

ROYAL CANADIAN MOUNTED POLICE

F. 237

20



DIVISION FILE No. 44 H 637-2-96

DIVISION "H"

SUB-DIVISION Yarmouth

DETACHMENT Digby.

PROVINCE Nova Scotia,

DATE 29-9-44.

FILE REFS.

RE:

Stoker 11 Alexander Ray BELANGER. V.82824.
Accidental Drowning,
Annapolis Basin, Anna, Co, N. S.

HEADQUARTERS

SUB-DIVISION

44-1-265

DETACHMENT

44-7-62

P.C.R.

First.

A. R. V. No.

DIARY DATE

SET FOR.....

1. With reference to the above, at 9 A.M. this date a phone call was received from Lt. P.A. Hoare, Naval Staff Shore Patrol Officer, HMCS "Cornwallis", Cornwallis, N. S. to effect that a Rating had been drowned off a Harbour Craft, the night before, and that so far the body had not been recovered. Lt. Hoare requested the assistance of this Detachment in investigating the matter further.
2. The writer patrolled to Cornwallis, N.S. where it was learned that Stoker 11 Alexander Ray BELANGER. V.82824, age 18 yrs, attached to H.M.C.S. "BUXTON" a Training Ship belonging to H.M.C.S. "Cornwallis", had been drowned the night before at approx. 11-45 P.M. while on his way to his ship via Harbour Craft from Digby. N. S., inquiries so far indicated the deceased had been drunk, and had rolled overboard. Although an immediate search was made, also a more extensive one later by four Harbour Craft, the body had not been seen. The night was quite dark with some wind, sufficient to make an occasional white cap.
3. Due to the heavy sea running this date, and the lapse of time since the body had been missing, it was considered useless to drag for the body, search parties though were on the look out on the beach, and all Craft had been advised to keep a sharp watch while on patrol.
4. On interviewing Lt. H.A. THOMPSON, who had been on the Harbour Craft at the time, it was learned that the body had been lost two cables from H.M.C.S. "Chicoutimi", 274 degrees true from No. 5 Bouy. Roughly speaking 500 yards West of the Jetty at HMCS "Cornwallis". Lt. Thompson stated he was in the wheelhouse of the Harbour Craft, when the call "Man overboard" was heard, the craft had turned sharply, and followed its own wake, but nothing of the body could be found. He had then gone aboard HMCS "Chicoutimi" and sent a signal ashore.
5. It was further learned that two ratings on H.M.C.S. "Saguenay" had been on the Harbour Craft, and had witnessed the drowning. Accompanied by Lt. Hoare the writer patrolled to the "Saguenay" via Harbour Craft, where it was learned that Ldg/Writer, Allan Herbert McGIBBON and A.B. Robert ROLLICK. V-60894 had been on the Harbour Craft in question. McGIBBON stated he saw Stoker 11 BELANGER on the Jetty in Digby, at which time he had to be held up by a friend, and that two of them had to help him aboard the Harbour Craft. That BELANGER was put on the roof of the cabin, aft of the wheelhouse, and that when about halfway between the HMCS "Annapolis" and HMCS "Chicoutimi" he heard an unknown P.O. holler "Man Overboard", he looked to where BELANGER had been on the roof of the cabin, and saw he was gone. (Statement attached)
6. A.B. ROLLICK stated he saw BELANGER brought aboard the Harbour Craft by two of BELANGER's friends, saw him put on top of the cabin, and when the craft was about halfway between the "Annapolis" and "Chicoutimi" the craft had given a list to Port, and saw the drunken rating go overboard. (Statement attached)

O V E R -

Accidental Drowning.

Annapolis Basin, Anna, Co, N. S.

7. Patrol was then made to H.M.C.S. "Buxton", where it was learned that Cook (s) Royal E. McMILLAN, V.71997 had been on the H. C. and was standing on the starboard side with his back to the cabin, that he had seen Stoker 11 BELANGER and Stoker 11. Adam ARMBRUSTER, V.83199, on top of the cabin, and that ARMBRUSTER had his arm around BELANGER's head, That on just happening to look around, he saw BELANGER roll off the top of the cabin, hit the gunwale and drop into the water. McMILLAN stated he did not think BELANGER came up after he dropped. (Statement attached)

8. Adam ARMBRUSTER, Stoker 11, V.83199, age 19 yrs. stated he had accompanied the deceased ashore at Digby, together with Stoker 11, Harold LECKIE, V.83084, S.P.O. Ralph, and Ld. Stoke BERNIER, that they had got 2 dozen quarts of beer at the Liquor Store; taken it to a friends home, where they had consumed most of it, also that some other person had had a quart of whiskey, from which they all had had several drinks. That LECKIE, BELANGER and he had left the house to catch the 11 P.M. Harbour Craft, and that BELANGER had been so drunk, that he had to be assisted down to the Jetty, and then aboard the Craft. That they had laid him down on top of the bain roof, and he had stayed with him, putting his arm under BELANGER's head, and his arm over him. That he must have fallen asleep shortly after leaving the Annapolis, for he did not feel BELANGER move, but was awakened by some one yelling "Man overboard". ARMBRUSTER stated he was not drunk himself although he was feeling "good", but knew what he was doing.

