was found in 106 fathoms, its nature not being ascertained, as, in the process of sounding, the arming had dropped off the lead.

After each sounding the captain felt justified in maintaining full speed ahead.

Had he taken a third cast of the lead within an hour or so, the fate of his ship might have been different.

*Judgment.*

The Court, composed of the undersigned and the two Assessors, Captains English and Greene, had before it the evidence not only of the master and of the officers of the watch, but also of two Renew's fishing masters, familiar for over a quarter of a century with the currents on that part of the coast where the casualty occurred—which currents were a factor largely responsible for the accident—and finds that the position of the ship at noon on the 27th October was in latitude 50° 21' N. and longitude 47° 01' W. by observation; that an azimuth of the sun was taken the same day; that the error of the compass was found to be 24 degrees W., which was properly applied to the course steered by the Standard compass at the time; this was S. 70° W., and was altered on the 28th at 2.56 p.m. to S. 65° W. The ship was going at a speed of 8½ knots; the wind was from the S.W. with a moderate breeze, weather dull and hazy.

At 8 p.m. on the 28th a cast of the lead was taken, and 85 fathoms found no bottom.

At 11.55 p.m. that night another cast was taken, and bottom was found in 106 fathoms. The ship was then steering a course of S. 62° W. and going at full speed.

The captain would have acted more prudently if, after the last sounding, he had taken a more southerly course and another cast of the lead at, say 1 a.m., being, as he claims, so well acquainted with the dangers of that coast.

If he had not been so confident, he would doubtless have reduced, as prudence demanded, the speed of his ship.

With S. and S.W. winds the tides are irregular.

On this occasion the tide was setting in towards the land, and to this fact, as well as to the cutting of the course too fine, the casualty is to be attributed.

After the accident the captain's conduct was all that could be expected from a competent and resourceful master.

At the sacrifice of the ship's papers and of all his own personal effects, he used, in critical circumstances, cool judgment and successful efforts to save the lives of his crew.

In view of the foregoing verdict the Court does not deal with Captain Higginbotham's certificate.

(Signed) J. G. CONROY,

S. J. P.

(Issued in London by the Board of Trade on the 24th day of December, 1906.)