

APPENDIX B

WRECK OF THE *ROSECRANS*, 7 JANUARY 1913

Account of the wreck of the *Rosecrans* taken from the *1913 Annual Report of United States Life-saving Service*, 66-74:

Wreck of Steamer "Rosecrans" January 7, 1913.

CAPE DISAPPOINTMENT AND POINT ADAMS STATIONS.

Shortly after 5 o'clock on the morning of January 7, 1913, during the prevalence of a heavy gale with thick weather, the 2,976-ton Associated Oil Co.'s steamer *Rosecrans*, bound from Monterey, Cal., to Portland, Oreg., with a cargo of 19,000 barrels of crude oil, stranded on Peacock Spit, at the entrance to the Columbia River. The vessel and her cargo, valued at \$260,000, were totally destroyed, and 33 of the 36 persons composing her crew perished before assistance could reach them. Two members of the crew—John Slinning, quartermaster, and Brick Lundmark, carpenter—were rescued from the steamer's rigging by the Point Adams life-saving crew several hours after she stranded. The other survivor[sic], Quartermaster Fred W. Peters, drifted ashore on a plank after he had been more than five hours in the water. The names of the lost are given by the owners of the *Rosecrans* as follows: L. F. Johnson, captain; Thos. Mullins, Hans Tonder, and C. R. Palmer, first, second, and third mate, respectively; R. M. Grundell, chief engineer; J. A. McPherson, J. L. Adams, and Norman Fife first, second, and third assistant engineer, respectively; L. A. Prudhont, wireless operator; Milton Elletson, electrician; F. Armstrong and Henry Hendrickson, quartermasters; F. Wilson, steward; Pete Uren, Hjalamar Reistad, Severin Gjosen, Wm. Harden, Chris Murphy, Steve O'Hare, J. McGlinchy, C. Smith J. Olsen, S. Cagna, Pete Hareide, F. Mihan, Knut Larsen, Richard Hannan, James Yeates, Chas. Alt, D. Bryant, H.G. Cross, and Angus McDonald. It appears that still another person was lost, but his name is not in the list furnished by the owners.

The *Rosecrans* left Monterey, Cal., on the afternoon of January 4. Her voyage up the coast was uneventful until the night of the 6th, as she neared the mouth of the Columbia River. On the evening of the date mentioned the wireless operator at Astoria, Oreg., received a message from her master, stating that she would be off the bar on the following morning. As shown by the testimony of the three survivors it was the intention of Capt. Johnson to cross in over the bar at daybreak of the 7th, when the tidal conditions would be more favorable.

Quartermaster Slinning testifies that the steamer passed Tillamook Rock Light "a little before 4 a.m. of the 7th." She was then 14 or 24 miles offshore, steering north 8° west under slow bell. A southerly gale, with a velocity of 60 or 70 miles an hour, accompanied by a heavy following sea, prevailed. The weather was thick and rainy, but light beacons were occasionally visible. Quartermaster Peters testifies that when he came on deck about 4 a.m. to relieve Slinning, he saw

a white light well off the starboard bow which was taken to be the Cape Disappointment Light. Another light visible one-half point on the starboard bow was thought to be the North Head Light. The Columbia River Lightship was not seen at all. It is shown that during the latter part of the night Third Officer C.R. Palmer was on the bridge, and that the master remained below except for a brief interval shortly after 4 a.m., when he came on deck to exchange a few words with Palmer. The steamer held to the course set by the captain—north 80 west—until she stranded at 5.15 a.m.

As to the responsibility for the disaster, the officer of the department who investigated the case has the following to say:

No other conclusion can be reached by me than that the disaster resulted from poor judgment and carelessness on the part of those who were responsible for the navigation and safety of the *Rosecrans*. The vessel must have passed the Tillamook Rock Light earlier than 3.30 a.m., as it is unreasonable to think that she could have covered 19 nautical miles in the next hour and 40 minutes under slow bell. If the course steered is correct, unless the compass was greatly in error the light abeam must have been much more than 21 miles distant, otherwise the vessel would have stranded on Clatsop Beach.

