

Commanding Officer's Report

27 Feb 1944

HMCS COLUMBIA I49

On 25 Feb 1944 HMCS COLUMBIA I49 struck a cliff in Motion Bay, Newfoundland which resulted in the death of 2 ratings.

SECRET

27th February,

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Sir,

I have the honour to submit the following report.

2. All times referred to are Zone plus 3.
3. At 1115P, 25th February, 1944, H.M.C.S. "COLUMBIA", upon being relieved by the Ocean Escort - E.G. B-7 - parted company from Convoy HX.280 and proceeded towards St. John's, Newfoundland. The departure position was $44^{\circ} 39' N 52^{\circ} 59' W$, based on a Sun Position Line obtained at 1000P and an M/F.D/F. bearing from Cape Race, course 015° , speed twenty knots. The position referred to above was considered doubtful.
4. Previous to this Radar type 271 had become defective, in addition to the echo sounding machine. At 1200P speed was increased to twenty-four knots. A series of M/F.D/F. bearings at hourly intervals was obtained from Cape Race and another Sun Position Line, of doubtful value, was obtained at 1200P. The weather at this time was light NNW wind, light sea and swell, overcast with occasional rain squalls, mean visibility approximately five miles. At 1500P course was altered to 005° , speed twenty-five knots.
5. At 1845P, in view of decreasing visibility, speed was reduced to fifteen knots. At 1855 course was altered to 340° on the strength of bearings obtained from Cape Race, Torbay, and Broadcast Station VONF, the latter bearing being of no value.
6. From approximately 1710P the SW2C had been in operation. From about 1800 on a number of land echoes were reported on all bearings which were obviously of no value. At this time the ship was proceeding through numerous patches of soft flow ice.
7. At 1903P, a land echo was reported ahead, distance 1.5 miles. Within a matter of seconds, which were timed by the Officer of the Watch, range was reported as .5 miles. By then, having no faith whatever in the SW2C bearings, this I also considered to be unreliable and of no practical navigational value. What appeared to be a large cloud effect loomed ahead, which within a few seconds I classified as land. Both engines were immediately rung full astern, and the ship struck a practically perpendicular cliff head on. Almost instantaneously the propellers imparted sternway to the ship.
8. By this time darkness had settled down, which together with dense fog rendered visibility nil. (The) echoes of land echoes were then reported from SW2C

CAPTAIN (S)

FEB 28 1943

NEWFOUNDLAND

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which were useless as land was being reported all round. On the stern bearing no echoes were reported but the after lookouts reported breakers dead astern and land could be seen at a distance of approximately fifty yards. The ship was stopped at this time. The impact had thrown all the compasses out, and no reliance could be placed on them. With the ship stopped, the compasses settled and I managed to get into open water relying on compass courses. A signal - priority "Emergency" - was sent to the Flag Officer Newfoundland, and shortly afterwards a signal was received from H.M.C.S. "TROIS RIVIERES" indicating that he was in the vicinity and offering assistance. At this time the ship's position was in extreme doubt.

9. A rating had been trapped by a bulkhead in the Asdic compartment forward, and several hours were spent in extricating him. This limited my use of the engines ahead, as there was grave danger of his drowning had more strain been put on the bulkhead. This rating was finally removed, and a series of W/T bearings exchanged with H.M.C.S. "TROIS RIVIERES". These bearings, together with the courses steered, indicated the ship had struck a cliff in Motion Bay. Contact was established with H.M.C.S. "TROIS RIVIERES" in dense fog at 2320P. At 2355P H.M.C.S. "TROIS RIVIERES" led off for St. John's and escorted the ship to a position off the entrance of the harbour, where the diaphone at Fort Amherst was picked up. Passed gate at 0132P/26 and berthed Number 4 Jetty, H.M.C. Dockyard, at 0135P.

10. The rating who had been trapped in the Dome compartment had died a few minutes after his removal, in spite of every effort made by the Medical Officer. Another rating who at the time of the collision had been in the same compartment had been dangerously injured and was landed immediately on the ship's arrival.

11. The ship sustained severe damage forward. The fo'c'sle was crushed from the stem aft to Number 12 bulkhead which, while buckled, held.

12. Upon berthing, assistance was immediately available from all Departments concerned.

13. I consider the conduct of the Officers and ship's company, through a trying several hours, to have been exemplary.

I have the honour to be,

Sir,

Your obedient Servant,

R. S. MacNeil

Lieutenant-Commander, R.C.N.R.

The Captain (D) Newfoundland,
ST. JOHN'S, Newfoundland.

No. 203-184.
To: THE FLAG OFFICER NEWFOUNDLAND.

Forwarded.

- 2. It is recommended that a Board of Inquiry be convened.
- 3. Form E.33E will be forwarded immediately on receipt.

J. M. Rowland

(J. M. Rowland),

A/CAPTAIN, R. C. N.,

28-2-44. CAPTAIN (D) NEWFOUNDLAND.

The following information was received from the Flag Officer, Newfoundland, on 28-2-44, in reference to the above-mentioned case:

On 27-2-44, the vessel "St. John's" was reported to have been sighted by the "St. John's" on the 27th inst. at 10:30 p.m. The "St. John's" was reported to be on a course of 100 degrees and to be making 10 knots. The "St. John's" was reported to be carrying a cargo of coal and to be bound for St. John's.

The "St. John's" was reported to be in company with the "St. John's" and to be making 10 knots. The "St. John's" was reported to be carrying a cargo of coal and to be bound for St. John's.

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