

(No. 7569.)

"TURRIALBA" (S.S.).

FINDING and Order of a Naval Court held at the British Consulate-General, at New York, on the 7th, 8th, 9th, and 10th of January, 1913, to investigate the circumstances attending the stranding and wreck of the British steamship "TURRIALBA," of the Port of Glasgow, Official Number 128277, when on a voyage from Kingston, Jamaica, to New York, whereby serious damage to the vessel ensued, and to investigate the cause of such stranding and wreck, and to inquire into the conduct of the master, certificated chief mate, certificated second mate, certificated third mate, and crew of the said vessel.

Report of Court.

The "Turrialba" was a steam vessel, schooner rigged, of 3,088 tons registered tonnage, built at Belfast in 1909, and belonging to the Port of Glasgow.

It appears from the evidence before this Court that she sailed from Kingston, Jamaica, on or about the 19th day of December, 1912, bound for New York, with a cargo of coffee and general merchandise, and a crew of 86 hands all told, as well as 57 passengers and two distressed seamen.

She was provided with proper charts covering the route between Jamaica and New York.

She was provided with three compasses and one chronometer, all of which were in good order.

She had one patent log, which had been found to be defective, and had been discarded before her arrival at Kingston, Jamaica. She carried one patent sounding machine, fitted with one wire and one recorder, two deep-sea leads, and four ordinary hand leads.

All went well up to noon on December 23rd, 1912, when the ship's position was fixed by observation at latitude 36° 00' North, longitude 73° 58' West. At noon of December 23rd the vessel's engines were going full speed ahead, and her course was N. 8° E. (compass), being N. 3½° E. true. This course was maintained until 5.45 o'clock on the afternoon of December 23rd, when the course was altered one degree to the westward by standard compass. The ship was still proceeding at full speed, the engines making about 75 revolutions per minute, which would indicate a speed of a little more than 13 knots per hour, and the master (as shown in his own evidence) calculated that he would reach a point at about 38° 20' north latitude, longitude about 73° 53' W. by 9 p.m., where he expected to get soundings showing a depth of 37 fathoms of water. At 8 p.m. a cast of the machine lead was taken, and about 125 fathoms of wire were run out but no bottom was found. At 9 p.m. another cast was taken, the recorder of the machine lead indicating a depth of 25 fathoms of water. The result of this sounding appears to have led the master to suppose that he was some 25 miles to the northward of the point he had expected to reach at that time. The engines were kept going full speed ahead, and at 10 p.m. the lead was again hove, 25 fathoms being again obtained. At 10 p.m. the ship's course was altered to N. 8° E. (compass). At 11 p.m. another sounding was taken, a depth of 22 fathoms being obtained. The wind which had been blowing steadily from the north-east was increasing and there were heavy snow squalls. At 11 p.m. the course was altered to N. 10° E. (compass). The ship continued to proceed full speed ahead, and a sounding taken with the machine lead at midnight showed a depth of 27 fathoms. Up to this time the master had taken the readings of the lead, the recorder being carried to him after each sounding by the officer on watch. At midnight, the second officer relieved the third officer on the bridge, and at 1 a.m., under the instructions of the master, he proceeded to take