Quartermaster Peters states that when he came on deck at 4 a. m. two lights were visible—one white light well off to starboard bow, which was taken for the Cape Disappointment Light, and North Head Light, visible one-half point on the starboard bow. As the *Rosecrans* at that time was probably at least 7 miles from Peacock Spit (this being determined by the combined speed of the vessel, which was perhaps 3 or 4 knots, and the current setting to the northward with the same velocity), it seems probable that the white light visible broad off the starboard bow was Desdemona Shoals Light. North Head Light, surrounded by mist, was probably not seen at all.

Had the light last seen been North Head Light, the position of the vessel would have been such that the strong ebb tide at the mouth of the river would doubtless have carried her clear of Peacock Spit. She must have passed within 3 miles inside of Columbia River Lightship, which she should have sighted. Capt. Johnson should have remained on deck on approaching the Columbia River bar at night under such unfavorable weather conditions, and stood a course sufficiently broad to make the lightship and carry his vessel outside of danger. It is evident that the ship was far ahead of her reckoning, and that not sufficient allowance was made for the northerly set of the current, the velocity of which had been greatly increased by the southerly gale. Had the *Rosecrans*, after passing Tillamook Rock tight, headed off shore on port tack, with her engines just turning over, she would have drifted to the northward and been in a good position off the bar at daylight.

Peacock Spit takes its name from the U.S. sloop of war *Peacock*, which stranded on the shoal in 1841. The spit has claimed many a good ship. When a vessel grounds there she is either quickly pounded to pieces by the terrific breakers or swallowed up by yielding quicksands. The surf in that locality, always heavy, was extremely so on the morning of January 7.

The steamer struck at a point 14 miles from the shore, and about the same distance west by south of the Cape Disappointment Life-Saving Station. Immediately after the stranding, the master came on deck and gave orders to his wireless operator to flash an "S. O. S." call to the effect that the vessel was on the bar and breaking up. The message was repeated three or four times. Shortly afterwards the operator was instructed to shut off his current, the master being

fearful that the sparks from the apparatus might set the cargo on fire. The call was picked up by the operator at Astoria, who replied:

O.K. Will send help. About where are you?

To this the *Rosecrans* sent back the following:

Water has washed in the cabins—I can't stay much longer—hel—.

It is not shown that any signals other than those referred to were made aboard the *Rosecrans*. The survivors could not say whether the vessel carried any rockets, blue lights, or other means of making known the fact that they were in trouble. The steamer's whistle was not even blown, doubtless, however, for the very good reason that the engine room was flooded by the time the seriousness of the misfortune was realized. There were life preservers on board, but it appears that several of the sailors did not have them on when the time of need came. The vessel had four lifeboats, but all of them were carried away soon after the stranding. It is doubtful whether they would have shaped differently the outcome of the morning's events had the crew been able to launch them, as no small craft could have survived the smother of the seas breaking against and around the stricken steamer.

Immediately after the steamer grounded the signal was given to reverse the engines full speed, and put the helm hard over. Orders were also given to start the pumps, with the view of emptying some of the oil overboard and thus lightening ship. The vessel answered her helm and started to back, but the mountainous seas that piled down upon her the moment her progress was interrupted tore away her hatches and let a deluge below decks, which put out her fires and extinguished her lights, leaving her helpless and her crew in darkness.

After the engines stopped running the crew assembled below amidships to wait for daylight and the help which all felt assured their wireless call would bring. Just before dawn the foremast carried away and the ship broke in two abaft it. Notwithstanding the wreck and ruin that was taking place above deck, the crew remained under shelter until nearly 9 a.m., by which time the vessel had filled so full as to drive all hands into the open.