9. Stoker 11, Harold LECKIE, V.83084, age 18 yrs. corroborated ARMBRUSTER's statement as to obtaining the liquor, the consumption of it and some whiskey, also of helping BELANGER down to the Harbour Craft. Of speaking to the Cox'n about looking after BELANGER, and of being told he would put some one to look after him. He had then gone to the stern of the boat. Later he heard some one holler there was a man overboard, and of seeing a hat in the water after the boat had circled around, of trying to reach it, but had fallen overboard, and had been rescued by ARMBRUSTER. LECKIE also said he was not drunk, but just feeling good. (Statement attached)

10. On interviewing Ld./Seaman Fletcher Reginald SMALL, A.2443, who was Cox'n on Harbour Craft 215. Who stated he did not see BELANGER come aboard, but on leaving the wharf, he walked aft, and noticed a Rating on top of the cabin, aft of the wheelhouse, with two men with him. Had ordered one back to the stern; and had ordered the other Rating to hang onto the Rating's coat, (BELANGER) and look after him. The reason he did this, was because he had had considerable trouble with drunks in the cabin through them being sick over every one in the cabin, and considered it advisable to keep them outside, where they would be out of the way. About 58 minutes after leaving (11.58 P.M.) he heard the call "Man Overboard", had ordered full ahead, and made a full circle until he came to his own wake, when he had followed same for 100 yards, but without seeing the man, he had then searched for 20 or 25 minutes, when the engine had failed, after working on it for 15 minutes he got it started again, and had gone to HMCS "Chicoutimi", where Lt. THOMPSON had sent a signal ashore. Ldg/Sea. SMALL said it was a dark night, but not too dark, with just a light breeze. (Statement attached)

11. On top of the cabin of the Harbour Craft, is a small railing, used for a hand hold when walking on the wash board, this railing would not be more than two inches high, and would under no consideration hold a body that was rolling, in the writer's opinion, the top of the cabin would be the most dangerous place



44-7-62

First.

Stoker 11. Alexander Ray BELANGER.
V.82824. Accidental Drowning.
Annapolis Basin, Anna. Co, N. S.

THE MOST DANGEROUS PLACE to put a helpless person, for if the boat should take a list, as apparently happened in this case, there is nothing to stop them from going over the side.

12. Both ARMBRUSTER and LECKIE stated they had no Liquor Permit, and so far as they knew BELANGER did not have one. The liquor purchased being made by one of the others on the party, but they said they did not know which one had made the purchase.

13. The following telegram was sent to the O.C. "H" Div'n, confirmation copies attached;-

"Stoker 11 Alexander Ray BELANGER.V.82824 reported drowned
Annapolis Basin 12-30 A.M. 29-9-44 Body not recovered
A. S. Rankin.

13. This telegram was sent prior to ascertaining the correct time from Ldg./Sea. SMALL.

14. As stated in para. 3, it is considered useless to drag for the body, from past experience it has been proven that the body lost in the Annapolis Basin moves quite fast, due to the tides and currents. So far the writer has had six drownings in the Annapolis Basin, and although extensive dragging has taken place, also used divers and planes, not one had been recovered by these means, but all bodies have in time been recovered, with the exception of one. The time a body will float and be found, has varied from two weeks to six weeks. In view of this, it is not intended to drag, but to keep a sharp watch on the beaches and the water.

15. In view of the above, it is requested that Diary date be set as marginally noted.

16. The following statements are attached hereto;-

- Statement of Ldg/Sea.Fletcher R. SMALL. N.2443.
- " " Ldg./Wrt. Allan H. McGIBBON. V.18335.
- " " A. B. Robert ROLLICK. V.60894.
- " " Stoker 11. Adam ARMBRUSTER. V.83199.
- " " " " Harold LECKIE. V.83084.
- " " Cook (S) Royal E.McMILLAN. V.71997.

