

Tragedy struck on Lake Erie at about 1:30 on the afternoon of Monday, March 18, 1991, when the 65-foot, 1936-built, Port Dover based fishtug CAPTAIN K. sank with the loss of all three members of her crew. Along with several other fishtugs, CAPTAIN K. had been working off Long Point, but her skipper Gary Speight, 49, had decided to move into Long Point Bay. There, with visibility limited by fog and driving rain, CAPTAIN K. was struck broadside by the Canadian Coast Guard ship GRIFFON, which had been laying buoys in the area. The GRIFFON struck the port side of the tug with such force that she cut her almost in half, and CAPTAIN K. sank in less than a minute, leaving nothing but a bit of debris and a small oil slick on the surface some twelve miles out from Port Dover. On March 21st, divers located the wreck of the tug in about 120 feet of water, and noted severe damage to her hull and cabins. The pilothouse was so badly mangled that divers were unable to enter it to look for the still-missing crewmen. There was little damage to GRIFFON, but large streaks of black and white paint on her red bow bore silent witness to the impact between the ships. As a result of the incident, the master of GRIFFON, Capt. Gordon Stogdale, has been relieved of his command, suspended with pay pending the outcome of official investigation into the cause of the collision, and two other GRIFFON crew members also have been relieved of their duties. The federal government awarded to McKeil Marine, of Hamilton, a contract to raise CAPTAIN K., but inclement weather delayed the start of the salvage work until March 30th.

When the Michigan-Wisconsin Transportation Company took its Lake Michigan carferry BADGER out of service on November 16, 1990, the company blamed shallow harbour conditions at Kewaunee, and delays in readying dock facilities at Manitowoc so that the western terminus of the service from Ludington could be moved there. It was stated that it was hoped that service could be resumed in the spring. Recent press reports, however, have suggested that the cessation of service actually was due to "declining revenue". The Ludington City Commission and the Mason County Economic Development Alliance both have expressed grave concern over the effects which the lack of a ferry would have on the economy of the area. A March 13 press report indicated that the City Commission had unanimously endorsed an M.C.E.D.A. plan for the city to buy and operate BADGER in summer-only passenger and auto service. Ludington's transit authority would run the ferry, and hopes are that she could be in operation by June. The report indicated that Glen Bowden, president of Michigan-Wisconsin Transportation, endorsed the plan, but it was stated that the purchase price of the ferry was still under negotiation. No mention was made of what the future might hold for Bowden's other idle ferries, CITY OF MIDLAND 41 and SPARTAN.

During the afternoon of March 2nd, the St. Mary's River ferry SUGAR ISLANDER was damaged in a bizarre incident. A man apparently attempted to walk across the ice from Aune-Osborne Park on the U.S. side to Bayfield Park on the Canadian shore, but fell through into the water. While land crews attempted to fish the man out, the Sugar Island ferry was diverted upriver to assist. The man was rescued, spent the night in hospital, and then was transferred to "a mental illness facility", but SUGAR ISLANDER fared much worse. She struck rocks on the south side of the channel, unshipped the rudders at both ends, and severely damaged both propellers and shafts. The ice was too thick in the area for the ferry to be taken to the Soo, Michigan, drydock and so the Purvis tug ROCKET and the Eastern Upper Peninsula Transportation Authority tug THUNDER BAY broke out a path to the Government Wharf at the Canadian Soo. SUGAR ISLANDER was towed up to the wharf on March 4, and repairs were begun, supervised by Twin City Dry Dock but carried out with Canadian labour. One end of the double-ended ferry at a time had to be lifted from the water and the necessary repairs put in hand. The ferry was out of service for more than a week, but THUNDER BAY maintained the route, carrying six passengers per trip. DRUMMOND ISLANDER could not be brought from DeTour to substitute for SUGAR ISLANDER because of heavy ice in the lower river.