All that is known of the events that took place on board the *Rosecrans* is contained in the testimony of the three survivors taken at the official investigation of the disaster. Referring to his own experiences while engaged in the struggle to save himself, Quartermaster Peters, one of the three, says:

When I went on deck I tried to make the wheelhouse, where most of the crew were, and when I got forward of the stack I met Capt. Johnson. He was trying to get up to the wheelhouse, too, but his leg was broken, so we got him on the fiddle, under the overhang of the house. The seas were coming so strong that the after end of the house began to sag, so we had to get out of there. When I got out, a sea washed me to the rail. When the sea cleared I tried to make the rigging, but missed it and fell on the main deck. The next sea took me overboard. I noticed a plank a few feet away, and swam to it. I drifted over toward North Head Light, and thought I was safe until I saw the rocks and the breakers. I tried to swim clear of the rocks, and it seems the current started to take me out to sea. I then drifted up to the north'ard and the breakers got me and took me ashore. I lost my plank when I got into the breakers. I was obliged to cut adrift my life preserver, as it got over my head. I stayed on top of the breakers as best I could all the way in, and then crawled up on the driftwood away from the sea.

The place where Peters made land was Tioga Beach, 5 miles up the coast from the scene of the disaster. A gunner found him as he lay helpless on the strand, and with the assistance of others carried him to a near-by house, where he was given first-aid attention and medical treatment. Later the keeper of the Klipsan Beach Life-Saving Station, who had learned of his coining ashore, arrived, took him in charge, and continued to administer restorative treatment.

Quartermaster Slinning, another of the survivors, was also under shelter when the vessel struck. On gaining the deck he climbed up on the bridge. Referring to what happened to him he says:

There were a number of men besides myself on the bridge. As the big seas lifted the bridge and pilot house off, I first grabbed the exhaust pipe, held on to that for a while, then got around the after part of the smokestack. A sea struck me from there, and sent me over the rail. I held onto the rail until the sea had passed. Then another sea took me to the after rail, and I got up into the main rigging.

Slinning says he saw "quite a number" washed overboard. Two others beside himself—Carpenter Erick Lundmark and a member of the engine-room force named S. Cagna—succeeded in getting into the main rigging. After remaining aloft for several hours, Slinning and Lundmark were rescued by the Point Adams life-saving crew, as already stated. The other man succumbed before the rescuers arrived on the scene. While they were alongside the vessel his body dropped into the sea. It was recovered, but was afterwards lost when the Point Adams Station lifeboat broke adrift from the Columbia River Lightship, aboard which the life-saving crew had sought refuge.

Little or nothing is known relative to the experiences of any of the steamer's crew except the survivors, following the occurrence of the disaster. It would seem, however, that most, if not all, of them went overboard with the bridge and the pilot house.

Upon receipt of the "S. O. S." message from the *Rosecrans* the wireless operator at Astoria sent out a general distress call. Getting no response from any other station or any vessel, he called up the agent of the Puget Sound Tugboat Co. at Astoria and asked him to notify the life-saving stations at Cape Disappointment and Point Adams. He also communicated with the wireless operator at North Head, and asked him to notify the station first named. It is shown that the operator at the last-mentioned place tried repeatedly to communicate with the Cape Disappointment Station, but without avail, the telephone wires being out of order. The agent of the tugboat company succeeded, however, in getting word to the Point Adams Station.

Until 8.40 a.m.—3½ hours after the *Rosecrans* went on the shoals—no one on shore had any information as to the location of the vessel. At the time mentioned the surfman keeping the watch from the Cape Disappointment Station lookout tower, situated on the ocean side of the cape a quarter of a mile from the main station building, telephoned to Keeper Alfred Rimer of his station and informed him that a steamer was anchored in the breakers off McKenzie Head. The keeper immediately proceeded to the lookout to observe the vessel for himself, but could barely distinguish her though the thick mist that prevailed. Her bow at that time appeared to be slightly down, but she displayed no distress signals. The keeper promptly called up his station and gave instructions for the power life boat *Tenacious* to be made ready to go to sea. Several minutes later he and his men were on their way to the vessel.

