

We sincerely hope that our features concerning the loss of the steamers CITY OF BANGOR and ALTADOC (I) on the Keweenaw Peninsula in the autumn of 1926 and 1927, respectively, were not omens of bad things to come, but in the late autumn of 1989, the dreaded Keweenaw shoreline collected yet another wreck. At about 2:30 a.m. on Monday, December 4th, the United States Coast Guard buoy tender MESQUITE (WLB-305), which was a veteran of lake service and had been built in 1943 at Duluth by the Marine Iron and Shipbuilding Company, grounded on Pinnacle Rock, some three-quarters of a mile off Keweenaw Point, at the eastern tip of the peninsula. At the time of the accident, the 180-foot tender, based at Charlevoix, Michigan, and under the command of Lt. Com. J. R. Lynch, was attempting to replace the Pinnacle Rock summer buoy with a winter marker. Waves were three to six feet high, the wind was southerly at twelve knots, and visibility was ten miles at the time. When she stranded in some seventeen feet of water, MESQUITE suffered hull damage and her engine room flooded. The ship took a slight list to port, but settled solidly on the rocks. Three of the ship's 53 crew members were injured in the grounding, but none seriously. Rescue helicopters were sent to the scene from Traverse City, and the cutters ACACIA, KATMAI BAY and MOBILE BAY were summoned, as well as the tug ANGLIAN LADY. The crew abandoned MESQUITE some four hours after the accident and they were taken to Houghton aboard the Indian freighter MANGAL DESAI, which had responded to MESQUITE's calls for assistance. The injured men were flown to Hancock. The Coast guard made immediate plans to remove 19,000 gallons of diesel bunkers from the grounded cutter, but this work was delayed by the severe weather which developed soon after the accident, and it is not yet certain how much fuel may have escaped into Lake Superior.

Once the fuel was removed and a preliminary survey of the damage completed, it was intended that the U.S. Navy would be called in to handle the salvage of MESQUITE, but the season was too far advanced for work to be begun and it was conceded that the ship would have to remain on the rocks for the winter. On December 14th, the Coast Guard apparently acknowledged to Republican Congressman Robert Davis (a member of the House subcommittee which oversees the Coast Guard) that it was very unlikely that MESQUITE could be salvaged and returned to service, considering the damage which the vessel had sustained and the likelihood that winter conditions, expected to be severe in the area, would cause additional damage to the wreck. The Coast Guard has been assessing the impact which the loss of MESQUITE would have on its lake operations, and the question of whether a replacement vessel should be stationed at Charlevoix if, indeed, MESQUITE is a total loss.

On December 19th, the downbound P & H steamer BEECHGLEN and another vessel became trapped in very heavy ice at the foot of the Neebish Rock Cut in the lower St. Mary's River. Two other P & H steamers, T. R. McLAGAN and ELMGLEN, were also downbound but they were diverted down the Middle Neebish Channel. The McLAGAN made the passage in safety, but the ice forced ELMGLEN out of the channel and she grounded on the Johnson Point turn. At the time of this writing, we had no information as to the extent of any damage to the ship.

Another grounding occurred on December 29th, when the Finnish tanker KIISLA, a regular winter fixture on the lakes, found the bottom in Lake Erie off Buffalo. The vessel's hull was holed, but her inner tanks remained intact, and none of her cargo of some 6,000 tonnes of solvents escaped into the lake. KIISLA was freed the same day and was towed into Buffalo for an inspection of the damage.

While she is laid up for the winter at Sarnia, Ontario, the ULS self-unloader CANADIAN PROGRESS will be repowered by Sandrin Bros. Ltd. The vessel was built in 1963 at Port Weller, and was fitted with two eight-cylinder Ruston & Hornsby diesels. Over the years, however, parts for these engines have become unavailable and it became necessary to consider putting other power in the ship. It is understood that two large Caterpillar diesels will be installed in CANADIAN PROGRESS.