

Shortly after 8:00 p.m. on Saturday, August 11th, there occurred one of the most serious and frightening accidents to be seen on the Great Lakes in many years. The N. M. Paterson & Sons Ltd. bulk carrier WINDOC (II), (a) RHINE ORE (76), (b) STEELCLIFFE HALL (86), was downbound in the Welland Canal, loaded to her mid-summer marks with 26,023 metric tonnes of wheat from Thunder Bay for Montreal and Sorel. As she was passing beneath Bridge 11 at Allandburg, the bridge began to descend prematurely. WINDOC repeatedly sounded danger signals with her tyfon, but to no avail. The bridge span struck WINDOC's pilothouse and stripped it off just above the level of the bridgework bulwarks, also peeling the ship's tall funnel back onto the fantail. The severely wounded ship drifted down the canal to a point near the mouth of the power canal, at which point she came to rest after the crew dropped her starboard anchor. A major fire then erupted in her accommodations, possibly as a result of the emergency generator fuel tank being tipped over into the hot, exposed exhaust piping. It was late the following day before the fire was extinguished, the accommodations having been gutted. Meanwhile, the ship was down by the bow as a result of bottom damage suffered either from contacting the east canal bank or from running over her own anchor.

Fortunately, the bridge structure remained upright although considerable damage was caused to the bridge deck and the underside of the span. The bridge finally was lifted on August 13th and it likely will remain open for the rest of the season, with repairs to be done during the winter. That same day McKeil Marine crews got WINDOC moving down to a berth at Thorold with the assistance of the tugs CARROL C. 1, PAUL E. NO. 1, LAC VANCOUVER and PROGRESS, along with the derrick barge HENRY T. Emergency repairs had to be completed before her full condition could be assessed or the cargo removed. Port Weller Dry Docks reportedly has done preliminary estimates of the cost of several different repair scenarios. By the time these words are read, an announcement will have been made as to whether WINDOC will be repaired and, if so, in what manner.

There are two interesting sidebars to this story. The first is that WINDOC is the third of three sisterships to suffer a major accident involving fire. CARTIERCLIFFE HALL (88), (a) RUHR ORE (76), (c) WINNIPEG (94), (d) ALGONTARIO, suffered a major fire in her after end on Lake Superior, June 5, 1979, and six lives were lost. MONTCLIFFE HALL (88), (a) EMS ORE (76), (c) CARTIERDOC (II), had her bridge structure burned out during winter refurbishing at Sarnia on February 26, 1981. At least there were no deaths aboard WINDOC.

The second sidebar is that, to our knowledge, this is only the second time that a Welland Canal vertical lift bridge has been brought down on top of a ship. The first such incident occurred on October 2, 1938, and involved Bridge 21, the C.N.R. rail bridge at Port Colborne, which was brought down on the stack of a passing ship, clearing off her boat deck and almost sinking her in the process. The ship? She was Paterson's WINDOC (I) of 1899, (a) M. A. HANNA (16), (b) HYDRUS (II)(27). Is that weird, or is it not?

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Speaking of things peculiar, how often does it happen that a lakeship, disposed of by its owner as excess tonnage, is later reacquired by the same firm for active service? It happened this summer when the Parrish & Heimbecker organization decided to sell off its lake shipping division and confine its activities to the grain business. P&H approached several vessel operators and finally decided to sell to Canada Steamship Lines. Accordingly on July 9th, the papers were signed that transferred to CSL the 1953-54-built steamer OAKGLEN (II), (a) T. R. McLAGAN (90), and the 1960-built MAPLEGLLEN, (a) CAROL LAKE (87), (b) ALGOCAPE (I)(94). At first it was imagined by observers that this would not be good news for the two ships, and that CSL would be buying them only to obtain P&H's cargo contracts. Instead, however, it would seem that CSL not only wanted the contracts but also the steamers, which will allow the fleet to divert grain cargoes away from its self-unloaders, freeing up the latter for more suitable trades. MAPLEGLLEN