

The HART finally left her dock at the Lakehead, en route to Toronto on what was to have been her last trip of the season, commenced just in time to beat the annual end-of-November expiration of marine insurance. However, the conditions out on Lake Superior were not favourable, and so the HART went to anchor behind the Welcome Islands, which lie in the approaches to the harbour at the Canadian Lakehead. The HART remained at anchor for several days, but the weather did not improve and so Captain Burmeister decided to set out, but to hug the north shore of Lake Superior in an effort to avoid the full fury of the elements.

At a particular point in time when the HART's master felt that his ship was in the vicinity of Otter Island, Burmeister concluded that, as his steamer was making very little headway against the adverse conditions, he would turn the HART and run for the good harbour of refuge available in Jackfish Bay, which is located some eight miles east of the town of Terrace Bay. The visibility was very bad, with blowing snow, and the HART's master was feeling his way along the shore, using a hand lead for depth soundings.

Suddenly, at about 3:50 a.m. on Friday, November 27th, JUDGE HART ran solidly aground, the original grinding impact being followed very quickly by two more as the HART's bow ground over the rocks. In the darkness and blizzard conditions, the crew of the HART had no way of knowing where their ship was, but in reality she had found the Fitzsimmons Rocks, a dangerous shoal area situated in the southwestern approaches to Ashburton Bay. This bay is a deep, open bight positioned between Bottle Point on the west, and Guse Point on the east. This area is to be found at the easterly end of the most extreme northerly portion of the north shore of Lake Superior, and is a remote place indeed, and not the sort of spot in which one would wish to be shipwrecked during a late-season storm.

Immediately after the HART struck, her whistle was sounded to call all off-duty crewmen to the deck. The men worked for two hours trying to chop one of the lifeboats out from under a coating of almost two feet of ice, in case abandonment of the steamer was required. Nevertheless, although soundings indicated that the forward hold was open to the water and flooded to a depth of fifteen feet, and water could be heard entering the hull, it was not considered that JUDGE HART was in any immediate danger. Her engine, however, was kept working ahead in an effort to hold the HART on the rocks, for her master feared that unpleasant things would happen if she were allowed to float free.

On the other hand, her position on the rocks was most uncomfortable for the crew. The gale was blowing at some 53 m.p.h. throughout, and the steamer was covered with ice. One of the pilothouse windows had been kept open to provide better visibility when the ship was under way, and the sash had frozen solid in the open position, making things very unpleasant in the pilothouse. To make things worse there, when the wheelsman was relieved from his watch, his replacement had allowed the pilothouse door to freeze in the open position. Those inside were unable to get it free, and so it also remained open to the wind and the blowing snow.

The water breaking over the after end of the steamer made the galley impossible to use, and so for 36 hours the crew went without any hot food. The master himself spent 43 consecutive hours on the bridge without anything to eat.

When the blizzard finally let up and visibility improved, Capt. Burmeister discovered that there were other vessels sheltering in the vicinity of where the HART had gone aground. The Paterson steamers LAVALDOC and FORT WILDOC were anchored a few miles to the west, and in the same general area was the HART's fleetmate JAMES B. EADS. Capt. Burmeister tried to signal to the EADS by means of Morse Code with a lamp, but this was not successful.

When daylight came on the morning of Friday, November 27th, Capt. Stanley J. Tischart of the EADS observed the rocks that were so close to the bow of the HART, and realized that the canaller was in serious trouble. During the day,