

APPENDIX A

WRECK OF THE *CZARINA*, 12 JANUARY 1910

Account of the wreck of the *Czarina* taken in its entirety from the *1910 Annual Reports of United States Life-saving Service*, 59-65:

Wreck of the steamer "Czarina," January 12, 1910.

COOS BAY STATION.

Not in a quarter of a century has there occurred within the scope of the service such an appalling marine casualty as the wreck of the steamer *Czarina* at the mouth of Coos Bay, Oreg., January 12, 1910.

The *Czarina* was a 1,045-ton vessel owned by the Southern Pacific Co., of San Francisco. She was valued at \$100,000. When the disaster chronicled here took place she was on her way from Marshfield, Oreg., to San Francisco with a cargo of coal, lumber, and cement. About 40,000 feet of the lumber was stowed on her decks. She carried a crew of 23 men all told, and 1 passenger, whose names are given by the agent of the company as follows: Charles J. Duggan (captain), James Hughes, Benjamin F. Hedges, S. A. Ellefsen, Harry H. Kintzel, Charles Bostrom, Adam Rokka, Mindor Olsen, Charles Curran, Andrew Ahlstedt, Rhinehold Hagener, John McNicholas, Henry Young, John H. Robinson, Charles A. Thompson, Thomas Bilboa, Angelo Puntas, Columbus Otera, August Valaderis, Jose Martinez, Nicholas A. Quiroga, Joe de Sota, Joe Piles, and Harold B. Millis (passenger). But 1 of the entire 24 — Harry H. Kintzel, first assistant engineer — survived the disaster.

It may be stated for the information of the reader that Coos Bay is a sinuous body of water approximately half a mile wide and something like a dozen miles long. Beginning at the ocean entrance, it runs easterly for three-fourths of a mile, turns in a northerly direction and keeps nearly parallel with the coast for several miles, then swerves to the eastward again for half that distance and doubles back toward the south for 3 or 4 miles. At its head lies the town of Marshfield. In outline the bay is not unlike a dipper, with the bottom of the bowl lying toward the north. The peninsula of sand that separates it from the ocean is called the North spit. On the inner or bay shore of the spit is situated the Coos Bay Life-Saving Station, 2 miles above the entrance. Near the point of the spit, and overlooking the entrance, is the service observation tower and a house that shelters a boat and other equipment designed for the use of the life-saving crew in affording assistance to vessels that get into difficulty on the bar and in contiguous waters.

The *Czarina* left port at 11.15 a. m. The trip down the long, narrow bay was uneventful until she made the last turn in the channel and headed straight for the ocean. Then she began to ship water. It was very rough outside. In fact, the condition of the sea was such as to deter the prudent mariner from risking a passage over the bar — which the *Czarina* was about to attempt.

Capt. W. A. Magee, master of the harbor tug *Astoria*, was watching the *Czarina* as she steamed down the bay, his vantage point being a tower in Empire City, 4 miles above the entrance. He testifies that when she had worked her length beyond the black buoy, where the channel turns oceanward, she seemed suddenly to lose headway, stop, and move backward; then there came a momentary lull in the sea, and she went ahead again. To use an expression of the witness, she "seesawed" back and forth for several minutes in the manner described, then swung her head well to the northward, as if she intended to try for a less difficult passage to starboard. Shortly, however, she swung around to the southwest and went unsteadily forward until she brought up on the South spit. Then she blew a distress signal.

Up to the time of striking the South spit she had shipped 61 breakers by actual count. When she sounded a signal Capt. Magee left the tower, got up steam on his tug, and started down to the bar with the intention of going to her assistance, but by the time he reached the bar she had drifted across it and was working up along the beach northward. He did not therefore attempt to go out. He explains his failure to do so in the following words:

The bar was too rough for us to attempt to cross. After seeing the position of the *Czarina* I knew that nothing could be done from the outside. A steam schooner was off about three-fourths of a mile from the wreck, standing by.

