
Ketchikan Alaska Chronicle 9/22/1945

Ship Total Loss; One Man Missing

Beaten and lashed by a wild sea of flames, the steamer Prince George made her last voyage this morning as hundreds of persons lined the docks starting in honest disbelief, the proud ship choked with burst of fire and smoke before navy escort destroyers pulled close and towed the ill-fated vessel around Pennock island to her fiery grave. Coast Guardsmen and city firemen fought desperately to save the 325-foot liner so familiar to Ketchikanites who all during the war years depended on her Saturday morning arrival. Coast Guard and city doctors stood by to handle first aid cases.

Only 10 minutes after she docked at 8:10 this morning the fire alarm sounded. Fire, starting in the engine room, swept rapidly through the vessel but all passengers were up and off the ship in a few minutes after Stewardess Mary (Ozzie) Hutchison went from cabin to cabin to warn them the ship was afire.

FUTILE EFFORTS

Crews of firemen, Coast Guardsmen and civilians were on the spot, fire hose covered nearly every foot of the dock and chemicals arrived. For more than an hour scores of firemen used every facility available in a futile attempt to bring the blaze under control but when every effort was expended the ship had to be taken away from the dock.

Expressing the sentiment felt by hundreds of local people, Stewardess Hutchison fighting to keep the tears back, stood on the dock, "I never thought I would stand and see her burn up. I'm just watching my home burn." she said as the battered smoke blackened ship limped away on her dramatic last sailing.

For more than two decades the Canadian line has sent the George on its roundtrip here and her passing is "like losing an old friend" as one observer commented.

ONE MAN MISSING

One man was missing at muster held this afternoon by the ships captain, out there was a possibility he was picked up by one of the several craft which stood by. He is Verdun H. McDaniel, a fireman. When the ship was pulled away from the dock, 50 persons were aboard, all ship's officers and crew members. They were removed from the blazing steamer by the Coast Guard frigate Annapolis. Two men, one a member of the crew, were overcome by smoke and treated at the Coast Guard hospital. They were discharged later. The men were Lugi Villanaua, bellman, and Marshall Douglass from Prince Rupert.

SHIP'S OFFICER

Percy Smith, Price Rupert, third officer on the George, who lost all but the clothes he was wearing, said. "I was asleep when the fire started. I awakened and smelled smoke and got up immediately. When I realized what had happened I ran to the next cabin to awake the ship's night baker and get him out. "Mr. Smith said he had told the captain he wanted to get off at Prince Rupert last night but had been persuaded to stay on for this trip.

"I think it's wonderful the way the Coast Guard and fire department handled the fire. I have never seen firemen be on the job so fast," he said.

Mrs. William Wikstrom, a passenger on the ship, said she and her cabin partner were searching for the stem of her watch in the room before the alarm rang. The two of them commented on how hot the floor was and only minutes later realized why.

However, everyone aboard ship, the 96 crew members and passengers, literally thanked God the tragedy did not occur at sea during the night.

Emery Tobin and party visited the beached ship this afternoon and report there will be little if any salvage. The upper hull is bent inward and the forward mast toppled at 1:45.

Ketchikan Alaska Chronicle 9/24/1945

Blazing at Dock, Prince George Rescuers Faced Danger of Exploding Boilers

Coast Guard boats standing by the smoldering hulk of the once-proud Prince George, Canadian Pacific passenger liner, reported this morning that two of her smokestacks had fallen in and the third was leaning sideways. Her masts also had gone.

The \$500,000 steamer, her bow resting on two rocks but her stern still out in the current between Gravina and Pennock island, listed to port. Her lifeboats, which might have been dropped overboard early during the fire Saturday morning alongside the Heckman dock, also had been burned to a crisp, according to hundreds of Ketchikan persons who went over to view her over the weekend.

BLAZING ALL NIGHT

From north Tongass and north Second street the burning liner could be seen all night long Saturday by residents, dozens of whom took pictures of her from the outer Newtown district. About 10 p.m. Saturday one of the oil tanks on her apparently exploded, for flames lighted the sky for miles around. Later through the night the flames got to her other tanks as the tide went down.

Heavy oil covered the water for miles in her vicinity. Obviously flaming oil was what kept her hulk burning and smoking this morning. Several times after the explosions, however, the oil burned atop the water. A pile of potatoes—for Wingren's store—on her forward deck had been baked, then burned to a char.

After the tug General Kennedy had let the George glide onto Pennock island Saturday morning and prepared to cut loose, the tide came in and floated her back so she started to drift back into the channel. Fearing the ship might become a torch to the city of Ketchikan, Commander Jensen of the ship control office, USCG, had the Canadian army tug take her farther around the island and beach her among the rocks on Gravina island. There, with the tide out, she is arched into the sky,

MONTEREY RESCUES SIX

Chief Engineer Munroe and five crewmen who had been below fighting fire — some of them sent there by Captain Neill MacLellan of Vancouver — were taken off the burning George by the Coast Guard subchaser Monterey. The 98-foot Coast Guard boat drew alongside the stern and the men leaped down onto her through smoke and flames. Some were sick from smoke and fumes and left their belongings behind them.