The life-saving crew tried first to go directly around the cape, but found it impossible to stem the furious gale and the strong flooding tide. They thereupon turned back and went through the cutoff between Sand Island and the eastern end of Peacock Spit, but their attempt to reach the steamer by this route was likewise frustrated. Realizing after an hour's struggle the futility of

their efforts to make headway, Keeper Rimer hailed a tug, which it seems had learned of the vessel's plight and ventured out to investigate, and asked to be towed out over the bar. The master of the tug declined, however, to risk the fury of the waters at the river entrance. Nothing daunted, the boat crew renewed their apparently forlorn undertaking, and actually succeeded in crossing Republic Spit unassisted. But mechanical power was finally compelled to yield to the overwhelming force of the elements, and they reluctantly turned back to await the slacking of the tide. They reached their station at 11.30 a.m.

Soon after the return of the Cape Disappointment crew to their station, Keeper Oscar S. Wicklund, of the Point Adams Station (on the south side of the river entrance), arrived with his crew in the service power lifeboat *Dreadnaught*. It appears that the message from the agent of the Puget Sound Tugboat Co. to Keeper Wicklund, notifying him that the *Rosecrans* was in trouble on the bar, was received at the Point Adams Station at 5.30 a.m. The agent had also informed Keeper Wicklund that the tug *Tatoosh* was making ready to go to the steamer's assistance. Being told by the wireless operator at Astoria that the *Rosecrans* was probably in the breakers on Clatsop Spit, Keeper Wicklund sent a patrolman out to the beach to see if such was the case. He also telephoned to the jetty foreman on Point Adams, asking him to run an engine out on the jetty that extends seaward from the point and reconnoiter. This action taken, he ordered his men to get ready for sea.

The life-saving crew first proceeded to the mouth of the river, where the *Tatoosh*, bound on an errand similar to theirs, overtook them. The tug made a thorough exploration of the bar, but no trace of the vessel was to be seen. The search ended, the life-saving crew returned to their station, where they learned that the quest of the patrol and of the jetty foreman had been equally barren of results.

Keeper Wicklund now decided to run across the river and find out whether the Cape Disappointment crew had learned anything of the whereabouts of the *Rosecrans*, telephone communication with that station, as already indicated, having been temporarily interrupted. As he was about to leave the station he was informed by telephone from Fort Stevens that the steamer had run on Peacock Spit, not far from North Head. Deeming it advisable to unite the efforts of the two crews of surfmen, Keeper Wicklund therefore crossed over the river with all possible speed.

The experiences of the two parties of boatmen while attempting to reach the wreck and while endeavoring to rescue the 3 men, who alone of the 36 persons composing her crew could be seen in the rigging of the one mast that still remained standing, are graphically described by Keeper Wicklund in his report to the department and in his testimony given at the official investigation of the disaster.

It appears that immediately upon his arrival at the Cape Disappointment Station, Wicklund put off for the *Rosecrans* unaccompanied by the Cape Disappointment crew, several members of which were then out on the beach watching for any of the seamen who might come ashore. Concerning this attempt, the keeper has the following to say:

All that could be seen of the wreck was the mast sticking up with 3 men clinging to the rigging. I did not have much hope of reaching the vessel, but thought it would encourage those men in the rigging if they saw the lifeboat constantly trying to reach them. I made two attempts, but the boat was entirely submerged, and we were forced to return. I got out only a quarter of a mile from the cape.

When I got back to the Cape Disappointment Station, I talked the matter over with Capt. Rimer, and we agreed that we must reach the vessel if there was any way for us to do so. We concluded we would make another attempt right away, the tide having

slackened. We made up our minds that we would not quit trying as long as there was anyone left in the rigging.

