

(a) S. H. ROBBINS (U.S.96445) (47), was upbound for the Lakehead, having passed up at the Soo late in the afternoon of Friday, June 19th. BURLINGTON had been built in 1899, as Hull 34 of the Cleveland Shipbuilding Company, for the Wilson Transit Company. As the ROBBINS, she served Wilson until 1946 when C.S.L. acquired her through R. E. Dwor, of Port Colborne. She was 451.3 x 5.2 x 24.3, 4959 Gross and 3521 Net, and thus was somewhat larger than SCOTIADOC. BURLINGTON was to continue in service through the 1966 season, and was scrapped the following year at Hamilton by the Steel Company of Canada Ltd. SCOTIADOC might well have been expected to serve approximately that long as well, had not her path crossed with that of BURLINGTON some 3½ miles off Trowbridge Island, approximately 18 miles out of Port Arthur, at about 6:00 p.m. on June 20th, 1953.

The crew of each ship knew that the other was in the immediate area, and they were tracking each other by radar and blowing fog signals with their whistles. Capt. George Edgar Morriss, of SCOTIADOC, was certain that the steamers would pass in safety, he later testified, "judging from the sound of her (BURLINGTON's) whistle and the sometimes blacked-out (from 'sea-clutter') image on the (radar) screen", despite the fact that the mate reportedly remarked: "She seems to be coming nearer".

Seconds later, the mate yelled "hard aport". "I thought that was a good command," Capt. Morriss testified. "I saw the BURLINGTON myself then. She was almost at right angles and heading for the middle of our deck." The mate was reported as having said "hard astarboard" at this point. Capt. Morriss testified: "I thought that was a good command, too. By then it was a case of manoeuvring. We were at full speed." Our readers today will be forgiven for wondering why SCOTIADOC was proceeding at full speed under such foggy conditions and with another ship known to be in close proximity!

According to the testimony as reported by "The Telegram", Toronto, on July 23, 1953, "From that (starboard helm) command followed 10 frantic seconds... Engines of the SCOTIADOC were ordered stopped. The danger signal was sounded in five short blasts of the endangered ship's whistle. Then the mate swore 'Here she comes'.

"When the BURLINGTON hit, the SCOTIADOC's master said, the shock wasn't enough to throw him off his feet, yet the stem of the oncoming vessel bore through to the hatch coamings of the SCOTIADOC." Reports indicated that BURLINGTON's bow was stove some eight feet inward by the impact.

The "Telegram" report continued: "Capt. Morriss said he didn't sound the ship's alarm bell as the BURLINGTON slid off into the fog leaving the SCOTIADOC listing to starboard and going down slowly 'by the head'. He said he didn't send anyone specifically to check on all the crew members either. He stood in the pilothouse, after ordering the mate to get the boats over, watching his ship settle and the crew scurry out on deck and start for the lifeboat falls.

"He watched the starboard boat swing out freely and didn't know until later that it had been damaged in a fall to the water. Then he walked down to the port lifeboat and went aboard. 'Second last man off,' he thought. Just before leaving, he talked over the ship's radio-telephone and heard the BURLINGTON's master say 'We're coming back to pick up the crew.'

"In the water, as soon as he could see the other lifeboat, he started a count, Capt. Morriss said, and found one was missing. Later, the five aboard the starboard lifeboat were taken from their craft, then half-filled with icy water, and brought aboard the port boat 'for safety'."

The one man whom Capt. Morriss missed in his head count of those in the two lifeboats was porter Wallace McDermid, of Sault Ste. Marie, a World War Two veteran who wore a steel leg brace as a result of contracting polio. The evidence was that McDermid and four other persons were thrown into the lake when the starboard lifeboat was swamped as it was lowered down the high side