It would seem that the master of the *Astoria* expected that the steam schooner referred to by him would endeavor to assist the *Czarina*. This vessel, as shown by the evidence, did actually start in to the imperiled steamer, but put off again before getting near her. The schooner, it developed, was herself heavily loaded with lumber, and doubtless became apprehensive that the venture could not be undertaken without great danger to herself. It is also shown that on the following morning, while several of the *Czarina's* crew were still in her rigging, another vessel, the steamer *Nann Smith*, also attempted to approach her from the outside, but abandoned the enterprise on account of the danger involved. Had the *Astoria* risked the bar and gotten safely offshore, she might, at any time before the *Czarina* foundered, have been able to drift a line down to that vessel. At least such was the opinion expressed by the survivor, First Asst. Engineer Kintzel.

It is gathered from statements made by Kintzel that while the *Czarina* was being buffeted across the bar the boarding seas flooded her engine room and put out her fires, so that when she found herself in the quieter waters beyond she was entirely helpless. On the trip through the breakers the crew had been driven into the rigging, from which position they watched the seas play havoc with the deckload, carrying two of their lifeboats away and smashing another to pieces, thereby cutting off all chance of leaving ship even had an opportunity for launching a small craft presented itself.

Once outside, where the water was less turbulent, the vessel rode easier, and the turmoil on deck abated to such an extent that the crew left the rigging and threw over the anchor, the captain hoping by such action to keep offshore until help could reach them. But the fulfillment of this hope was denied, and the act mentioned without doubt operated ultimately to bring about the destruction of the vessel and the great loss of life that accompanied it. The *Czarina* drifted northward, and was soon in the breakers. Realizing what was in store for the crew should the progress of the vessel be interfered with before she came near enough to the beach for the life-saving crew to put a line over her, the captain ordered the anchor chain cut. Some of the sailors attempted to carry out this command, using a hacksaw, but before they could accomplish the task the seas drove them back into the rigging.

The anchor caught and brought the vessel up when she was still several hundred yards from the beach. Held thus, she had to take the full force of the ponderous breakers, and soon foundered, settling until her entire hull was submerged. The seas now completed the demolition of the deck load, sending it overboard to fill the breaker-swept space between ship and shore and menace the lives of both the sailors and those who would save them, and tossing it up against masts and rigging as if impatient to drive the hapless sailors from their refuge and complete the tragedy. As the rigging was sundered by the thrashing debris the chilled and exhausted men dropped off singly and in groups to their death in the wreckage alongside. Kintzel was swept overboard, about dark with the port rigging of the mainmast. Two or three of his shipmates went with him. He says he exchanged some words with them after finding himself in the water, but soon became separated from them in the gathering darkness. Kintzel was unable to tell much concerning the movements of any of the rest of the crew. His lack of information in this respect, however, is not surprising, as the situation on board was not conducive to accurate observation. He himself had on a life preserver. He was of the opinion that some of the others had them on also. For upward of two hours he was washed about in the furious surf, beaten by wreckage and smothered in the spume of the breakers. Once he was swept almost to the beach, but his strength was too far spent to fight the outward pull of the undertow, and he was carried back to the vessel again. There he managed to get hold of a heavy plank, to which he clung even after consciousness left him. His tenacity eventually saved him, for the plank was swept toward the beach, and a surfman wading out in the dangerous waters with a line tied to his waist discovered him and dragged him ashore.

The *Czarina* passed the life-saving station, outward bound, about 1 p. m. Knowing the condition of the bar, Keeper Clarence W. Boice, in charge of the station, was surprised to see her going out, and ascended the station lookout to watch her. His account of her movements after she reached the black buoy where the channel swings toward the ocean is substantially the same as that given by Capt. Magee, of the tug *Astoria*, who had been watching her from a tower in Empire city. When the keeper saw her swing out of the channel and veer toward the south spit he felt sure she would meet with disaster. He accordingly manned the lifeboat and pulled down the channel to the entrance. By that time the *Czarina* had worked across the bar and was drifting northward off the ocean beach. The station crew landed on the inside near the end of the north spit. Their movements from this time on are set forth by Keeper Boice as follows:

I could see that the *Czarina* was just above the north spit. Realizing that I could not reach her with the lifeboat on account of the rough bar, I called all my crew out of the boat, enlisted the services of two fishermen who were on their scow boat where we landed, and we all ran to the bar boathouse, where I gave the No. 1 surfman orders to get out the beach apparatus cart, and myself went into the bar lookout to observe the action of the vessel. No. 1 got the beach cart out and started along the beach.