Referring to the trip made by both crews to the wreck during the afternoon, Keeper Wicklund continues:

We left the station together about 12.30 p.m. Capt. Rimer's boat was about 200 yards ahead of mine, due to the fact that he was running at full speed. I slowed down a little against every sea to save my boat from destruction. While the wind had hauled a little to the southwest and moderated somewhat, it was still blowing a gale. The seas filled our boat constantly.

I observed the Cape Disappointment boat (the *Tenacious*) go out between the wreck and the shore, circle around the bow of the ship, and then rim to a position to southward of her. They seemed to be in trouble, as they lay in the same position for quite a while.

The wreck was lying headed west. I ran in as close as I dared toward the starboard quarter and signaled to the men in the rigging to jump, that being in my opinion the only way in which they could be rescued. I circled five times, and got as near the vessel as I dared each time, signaling to the sailors to jump, but they would not do it. As we got near the wreck the fifth time, a terrific sea struck our boat, turning it almost end over end and washing five members of the crew overboard, including myself. We all managed to hang onto the life rails and were hauled back into the boat—all except Surfman Pearson. When the boat righted itself he was more than 300 yards away from us. We had no difficulty, however, in picking him up. At this point we observed the Cape Disappointment crew signaling for assistance. We responded and found that they also had suffered a capsized, which had damaged their boat and stopped their engine. We towed them to the tug *Fearless*, which was standing by outside the breakers. We then returned to the wreck. Just as soon as we got within about 100 yards of the vessel one of the men jumped and was quickly rescued. This was Erich Lundmark, the ship's carpenter. Then another man—John Sunning—jumped and was rescued in the same manner. There was still another man in the rigging, but he was hanging on the ratlines and appeared to be dead. He fell shortly afterwards, struck an iron stanchion, and dropped into the sea. We picked up the body as it drifted toward us.

It was now about 4 o'clock. The sea was still high, and the tide running out strong. We had no chance to return to the harbor, so I shaped our course for the Columbia River Lightship, several miles seaward. We arrived there at 7.15 p.m.

On account of the heavy sea, we experienced considerable difficulty in getting aboard the lightship. We let the boat astern on 50 fathoms of 4-inch rope. The following morning the wind had increased instead of moderated, and the sea was mountain high. The life-saving crew, with the aid of the officers and the men of the lightship, tried three different times during the day to haul the boat alongside to get the remains of the sailor and free the boat of water, but the gale and sea made it impossible to do so without running the risk of killing some one. At 9 p.m. it was found that the boat had gone adrift.

The following day (January 9) the weather moderated sufficiently to permit us to be transferred to the tug *Oneonta*. The tug carried us to our station and took the two survivors to Astoria, where they were cared for by representatives of the wrecked vessel.

Keeper Wicklund expresses the opinion that if the exact location of the vessel could have been ascertained on the morning of the 7th when she struck the spit, the majority, if not all, of her crew might have been saved.

The two tug masters who assisted the life-saving crews upon the occasion of this disaster deserve high praise. The tug *Oneonta* (Charles E. Anderson, master) went out over the bar on the forenoon of the 7th and made an unsuccessful effort to locate the wreck. She went again in the evening of the day mentioned in search for the Point Adams Station crew, reported to be at sea disabled. This second trip of the tug took her clear to the lightship and back toward North Head. She burned blue lights and blew her whistle as she proceeded. Near midnight she turned back again toward the lightship and was rewarded by finding the crew safe aboard the vessel. She stood by all night, hoping to be able to take the life-savers off the next morning. When day came, however, it was still too rough to effect a transfer. She therefore went back to Astoria. On the afternoon of the 9th she again put to sea and brought the crew in.

The tug *Fearless* (E. D. Parsons, master) likewise made search for the *Rosecrans* on the morning of the disaster. She also went out on the afternoon of the same day and reached the locality of the wreck just as Keeper Wicklund was towing the Cape Disappointment lifeboat away from the vessel. Her coming was providential.