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a sounding with the machine lead. As the wire was running out, it parted and the lead and recorder were lost. This was immediately reported to the master who instructed the second officer to endeavour to obtain a sounding. The snow by this time was thick and continuous and the wind was increasing in force. The course was altered at or shortly after 1 a.m. on the 24th December, to N. 15° E. (compass), the engines being still kept at full ahead. A spare sinker was bent on to the broken wire of the sounding machine, and a cast was taken with this, the second officer reading the indicator of the sounding machine and reporting to the master the number of fathoms of wire run out as shown by the indicator. Between 1 a.m. and 3 a.m. of the 24th of December at least two soundings were taken, and between 3 a.m. and 3.50 a.m. at least two soundings were taken, or attempted to be taken, with the repaired sounding machine, but neither the evidence given before the Court nor the history of the vessel's navigation, as recorded in the chief officer's log and the scrap log, is sufficiently clear to show the exact times of soundings between 1 a.m. and 3.50 a.m., or the depths of water obtained. On each occasion of heaving the lead the second officer appears to have taken the reading on the dial and to have reported to the master the amount of wire run out. Between these hours the course was altered at least twice, the ship being hauled out to the eastward at least twenty degrees (20°) by the standard compass. The evidence as to the exact times of and reasons for these alterations is most unsatisfactory. A sounding taken about 3.50 a.m. gave a depth of six fathoms of water, and five minutes later the ship touched bottom. The master ordered the engines full astern and the helm hard aport. Both orders appear to have been carried out; but the quartermaster, Anders Hanssen, who was at the wheel, left the wheel without orders immediately afterwards and allowed it to run back. The ship's head then went aground, and although the engines were kept going full speed astern for several hours, the vessel remained fast at a point about 6 miles to the southward of Tucker Beach Light, the light bearing N. 1° W. The action of the heavy seas caused the after part of the vessel to pound on the ground, the rudder, stern frame, and rudder post being carried away and the propeller blades being stripped.

The Court, having regard to the circumstances above stated, finds as follows:—

That the ship appears to have been properly supplied with charts, compasses, and chronometer.

That the master, John Mellington Lindesay, was in error in calculating (as he appears to have done at 5.45 p.m. of the 23rd of December) that the ship would have reached 38° 20' north latitude, about 9 p.m. that night.

That having regard to the speed of the ship, there was no justification for the master's assumption that the depth of 25 fathoms found by soundings at 9 and 10 p.m. shewed him to be still farther to the northward.

That, instead of relying on the depths of water indicated by the indicator of the repaired sounding machine after 1 a.m. of December 24th, it would have been much more prudent on the part of the master to have brought the ship to and endeavoured to ascertain the correct depths by taking a vertical cast.

That the vessel was navigated at an excessive speed under the weather conditions prevailing at and after 1 a.m. on the 24th of December.

That the master's evidence as to what took place after that time was unsatisfactory.

That the Court censures the master for his errors of judgment above referred to, but finds that they do not amount to a wrongful act or default necessitating the dealing with his certificate.

That the certificated second mate, Thomas Pearson, gave his evidence before the Court in a most unsatisfactory manner. That his evidence is unreliable and misleading, and that he shewed a reprehensible lack of interest in his duties as navigating officer of the vessel; that he kept the records of the ship's navigation in a perfunctory and careless manner. But that his conduct did not amount to a wrongful act or default directly causing the stranding of and serious damage to the vessel.

The Court, however, finds that his conduct as a certificated navigating officer is worthy of severe censure and it hereby severely censures him accordingly.

That the vessel might have escaped stranding and the serious damage caused by the stranding had the helmsman, Anders Hanssen, not deserted his post without orders at the critical moment.

That the conduct of the other parties to these proceedings appears to call for no special comment.

That the steps taken by the master to safeguard life and property after the ship went ashore were adequate and proper.

The Court desires to add that the master would have been materially assisted in the navigation of the vessel if he had had on board a spare recorder for the sounding machine and a spare patent log, and further that the practice of keeping the same quartermaster on duty at the wheel for four consecutive hours with but a short relief for coffee is undesirable and should be discouraged.

The expenses of this Court fixed at £97 17s. 7d. are approved.

Dated at the British Consulate General, New York, this tenth day of January, 1913.

JOHN J. BRODERICK,
H. B. M. Vice-Consul.
President of Naval Court.

ARTHUR LEE, Master of the British s.s. "Kentucky," of North Shields, O.N. 133304.	} Members.
NOEL PATON PILCHER, Master of the British s.s. "Indrani," of Liverpool, O.N. 131440.	

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11th day of February, 1913.)