S. U. I.

A. S. Rankin Const.
A. S. Rankin. Reg. No. 11135.
L/C Digby Detachment.

O. C. "H" Division.

FORWARDED: Enclosures attached as mentioned. The investigation in this instance may be considered as one of assistance to the Department concerned as indicated in the foregoing, and as the incident is apparently of accidental nature no additional action is being taken, other than suitable enquiry and observation to assist in the location of the body, which will then be referred to the Department concerned.

S. U. I.

Yarmouth, N.S.

DIV. D.D. Oct. 2, 1944
10-11-44.

J. M. McIntosh
(J. M. McIntosh) Insp.
Comm'g Yarmouth S/Div'n.



44-7-62

First.

Y. S. D.
D. D.
5-11-44.

H.M.C.S. "SAGUENAY"
September 29, 1944.

STATEMENT OF LDG. WRITER ALLAN HERBERT MCGIBBON, V-18335

I got on the Harbour Craft at Digby at 11 P.M., 28th September, 1944. I sat in the Stern of the craft. I saw Belanger on the jetty - another sailor was holding him because he was drunk. Two sailors helped Belanger down to the craft as he was unable to walk. He was put on top of the Cabin behind the wheelhouse. When about half way between the "Annapolis" and "Chicoutimi" I heard a P.O. holler "man overboard". The Harbour Craft stopped and swung right around to search for the body. I did not see Belanger go overboard, but when the P.O. hollered I looked to where the drunken sailor had been and saw he was gone. 16

It was a very dark night, with a heavy sea running, and just started to rain. This would be about 11.20 P.M.

(Signed) A.H. McGibbon
Ldg. Wtr. V-18335

H.M.C.S. "SAGUENAY"
September 29, 1944.

STATEMENT OF A.B., ROBERT ROLLICK, V-60894

I got on the Harbour Craft at Digby at 11 P.M. September 28, 1944. I saw a sailor brought aboard by two of his friends - he was very drunk. They put him on top of the cabin behind the wheelhouse. The two friends were watching him. I was sitting in the stern. When between the "Annapolis" and "Chicoutimi" all at once the Harbour Craft took a list to the Port side and saw the drunken rating go overboard. I started to yell and so did all the rest - about 10 of us. The two ratings who brought him aboard were on top of the cabin. I heard them tell some one afterwards that "They were asleep" when their friend fell overboard. This occurrence happened about 11.45 P.M. 28th September, 1944.

It was very dark with a heavy sea running.

(Signed) R.M. Rollick.

OCT 31 A.M.

1944

STATEMENT OF Adam ARMBRUSTER, Stoker II, V-83199, Age 19 years.

Stoker II Belanger, Lecki, S.P.O. Ralph, Ldg. Stoker Bernier and I went ashore at 5 p.m. on September 28th, 1944, and we got 2 dozen quarters of beer from the Liquor Store and took it to a friend's house; some other chap that we met at the party had a quart of whisky. Belanger got pretty drunk. Lecki and I took him down to the Harbour Craft. We had practically to carry him down. We put him on top of the cabin behind the wheelhouse on the Port side. I laid down beside him with his head on my arm. I had the arm over him.

After leaving the "Annapolis" I fell asleep. I believe Belanger was asleep for he did not move from Digby to way past the "Annapolis". I woke up when I heard some one yell "Man Overboard". I looked around for Belanger but could not find him, and some one told me it was he that had fallen overboard, But I couldn't believe it. I felt nothing when Belanger fell from my arm. I would not say I was drunk, as I knew what I was doing. I was feeling good though.

The Cox'n told me to look after Belanger when we came aboard.

(Signed) Adam Armbruster.

H.M.C.S. "BUXTON",
September 29, 1944.

STATEMENT OF STOKER II, HAROLD LECKIE, V-83084, Age 18 years

I went ashore with S.P.O. Ralph, Ldg. Stoker Bernier, Stokers II Armbruster and Belanger. We got 2 dozen beer from the Liquor Store and went to a friend's house where we drank most of the beer. Another chap, not with us, had a quart of whisky from which we all had several drinks. Armbruster, Belanger and I left to catch the 11 p.m. Harbour Craft. Belanger was real drunk, while Armbruster and I were feeling good. We put him on top of the cabin. I asked the Cox'n if I should stay there and look after him, he said no he would put some one there to look after him, so I went in the stern of the boat. Armbruster was standing beside Belanger.

After leaving one ship I heard some one holler there was a man overboard. The craft lirched around and I saw a hat in the water. I leaned over to pick it up and whatever I had hold of broke off and I fell overboard. Armbruster pulled me back aboard. When I came up I did not see the body anywhere.