It appears that while Keeper Rimer was on his way to the scene of the disaster his boat, the *Tenacious*, sprang a bad leak and the engine became disabled. The engine could be kept running, but it was found impossible to regulate its speed. The crew, nevertheless, ran in near the wreck and tried to persuade the sailors in the rigging to jump. As in the case of the Point Adams crew (whose maneuvers while near the vessel have already been described), they were unable to remain long in a position suitable for effecting a rescue. While waiting 50 yards away from the wreck for a second favorable chance to swing in near the projecting mast they got into a run of tremendously heavy breakers. Their engine stopped and their boat, swept helplessly along, turned turtle. The keeper and two surfmen were washed out, and the boat had its steering, gear and rudder disabled. Telling of what now transpired, Keeper Rimer says:

After a few moments we all managed by the greatest effort to get on board again, but found the boat and engine room full of water. We, nevertheless, manned the oars and tried our best to get back to the wreck. But, notwithstanding our utmost efforts, we failed. As we were in a seething cauldron and unable to handle our boat with oars, I wigwagged to the Point Adams boat to tow us into quieter water, and Capt. Wicklund came and towed us to the tug *Fearless*. We tried to pump our boat out, but it was no use. Her bottom was all split up and her air compartments full of water.

When it was found that the Cape Disappointment boat was no longer serviceable, the *Fearless* started to tow her into the harbor on a 60-fathom 4-inch line. The tug had proceeded only a short distance, however, when Capt. Parsons became apprehensive that the *Tenacious*, which still contained the life-saving crew, would be unable to survive the passage over the bar. As the crew were all badly used up and unable to manage their practically wrecked craft, Surfman Allen of the Point Adams Station—who had been left on shore when his comrades put to sea, but had gone to the wreck aboard the *Fearless*—volunteered to leave the tug, get aboard the trailing power boat, and steer her through the breakers. Capt. Parsons declined to permit him to do so, however, and decided, moreover, to remove to his vessel every man in the boat. The wisdom of his action was shortly to be realized by all hands. While the tug was plowing her way bravely over the surf-swept bar, the towing line snapped. The power boat was no sooner adrift than the

seas caught her up and rolled her over and over. The tug did not dare swing around and attempt to pick her up.

The wreck of the *Rosecrans* will take its place as one of the most lamentable marine casualties in the history of the service. The work of the life-saving crews in attendance, while so meager in results, will likewise stand out conspicuously among the many fine examples of bravery and devotion to duty recorded in the annals of the establishment. Rarely have crews of the service worked against more distressing odds or exhibited a more indomitable spirit. The terrible situation they had to face in their efforts to save the pitiful remnant of the *Rosecran's* crew may be imagined by a perusal, of the following answer made by Keeper Rimer to a question put by the investigating officer as to the state of the seas in and around the wreck:

The seas were confused, going in every direction. One time Capt. Wicklund's boat was headed into a sea which appeared to be 40 feet high. It struck the *Dreadnaught* broadside and I thought he was gone. I started to go to his assistance, but when I looked again I found he was all right.

It is gratifying to state that the services of the life-saving crews and of the masters of the tugs *Oneonta* and *Fearless* were properly recognized by the department. Keepers Rimer and Wicklund, and Captains Anderson and Parsons each received a congratulatory letter from the Secretary of the Treasury. Moreover, each member of the two life-saving crews who performed service at the wreck (16 persons in all) was awarded the gold life-saving medal (see "Awards of life-saving medals," p. 45) bestowed by the department in recognition of heroic daring exhibited in "saving or attempting to save life from the perils of the sea." The Legislature of Oregon, also, adopted a resolution commending by name each man who took part in the day's hazardous work.

Considering the difficulties and dangers experienced by the life-savers on this occasion, it seems little short of miraculous that they all escaped with their lives. Both crews, as it is shown, were upset in the breaker-swept area, yet no one suffered injury more serious than a few bruises and cuts.

Neither of the service power boats was ever recovered.