I noticed that the vessel had anchored just outside the break on the beach. I judged from the trend of her chain that she had let out lots of cable, and I thought there was a possibility of her holding on, so I phoned from the lookout tower to Mr. Shine at Empire requesting him to wire Supt. Varney at San Francisco that the *Czarina* was anchored just outside the breakers, apparently in trouble, and for him to communicate with the revenue cutter *Manning* to come to her assistance. I then asked Mr. Shine to notify the manager of the company to which the *Czarina* belonged.

At this time, however, I could see that the ship was drifting to the northward about parallel with the breakers. I remained in the lookout about 20 minutes. I then went down and joined my crew with the beach cart, overtaking them about a quarter of a mile up the

beach. We followed along watching the ship slowly dragging, but she shortly brought up, the waves began to break over her bow, then over the body of the vessel, and she swung stern to the beach and came in some. At this time there were probably three lines of breakers outside the ship and a succession of breakers from the ship to the beach. We stopped with the beach cart abreast of her. I remained by the cart and sent No. 1 with some of the crew, and 30 or 40 people whom I had asked to assist us, to the bar boathouse to bring up the surfboat.

They got back in a few minutes with the surfboat. By this time the vessel had foundered and the seas were breaking all over her. I now had the beach cart taken down close to the surf, and just as we were ready to remove the gear the sea came in around the cart and I had to move it back up the beach a little. The Lyle gun was put in as close to the surf as possible, and a No. 4 line 700 yards long was sent out with a 6-ounce charge of powder. There was no wind, and the line went straight out, but fell 200 yards short. While the crew were hauling in the No. 4 line a No. 7 line 600 yards long was sent out with a 6-ounce charge. This shot fell considerably shorter than the first. By this time the vessel had settled so much that if a line had fallen across her the crew could not have left the rigging to secure it, as the seas were breaking over her continually and there was no stay between the masts on which a line might catch. Some of the men had been already swept from the rigging. I judged the distance to the vessel to be about 900 yards, and seeing that it was impossible to reach her with the beach apparatus, we manned the surfboat and attempted to launch it. The surf was so heavy, however, that we could not get off. I was knocked down by a sea while we were trying to get the boat off the wagon, which had been run down into the water. The lumber that had formed the vessel's deck load was coming in by this time so thick that we could not have gone through it even had we succeeded in getting away from the beach in the boat.

By this time the smokestack had fallen, and the tops of both masts had broken off, and several of the crew had been knocked off the rigging. When we saw that nothing could be done to save the men we scattered along the beach to watch for any who might be washed ashore on lumber or wreckage. About dark the lower part of the port main rigging carried away and several of the crew went with it. As darkness came on we could see five or six men still clinging to the rigging. Fires were now lighted and the beach was patrolled throughout the night by the station crew, some of whom waded into the surf as far as they dared go with heaving lines fastened to their waists. About 9 p. m. a man was seen in the surf holding to a piece of wreckage. He was hauled out and found to be breathing. We carried him to a fire, and after two hours' work restored him so that he could be conveyed to a marine hospital, where he fully recovered.

At daylight of the 13th the mainmast was still standing, and there were still several men in the rigging. The surf still continued as high as on the previous day, and it was impossible to launch a boat. The vessel had settled so that the water was half way up the mainmast, and the seas continued to break heavily where she was. The men in the rigging gradually went, and by 10 a. m. they had all disappeared.