(Signed) Harold R. Leckie

H.M.C.S. "BUXTON"
September 29,

STATEMENT OF COOK (S), ROYAL E. McMILLAN, V-71997

I was aboard the Harbour Craft from Digby at 11 P.M. of September 28th, 1944. I was standing on the Starboard side of the cabin, with my back to the cabin. Stoker II Belanger was on top of the cabin. Stoker II, Armbruster, also on top of the cabin and had his arm around Belanger's head. When about half way between the "Annapolis" and the "Chicoutimi" I happened to turn around and saw Belanger roll off the top of the cabin, hit the gunwale and drop into the water. I do not think Belanger came up after he dropped.

It was a dark night with not much of a sea running.

(Signed) R.E. McMillan

H.M.C.S. "CORNWALLIS" 17

29th September, 1944.

STATEMENT OF LDG. SEAMAN FLETCHER REGINAL SMALL, A-2443

I was on duty as Coxswain on Harbour Craft 15 on September 28th 1944 from 9 a.m. I was at the Digby Wharf at 11 P.M. of that date. On leaving the wharf I went back aft to get the passengers into the aft. cabin. I noticed one rating laid out on the top of the cabin aft of the wheelhouse. There were two men with him. I drove one rating back. Ordered the other rating to hang on to the rating that was laid out. I took his hand and put it on the rating's coat. I then left and returned to the wheelhouse. About 58 minutes later we heard a call "Man Overboard". I ordered full ahead and turned a full circle to Port until I came to my own wake, which I followed back for approx. 100 yards, all the while shining my searchlight. When the call came I ordered a life ring thrown overboard, but nobody responded. We searched for 20 to 25 minutes when our engine failed. After we got the engine going we proceeded to the "Chicoutimi" where we Lieutenant Thompson sent a signal ashore.

It was a dark night with a light breeze, just enough to make an occasional white cap.

(Signed) Fletcher Small.

H.M.C.S. "CORNWALLIS" 17

29th September, 1944.

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It was a dark night with a light breeze, just enough to make an occasional white cap.

(Signed) Fletcher Small.

ROYAL CANADIAN MOUNTED POLICE

F. 237

DIVISION FILE No. **44H 637-2-96**

DIVISION

"H"

SUB-DIVISION

Yarmouth

DETACHMENT

Digby,

PROVINCE

Nova Scotia,

DATE

2-12-44.

FILE REFS.

RE:

Sto. 11 Alexander Ray BELANGER, V.92624,
Accidental Drowning,
Annapolis Basin, Anna, Co, N. S.

HEADQUARTERS

1. Further to the above, nothing further has been learned regarding the whereabouts of the body of the above named since submitting the last report.

SUB-DIVISION

2. The above named was drowned in the Annapolis Basin, Anna, Co, on the night of Sept, 28th, while going from Digby to H.M.C.S. "Buxton" via Harbour Craft; since then a sharp watch has been kept by all Naval Craft, and local fishermen, also by residents living along the shore of the Basin, but without success.

44-1-265

DETACHMENT

3. As it is now nine weeks since BELANGER was drowned, there is not much hope that his body will be recovered. It is therefore requested this file be considered closed, to be reopened should the body be recovered.

44-7-62

P.C.R.

CONCLUDED. HANDED OVER.

6-11-44.

A. S. Rankin Const.
A. S. Rankin, Reg, No, 11135.
1/C Digby Detachment.

O. C. "H" Division.

FORWARDED: In view of the foregoing, it is considered this file may be closed at this point, subject to re-opening should the body be recovered at a later date.

A. R. V. No.

CONCLUDED. HANDED OVER.

Yarmouth, N.S.
Dec. 4, 1944

(J. H. McIntosh) Insp.
Comm'g Yarmouth S/Div'n.

The Commander-in-Chief,
Canadian Northwest Atlantic,
Area Combined Headquarters,
17 South St., HALIFAX, N.S.

1. FORWARDED FOR YOUR INFORMATION. The body of the above named deceased has not been recovered and no further correspondence will be forwarded pending definite information concerning it.

Halifax, N.S.,
11-12-44

C3:MR

(A. N. Eames)

Asst. Comm'r.,

Commissioner, OTTAWA.

Commanding "H" Division.

DIARY DATE

1. FORWARDED FOR YOUR INFORMATION.

SET FOR.....

2. CONCLUDED - HANDED OVER.

Halifax, N.S.,
11-12-44

C3:MR

(J. A. Peacock)

S/Insp.,

for Officer In Charge C.I.B.

DEC 21 A.M.