

CLEVELAND was downbound at a speed of 16 m.p.h., but on the upbound course, approximately four miles out from Harbor Beach, Michigan. Her master, Capt. Rudolph J. Kiessling, said later that he saw nothing wrong with not reducing speed as he could hear fog whistles from another ship and, believing that she also was downbound, intended to overtake her. He also admitted that it was normal practice to "cheat" and take the shorter, more shoreward, upbound course when heading down lower Lake Huron rather than following the downbound course which lay some six miles further out in the lake.

Shortly after 6:15, the Norwegian general cargo steamer RAVNEFJELL loomed out of the fog, heading at approximately 45 degrees for a glancing blow to the CLEVELAND's port quarter. RAVNEFJELL, registered at Oslo, Norway, was upbound for Milwaukee and under the command of Capt. Rolf W. Thorsen. Owned by A/S Luksefjell and managed by Olsen & Ugelstad, RAVNEFJELL was a handsome steamer built in 1938 by Nylands Verksted at Oslo, and she was a regular visitor to the Great Lakes, as had been many of the Olsen & Ugelstad ships for a number of years. She was 250.9 x 41.3 x 14.8, 1339 Gross and 743 Net, and she was powered by a low-pressure turbine with direct-reduction gearing and hydraulic coupling.

There was not much time for either ship to take effective evasive action, although attempts were made to steer both ships away from each other and RAVNEFJELL immediately was stopped. CITY OF CLEVELAND III was not stopped until after the impact but her third mate later testified that it was his belief that if the passenger steamer had immediately been stopped, the collision might have been avoided. As it was, however, the bow of RAVNEFJELL bit into the port quarter of the CLEVELAND abaft the paddlebox, cutting some ten feet into the CLEVELAND's superstructure and carrying away some sixty feet of it. Five passengers were killed, four of them in their cabins and one who was up early and walking the decks, and some twenty more were injured to varying degrees. It was fortunate that there were only 89 passengers aboard, together with 160 crew members, or else there likely would have been a massacre of sleeping passengers.

Many of the CLEVELAND's lifeboats were damaged in the collision, so RAVNEFJELL put down her boats and they combed the water for the dead and injured, who then were taken ashore by the Coast Guard rescue boat from Harbor Beach. Amongst those who died in the collision or succumbed after being taken ashore were the Benton Harbor police chief, and a former mayor of the city.

RAVNEFJELL received only minor bow damage in the collision, and after the dead and injured were dealt with, she was allowed to proceed onward to Milwaukee. Although badly damaged, CITY OF CLEVELAND III still was navigable and both her wheels were operable, so she was allowed to go on her way to Detroit, where she arrived at about 11:30 p.m. Her passengers were sent back to Benton Harbor by train, and the ship was taken to the Great Lakes Engineering Works at River Rouge, where the damage was evaluated. Not only were the staterooms abaft the port wheel severely damaged or totally gone, but the entire port side of the after atrium was shoved inward and large timbers were used to brace the gallery decks and keep them from collapsing. The D & C eventually would receive some \$500,000 from its insurers for the damage, but the company indicated that it likely would take \$1 million to put the elegant steamer back in the condition she enjoyed prior to the collision. The D & C would sue RAVNEFJELL and her owners for \$1,250,000 but, in view of the liability situation, it had no hope of succeeding in that litigation.

Whilst CITY OF CLEVELAND III was lying at the shipyard, a Coast Guard enquiry was convened and heard evidence in one of the steamer's parlours. Members of the board were Capt. James A. Hirschfield, Commandant of the Ninth Coast Guard District at Cleveland, Commander George P. Kenny and Lt. Commander T. E. Julian. It would appear that the Board was not sympathetic to the evidence of Capt. Kiessling, and Capt. Hirschfield drew the enquiry's attention to Pilot Rule 12, which required that, upon hearing a fog signal, a vessel should reduce its speed "to bare steerage way and navigate with caution".