At 1.30 p.m. of the 13th Keeper Johnson of the Coquille River Life-Saving Station, some 15 or 20 miles south of the scene of the wreck, reported to Keeper Boice with five surf men. This crew remained on the beach until the morning of the 14th and assisted in the work of the patrol. At 9 a. m. of the 14th a body was picked up 2 miles north of the wreck, and on the 17th another body was recovered 8 miles to the northward.

The officer who conducted the inquiry into the circumstances of this disaster expresses the opinion in his report that “no blame should attach to the service, nor to the keeper, nor to any member of the Coos Bay Life-Saving Station, for the deplorable loss of life” that occurred. In support of this conclusion he recites the obstacles that stood in the way of successful wreck operations as follows:

The vessel was no doubt anchored for the purpose of holding her outside the break, and it is evident that the anchor would not hold her, but allowed her to drift until she brought up in a place where she was exposed to the heaviest break, and where no assistance could be rendered from the outside, and at too great a distance from the shore to permit a line to be put on board by means of the beach apparatus. The heavy seas breaking over the vessel prevented those remaining on board and who had taken to the rigging, from getting to the deck and slipping the anchor so that she would go in where a line could be sent on board. She was heavily laden with coal and cement and with a deckload of lumber. She foundered in a few minutes after she brought up, and the lumber from the deckload filled the water. The surf on the beach was so heavy that it was impossible to launch a boat. The vessel was too far from the beach and too low in the water to afford any lee for launching a boat. The floating lumber coming ashore made it extremely hazardous for those venturing into the water in the hope of finding those who might come ashore from the wreck. The heavy seas did not abate in time to permit a boat to be launched the next day for the purpose of trying to save those remaining on board.

The situation, as set forth above, is fully borne out by the sworn testimony of persons who were present on the beach and participated in such efforts as were made to establish communication with the wreck. The citizens of the locality, however, many of whom witnessed the work of the life-saving crew, did not regard Keeper Boice’s generalship as equal to the exigencies of the occasion. Their criticism of his management of the affair found expression in letters to the department from individuals, and in petitions from local commercial bodies — the Marshfield Chamber of Commerce and the commissioners of the port of Coos Bay — charging him with failure to exert every effort to effect the rescue of those aboard the *Czarina*, alleging incapacity as a commanding officer, and asking for a thorough investigation of his conduct. Specific charges against the keeper were finally presented by the secretary of the port of Coos Bay by letter of March 18, 1910, who promised to furnish a list of witnesses and extend to any investigating officer “every assistance in bringing out the truth.”

The complaint embodied 10 formal charges, 7 of which contained specific allegations of dereliction at the wreck under discussion; one (the sixth) charged him with failure to drill his crew regularly in the handling of the surfboat, as required by the regulations of the service; and two alleged neglect of duty and incompetency upon two former occasions of disaster to vessels. These two are omitted here, however, as they have no direct bearing upon the case under notice. It may be stated, nevertheless, that they were fully gone into by the investigating officer, and were duly considered by the department as affecting the fitness of the accused to continue in command of a life-saving crew.

The specifications relating to the *Czarina*, and that charging the keeper with failure to practice regularly with the surfboat, are as follows:

1. That the said keeper failed in accordance with regulations (sec. 241) to telephone adjacent stations for assistance.

2. That said keeper, under regulations (sec. 245), failed to use an extraordinary charge of powder in shooting the Lyle gun, and desisted from said shooting entirely after two attempts.

3. That said attempts with the Lyle gun were made at a time when the tide was about three-quarters high, while at low water the gun could have been placed 100 yards nearer the wreck; but no attempt was made at low water.

4. That said keeper, in accordance with regulations (sec. 252), failed to make an attempt to launch the surfboat.

5. That said keeper made no attempt to bring the lifeboat to the scene of the wreck, although men were present who would have volunteered in so doing.

6. That the keeper had failed for a long time before said wreck to cause his crew to drill in the surf; that is, to launch the surfboat from the beach into the surf.

7. That at the time of said wreck the keeper permitted the wives of the crew to be on the beach in the presence of their husbands.

