

(No. 7506.)

"TURRET CAPE" (S.S.).

In the matter of Formal Investigation held in Toronto on the 8th of December, 1911, which was presided over by Captain L. A. DEMERS, F.R.A.S., Dominion Wreck Commissioner, assisted by Captain JAMES B. FOOTE and Captain SAMUEL CRANGLE, into the stranding and eventually the total loss of the s.s. "TURRET CAPE," on November 17th last, on a shoal two miles south-west of Cove Island, Lake Huron; Captain Wharry, the Master of the ill-fated boat, was represented by Mr. W. S. Middlebora, M.P.

The witnesses examined were—

Captain Wharry;
F. Lawrence, mate;
R. C. Whiteside, second mate;
Clarence Crompton, wheelsman.

The captain, in his evidence, states that the s.s. "Turret Cape" is an iron built vessel, single screw, with a speed of 10½ knots, carrying two deck officers and two engineers, the second mate not being certified, the mate possessing a master's certificate. Registered in Newcastle-on-Tyne, G.B. That on the morning of the 17th of November, at 4.30 a.m., he left Point Edward, light, bound for Port Arthur, the ship drawing approximately at the time 12 feet aft and one foot forward; that on departure from Point Edward a bearing was taken of the lightship, and a course was shaped in order to keep on the weather shore, in view of the fact that the weather was stormy and strong breeze blowing from the eastward. His intention was to hug the eastern shore of Lake Huron and watch his opportunity to shape his course for Port Arthur, if the weather permitted. That from that time on to the time the vessel reached Lyal Island the wind was the same direction easterly, with snow flurries, rain, and very fresh breezes, and the course was shaped in order to allow for leeway as the ship was light. When off Lyal Island the light was seen and a bearing was taken, the ship being stopped in the meanwhile for sounding, which sounding gave as a result seventeen fathoms, which placed the vessel in a position of three miles from Lyal Island. The course was then shaped north-west by N. ¼ W., and just at that moment the wind veered around to the south-west, blowing a hurricane about 50 to 60 miles an hour. When off Cove Island the position was assumed to be eight miles, and light was seen, but shortly after the vessel stranded broadside on the shoals in the vicinity of Cove Island. There was at that time a heavy sea running. In view of the conditions, it was impossible to attempt to make any efforts to extricate the vessel from her position; the lifeboat was placed in readiness, but not lowered in the water. The master says that he took every method which a seaman is called upon to adopt in order to bring his vessel to a safe destination.

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The mate was then examined, and corroborated to some extent the evidence of the master, but proved that he was not a very intelligent witness.

The second mate in his evidence stated that the vessel steered very well; that he was on duty at the time of the accident; that all the precautions were taken in order to bring the vessel out of the dilemma, and that on an occasion of that kind it was an absolute impossibility to perform any other action than which had been performed by Captain Wharry.

Evidence was given by Mr. Darragh showing that there was a current running at times, velocity not determined and very erratic, and therefore it is impossible for any navigator to exactly allow for the current, its velocity depending on the direction and force of the wind.

Captain R. D. Simpson is under the impression that if he had been master of the vessel at the time, that he would have probably adopted a different method and shaped a course when off Point Clark for Port Arthur. However, it is his impression that the master, Captain Wharry, has done the best that could be done under the circumstances immediately preceding the casualty.

The wheelsman testified that the ship steered very well, and the instructions as to the courses that he received were strictly followed.

Finding.

The Court having carefully weighed the evidence adduced, finds the master, Captain Wharry, committed a grave error of judgment by placing his vessel in the bight between Clark Point and Cove Island. His belief that his ship would have rolled had he shaped a course when off Lyal Island is not acceptable, and it is an impossibility for a navigator to ply on the lakes without meeting at times certain conditions of the weather which will cause vessels to labour and roll in a seaway.

In view of the fact that the master did not seem to have on his vessel officers upon whom he could rely absolutely to check over with him the work, his courses or bearings of any kind, this Court is inclined to be lenient with him, and as we find that his error of judgment is not of a culpable nature for not adopting a course which would have been the most seamanlike method of reaching Port Arthur, and failing to take sufficient soundings to determine his position, we suspend his certificate for a period of three months from 8th December, 1911, till 8th March, 1912.

The Court warns him that in case of thick weather, and when hugging the shores, more frequent soundings should be taken.

The mate and second mate are exonerated from blame.

(Signed) L. A. DEMERS.

Wreck Commissioner.

Concurred by:

(Signed) JAMES B. FOOTE.

() S. CRANGLE.

(Issued in London by the Board of Trade on the 20th day of January, 1912.)