

(No. 7710.)

"FRANKIER" (S.S.).

In the matter of a Formal Investigation held in the Custom House, Halifax, N.S., on Thursday, the 2nd March, 1916, into the causes which led to the grounding of the S.S. "FRANKIER" on the morning of 10th December, 1915, at a place about four miles south of Cranberry Light, before Captain L. A. DEMERS, F.R.A.S., F.R.S.A., Dominion Wreck Commissioner, assisted by Captain JOHN FLEMING and Captain D. C. STUART, acting as Nautical Assessors.

Mr. W. A. Henry, K.C., represented the Master and Owners.

The Master, John Trattles, deposed that the "Frankier" was a steel built, single screw vessel, of 2,443 tons net and 3,336 tons gross, triple expansion engines, with a speed of 8 knots, and carrying a crew of 27, of which two were certificated officers, Official No. 122850; that she was owned by Messrs. Bryce and Gylsen, London; that on 7th December they left Portland with 215,000 bushels of grain for Dunstan *via* Louisburg, it being the intention to bunker at the latter port; that the weather met with up to the time of the casualty was squally, with snow and seas, and no observations for adjustment of the compasses were possible; but that the standard compass of Lord Kelvin make had no more than three degrees deviation; that the ship was well supplied with all necessary instruments. Yet it is found on inspection that he navigated his ship with a blue back chart published in 1906, and without sailing directions—other than an addition of 1912—which he stated he was unable to obtain in Portland. He admitted being a total stranger on the coast; that his log, a Cherub, was not correct, but he did not know how much the error was. He proceeded along the coast, and when he had a glimpse of Cape Sable abeam he fixed his position as being nine miles off.

He remained on deck, on and off, until 3.50 of the 10th, owing to weather conditions being unfavourable. Sometime after passing Cape Sable a light was sighted abeam which he took for Green Island Light, establishing his distance from it at about fourteen miles; but no second bearing was obtained.

That between two and four, being on deck, he altered the course of the ship to the eastward several times, finally giving a definite course of N.E. by E. $\frac{1}{2}$ E. Prior to leaving the bridge a light which he believed to be Cranberry Light was sighted three points on the port bow. He then estimated the distance he would pass off that light, steering N.E. by E. $\frac{1}{2}$ E. at about six miles. At 3.50 he retired to his room and sat on the settee, sleep overtaking him. He awoke at the first bump of the ship on the rocks, and wended his way to the bridge and ordered the engines full speed astern. Soundings were taken around the ship and within it, when it was discovered that she was making water fast in the fore peak, the vessel floated off and a course was given for Louisburg, where she arrived without further mishap.

He pointed out to the Court an erasure in the scrap log which had been made, of courses supposed to have been steered between two and four; but notwithstanding this he confirmed the entries in the mate's log as being correct by affixing his signature. He drew the attention of the Court to the fact that he considered the mate as inefficient.

The Second Officer, William Barrons, corroborated in part the statements of the master, although a difference existed in his expose of the condition of the weather during his watch. He also had words of condemnation of the mate's abilities.

The mate stated that when he came on deck at four he got the course N.E. by E. $\frac{1}{2}$ E. from the second mate; that after a while he estimated that the ship was too near shore and altered the course half a point easterly; but brought her back shortly afterwards to her former course. He also brought her out a quarter of a point and again steered the former course. He said he did not know of bad relations between the master and himself; but there may have been some story telling on board.

Three wheelmen positively asserted that the ship steered well and was so steered by them. The evidence of one of them, Hugo Manners, particularly impressed the Court. When he relieved the wheel at 4.35 he saw the Captain standing in the door of the chart room. On this point he was positiveness itself.

The lookout man said he saw other lights besides the brilliant one, which appeared to him as shore lights.

The second engineer was at his post when the ship grounded. He felt the jar and avers that he had an order from the bridge to stop the engine two and a half to three minutes after the ship first touched. He also entertains a poor opinion of the mate; but the friction is purely of a personal nature.

The contradictory evidence is particularly in connection with the state of the weather between two and four o'clock, or right up to the stranding rather at 4.45. Some said the weather was clear, others foggy, squally, blowing moderate winds, and from heavy to choppy seas, and not much sea.

One of the wheelmen who was on duty between two and four stated that to his knowledge the course was altered six or seven times during that period. On referring to the log no mention is made of such changes, and it is the movements during that period which were effaced from the scrap log.

Further evidence being unnecessary the Court adjourned until 5 p.m., March 3rd.

Finding.

The evidence obtained, which was of an extremely contradictory nature, and sufficient to awaken suspicion, was carefully reviewed and weighed.