8. That said keeper at the time of said wreck displayed no executive ability, and gave evidence to all present of being either incompetent to hold his position or too cowardly to perform his duties.

The request for an investigation was duly complied with, Lieut. W. W. Joynes, United States Revenue-Cutter Service, assistant inspector of the seventh life-saving district, with headquarters at Elizabeth City, N. C., being assigned to the work of conducting the inquiry. That officer arrived in Marshfield, Oreg., April 28, 1910, and began the examination of witnesses May 3, the intervening time having been spent in conference with citizens interested in the prosecution of the charges against the keeper, in visiting the scene of the wreck, and in examining the service boats and equipment. The sessions extended over a period of several days, being concluded May 7. Both the prosecution and the defense were represented by counsel, the former presenting 13 witnesses and the latter 9. Every opportunity was afforded both parties to introduce any witness desired, so that all might feel fully satisfied with the proceedings. For the same reason counsel were indulged in the matter of examination.

Charges 1, 2, 4, 5, 6, and 7 were admitted by the keeper. The third charge was not proven, there being considerable divergence of opinion in the testimony of witnesses as to the distance the Lyle gun might have been placed nearer the wreck. The investigating officer did not think it could have been set out more than 50 yards beyond the spot from which it was actually fired.

Charge 7 is considered unimportant, as it was not shown that the presence of women on the beach in any way interfered with the work of the life-saving crew.

The eighth charge is a general allegation of professional unfitness on the part of the keeper, as evidenced by his alleged failure to do certain things indicated in charges 1 to 7. The views of the investigating officer in relation to this charge, and which really constitute his findings in the case, are as follows:

In my opinion the keeper rested too positively upon his own estimate of conditions and eventualities, as shown in not summoning assistance from other stations because he thought the vessel would not last; in concluding, simply on his own judgment, that the wreck could not be reached with the gun; and in making no actual attempt to launch a boat. Yet in regard to these matters he probably had had[sic] as much experience and possessed as good judgment as anyone else present. Failing in his efforts with the gun and boat, he appears to have assumed a passive attitude, simply awaiting the termination of the tragedy. There was nothing else to do, as he looked at it.

It is difficult to express an opinion in this matter. I can conceive, from an extensive experience on this coast (for some time in this immediate vicinity), what a difficult problem confronted the keeper. I venture the opinion that this, his second important wreck and his first serious one as a keeper, confused him by its awfulness, so that, having done all that in his judgment was possible, he stopped at a loss what else to do. I believe that no human power could have succeeded in rescuing the men in the rigging of the *Czarina*. Nevertheless, I think the keeper should have made further attempts with both gun and boat. His failure to do so indicates a certain degree of incompetency; but neither has it been shown, nor do I believe, that there is anything of the coward in the make-up of Capt. Boice.

Lieut. Joynes comments as follows upon the bearing of Capt. Boice during the progress of the investigation and upon the difficulties of his position as keeper:

I wish to direct attention to the testimony of Keeper Boice — his assumption of all the responsibility. His bearing throughout the investigation was such as to command the admiration of all who heard his declarations — frank, sincere, and straightforward, and beyond doubt strictly truthful. He is a young man 31 years of age, having been only two years a keeper and in charge of a hard station, with a large, dangerous area under his supervision.

Capt. Boice had previously served in the crew of the Coquille River (Oreg.) Life-Saving Station as the No. 1 man, in which position his ability as a surfman, his intelligence, and his fidelity to duty had attracted the attention of his superiors. Therefore, when a vacancy occurred in the keepership of the Coos Bay station, he was recommended by the officers of the thirteenth life-saving district as the best-qualified man available for the place. His case appears to have been one of those sometimes met with, in which an admirable soldier fails as a commander. Notwithstanding his superior professional qualifications, it was of course out of the question to retain him in command of a life-saving station after his failure to measure up to the demands of the distressing occurrence here described. His resignation as keeper was accordingly accepted. He was granted permission, however, to reenter the service as a surfman at the station where his services previous to his promotion to a keepership had been exceptionally creditable.