The Monterey had edged in between the George and Heckman dock to fight the fire when the General Kennedy began to tow the ship. That brought the stern hard into the dock, forcing the Monterey to back out full speed to avoid being sandwiched between the ship and the dock.

Fire was leaping from port holes below the deck when the ship was towed away, so the dock probably would have caught fire if the ship had remained alongside.

BOILERS WERE SIZZLING

Crewmen on the Kennedy thought safety valves on the George allowed steam to escape from her boilers, ending the threat of an explosion, but members of the Monterey's crew said they could hear the boilers sizzling even after the ship was beached. The skipper of the Monterey took some men onto the stern of the ship with a hose and were making some headway against the fire when ordered off for fear she would tip over.

"We could see the ribs of the George through her red-hot plates," a crewman of the Monterey told the Chronicle. "We had to move in carefully through bolts of flame to get those six men off." Later, plates of the steamer melted and buckled, spreading the rivets and letting cooling water in.

The frigates Annapolis and Bangor, navy-owned and Coast Guard manned, and the Salvor, a Coast Guard craft, and the army tug Fornance, were in the fleet that fought the fire as the boat moved over to her grave. All ran risk of being covered with flaming oil has the boilers or oil tanks exploded.

Prince George Second for Canadian Tug

For the second time this year the General Kennedy, motor vessel Z70, towed away a flaming ship when it took the Prince George to Gravina island to beach it Saturday, Sergeant Frank Dwyer. Canadian army man aboard the Kennedy, told The Chronicle.

The vessel, operated by the water transport company, Canadian army service corps, also pulled away the Green Hill Park, which exploded at the Vancouver Canadian Pacific dock last spring.

The Kennedy arrived from Prince Rupert only five minutes behind the Prince George Saturday morning, Sergeant Dwyer said. It was bringing the Fortress ball team here for a game. "We had just tied up when we heard an explosion," Dwyer said, and the Kennedy immediately got under way, the first boat on the scene. After rescuing two men clinging desperately to the side of the burning ship, the Kennedy crew put their fire hoses into open.

About an hour later, the Kennedy towed the torch-like ship around Pennock island for beaching. "The first time we put her on Pennock island but the tide was coming in so fast we had to take her downstream for fear the tide would take her back out. It was risky work as she zigzagged down the channel until we could find a satisfactory spot to beach her," Sergeant Dwyer said. 'About 10 minutes before she was safely beached she was a roaring inferno, boilers blew up and the spray hit the deck of our ship."

Ketchikan Daily Alaska Fishing News 9/25/1945

At One Time Local Fire Department Had Fire Out in Liner's Engine Room

Captain W. E. Eastham, of the Ketchikan Fire Department this morning expressed views of the department regarding the splendid co-operation the department received in fighting, not only the recent Prince George fire Saturday morning but in the general way the Coast Guard has worked with the department for the good of the community in general.

However, according to Captain Eastham, he does not believe the local Fire Department was given the credit due it in the fire sighting exhibition displayed in trying to save the Canadian ship Prince George Saturday morning.

Incidents the Captain refers to are as follows: The local Fire Departments boat laid four hose lines, three with water and one with foam, into the boat. The Department extinguished the flames in the engine room at one time.

Seven of the ship's crew, one of whom was overcome by smoke, were removed from the burning boat by members of the Dept. One of these men of the crew was reported missing and was rechecked and accounted for by the Ketchikan Fire Department.

Thirty-two members of the local Department took part in fighting the George fire. The regular crew were on duty for four hours. The boat crew worked five and a half hours. No one was injured.

EDITOR'S NOTE: We believe that the Ketchikan Fire Department that the Ketchikan Fire Department is the best department in Alaska and it is taken too much for granted they will always be on the job that possibly is the reason they are not given the credit they deserve.

Ketchikan Alaska Chronicle, 9/26/1945

Survivors of Ill-Fated Prince George Leave for South Tomorrow

Photo caption

Survivors of the ill-fated Canadian National lines steamer Prince George are shown above at the Coast Guard's barracks 3, near the city ball park, where they have been housed since their ship was destroyed by fire Saturday. Below a group of survivors read Monday's Chronicle, which contained five photos of the destructive fire in which many lost all their personal belongings.

Fire victim's Body Found

The body of Verdun McDaniel, fireman who lost his life in the Prince George fire Saturday, was recovered by a party of ship's officers who boarded the wreckage today. The group went to Gravina island with Superintendent G. A. MacMillan of Canadian National lines this morning by Coast Guard boat.

Insurance inspectors from Vancouver may arrive tomorrow for an investigation.

Prince George Crew Leaving

The officers and men from the ill-fated Prince George, the majority of whom spent the past five days as guests of the U.S. Coast Guard, are to leave for Vancouver tomorrow on the Prince Rupert.

The 88 men from the liner were treated as though they were just another draft of Coast Guardsmen.

They volunteered for work details, their cooks helped out in the galley and the waiters served tables.

The canteen was opened to them and they purchased cigarettes and beer at servicemen's prices.

The appreciation of the treatment they received was emphasized by Arthur H. Robson, Prince George purser, who said:

"I can't tell you how much we all enjoyed our stay here as guests of the Coast Guard. The boys are all tickled and there is not one of us who is not sorry to leave."