We find that the Master, John Trattles, in his evidence made many statements which are not in accordance with entries in the logs or statements furnished by other members of the crew. He stated that after instituting inquiries in Portland he failed to secure an up-to-date chart on a larger scale, or sailing directions.

We wonder at this statement in view of the fact that so many Canadian vessels and others sail from that port, and there must necessarily be found some stores having in stock charts of all descriptions. Failing this, however, had he been anxious to prepare himself to meet conditions on this coast, which was hitherto unknown to him, such instruments of navigation could have been bought from some of the ships then in Portland. Notwithstanding that fact he was not supplied with such.

He admits that his log could not be relied upon, not having studied the tides and their effect on his speed, and having made no attempt to approach the light which he assumed to be Green Island in order to take cross bearings or soundings to enable him to establish a fix; after steering various courses between two and four of the morning of the 10th, without keeping count of them as regards time and distances, he chose to lay a course which brought him, or would bring him, at a distance of six miles from Cranberry Head in a neighbourhood full of hidden dangers. After obtaining a bearing, and only one, of the said light, he deliberately left the bridge, the second officer remaining in charge of same until he was relieved by the mate at four o'clock, evidently without leaving any special orders for the mate to be observant and careful, and to report if in doubt.

The master, by attaching his signature to a log which did not include all the facts, showed additional indifference in the navigation of his ship. We note that between the hours of two and four some entries

were made in the scrap log, but afterwards effaced, apparently with a purpose, by some person whom this Court is unable to ascertain. The erasing is strikingly visible. The mate's log was written without question as to erasure in scrap log and signed by the master.

The wheelsman who took the wheel at 4.25 to allow the other man to get coffee, stated that he saw the master at the chart room door, with his overcoat on. The Court has been impressed by the evidence of this witness owing to its apparent straightforwardness, and his statement as to the master's presence at the door at that time surprises us in view of the statement of the master that he had retired to his room and sat on the settee and fell asleep being awakened by the grounding; also the statement of the Mate who avers that he had to shake the master and awaken him after the ship had touched.

There is nothing to show that the grounding was premeditated; but on the other hand, we affirm that no better methods could be adopted had it been the intention to lose the vessel.

We have noted with interest his statement respecting his lack of confidence in the mate, whom he declared to be inefficient. In view of this the lack of care the master showed in not remaining on the bridge until the change of watches and warning the mate to be very careful and if in doubt to call him, does not strike the Court very favourably.

The "Frankier" was carrying a precious cargo, which, though consigned to a private firm, would eventually have been forwarded to the Allies. Being entrusted with this we consider a double responsibility of great magnitude, it behoved the master to adopt every and all precautionary measures to bring his ship safely to her destination.

For the above reasons we feel it our duty to prevent him from having any further responsibility with respect to this vessel on this mission, and therefore suspend his certificate for a period of three months to date from the 3rd of March, 1916, until the 3rd of June, 1916, (No. 031,916).

Respecting the mate's share in this casualty we claim that the moment he entertained a doubt as to the ship's position with regard to the land, he should immediately have given the danger he evidently apprehended, a wider berth and communicated his

doubts to the master, which action would have relieved him of responsibilities. Though he felt confident that the vessel appeared dangerously close to land he only made a slight alteration in the course, half-a-point,—and again a quarter of a point, bringing her back to her former course shortly afterwards, she being on that course when she grounded.

It would appear that he did not signal to the engine room to stop the engines until two and a half to three minutes after she touched, according to the evidence of the second engineer.

It is evident that bad feeling existed on board the ship between the master and second mate, against the mate, whilst the latter, in his evidence, had no complaint to make against his associates.

In view of his failing to call the master, and meanwhile adopt means of safety, we hereby suspend the Master's Certificate, No. 02359, of the mate, Thomas George, for a period of two months to date from 3rd March, 1916 to the 3rd May, 1916.

The second officer was on the bridge from midnight to four o'clock, and we cannot attach any blame to him as he does not seem to have had any responsibilities. He is, therefore, exonerated, as well as the second engineer, who appears to have performed whatever duties were incumbent upon him in a timely and satisfactory manner.

The Court has decided to retain the scrap log so that it may be forwarded to the Board of Trade for its information.

Read in Open Court at Halifax, N.S., this 3rd day of March, 1916.

(Signed) L. A. DEMERS,
Dominion Wreck Commissioner.

We concur :

(Signed) JOHN FLEMING	} <i>Assessors.</i>
(Signed) D. C. STUART	

(Issued in London by the Board of Trade on the 5th day of May, 1916.)