

DESPATCH

No. 35612

C. O.  
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previous paper.  
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(Subject.)

Report on grounding of S.S. Sylbil

by Comdr & Whitehouse R.O.  
Lrs -

(Minutes.)

Mr. Read  
Sincerely,  
H. J. R. You asked for this report. 10/31/05

Copy (sent in orig.) to the B. J. J., with  
reference to our letter to the Secy of Army,  
explaining the Commander Whitehouse is  
atones.  
H. J. R.  
1/11

S. A.

C.O.  
38612  
OCT 05  
Mombasa

Commissioner's Office,  
Mombasa

*Cape*

October 6th 1905.

AFRICA PROTECTORATE.

No. 542

Sir,

*29365*  
*Whitehouse*

With reference to my despatch No. 404 of July 14th,  
I have the honour to transmit to you herewith a report  
by Commander B. Whitehouse, Royal Navy on the grounding  
of the Steam Ship "Sybil" which I am informed he was  
requested by Mr. Head to submit.

I have the honour to be,

Sir,

Your most obedient,  
humble servant,

*H. J. Walker*

Acting Commissioner.

H. V. Principal Secretary of State

for the Colonies,

Downing Street,

LONDON.

C. O.  
38612

Recd

351

MAKES STEAMER EXCEEDS 105

Antebbe,

10th September 1905.

Sir,

With reference to the two groundings of the S.S. "Cybil":-  
The Captain's letter of June 22nd 1905, states  
that on the day he grounded near Gull Shoal he steered a  
true course of S. 61. W. (true) down Kevitondo Gulf until  
Kwaka Island came into sight with conical peak on West  
Businga (Clerk's Hill). He then steered that bearing along that  
line for five minutes, probably at a rate of about eight  
knots as he states there was a heavy swell on, passing the  
Gull Shoal at a distance of 2/3rd of a mile. Four minutes  
later he had soundings of 26 fathoms, and a rock three  
minutes later.

A direct bearing of 100 (true) was taken at Port  
Florence, and the bearing of the place the ship  
in the morning was marked on the enclosed tracing.

It is to be true that the transit line given clears the  
Gull Shoal as known at present, but I have twice pointed out  
the necessity, in my opinion, of sounding out the Channel round  
Gull Shoal, and the M. S. Channel, to see if the steamers can  
use it for the Channel run, as the line as specially given  
on this account to help out in a wide berth to the  
Island. Unfortunately as I was not aware of its exact position  
at the time I wrote it, I do not know.

The present position was checked by me on the 4th of this  
month and was placed on the tracing, only 259 yards from the  
South end of the Shoal, far from the East extreme of  
Kwaka Island.

It should be that distance South of that rock, but I was  
unable

unable to raise its anchor, and as it is close to the rock and the sailing directions give it a very wide berth, I left it there for the present.

I Captain [Name] stated he states he [Name] the course [Name] the [Name] line at [Name] [Name].

[Name] stated that he mistook, [Name] Hill on Businga, [Name] very conical, and called it mistaken. A line [Name] and Chankonga [Name] within quarter of [Name] of Gull Shoal [Name].

[Name] [Name] [Name] the conical near West Businga" but [Name] is not on West Businga, nor is the Western Hill conical or [Name], the Gull Shoal.

A line drawn through the Western Hill of Businga and Chankonga, passes [Name] the South of Gull Shoal, and [Name] [Name] [Name] passed at about 2/3 rds of a mile distance. I therefore [Name] that he laid off a wrong course in the [Name] after the post set, on a line passing [Name] [Name] South of the buoy.

[Name] [Name] [Name] that the [Name] was on the [Name] [Name] Hill [Name], [Name] therefore [Name] have [Name] [Name] than he stated. [Name] course was altered at the [Name] [Name] stated, the [Name] [Name] [Name] to run 1 1/2 mile [Name] [Name] to the buoy. There is a clear statement [Name] [Name] [Name] for which at 8 knots would [Name] about 3 or 4 miles. [Name] the altered course then to 4.36 H., and [Name] again stated, she ran straight on Gull Shoal.

The sailing directions from Port Florence, lay down

a course of S. 61. W. (Mag) after passing North of Hard Shoal and further state, "Hart Point (Black wooded) kept in line with the Summit clears Bull Shoal, when Sentinel is clear of Hart Point alter course to S. 31. W. (Mag) Swan Island ahead. (see dotted line on drawing). On reporting on the grounding of this ship North of Haha last January, I stated that "This kind of accident can only have one result in the end" and I am very much surprised to find another such case so soon. I had to draw Captain Hutton's attention to the fact, twice, that he passed much too close to the Bismarckstein Rocks when entering Mwanza Harbour ( see my letter to him dated 15th March, 1905.) I have not seen Captain Hutton's first report on the grounding on Bull Shoal, but I quite fail to see how there could be "heavy head sea", for a ship like the "Cybil" at an enclosed place like Bull Shoal, or why he could not have anchored at once and tried to locate an unknown rock. It should not be necessary to instruct the officers to do this, when such accidents occur. A red buoy was placed by Mr. Pennycuik in a position which he informed me was <sup>one</sup> the/pointed out by Captain Hutton as the spot in which he struck. This I found to be in the position marked B. It was in 100 feet depth and had been water between it and the Shoal, it is a little East of the entering course laid down for the steamers and they should pass to the Westward of it. It had better be left there until the white buoy is moved to its proper position South of the Shoal. (A) With regard to the grounding of this ship again, N.N. S. of Haha:-

While in Haha I saw a statement in the papers that the "Cybil" had run on an unsurveyed rock near Haha later I received a copy of the Commissioner's telegram to the

Colonial

Colonial Office, which was sent to me for my information.

The locality was stated as "20 miles from Bukoba". I was asked if I could give any information, but was only able to state that a rock had been known to exist since August last, N.E. of Bukoba, that it had had been practically fixed on the German Map by me in April last, and notice given to both Capt. and Lieut. It was not considered worth while to attempt to find out its locality, as I wished to return as soon as possible, before this intelligence arrived it had been arranged that I should remain in town until 26th August.

As regard the locality of Bukoba:-

When on the West coast of the "Winifred" with Sir George Whitehouse and Mr. Sandiford and passing up the coast from Bukoba, I was walking on deck with Mr. Sandiford, and thought I noticed a very slight touch of the ship on something. Mr. Sandiford also thought he noticed something similar. I had the lead hove at once and got several soundings of 55 feet, Sand, previously and later I got 70 and 66 feet.

We both agreed later that the slight jar we noticed was probably caused by a heavy piece of firewood being thrown down on the deck below. This 55 feet was then marked as a danger on the German map.

Captain Hutchinson also informed me that he thought he had noticed a rock showing East of Buwabu. I did not think this would be possible as I had gone over the rough position of it on the first voyage of the "Winifred" and saw nothing showing. When he was going down to the Kagera River last February, I went on board the "Mackinnon" and marked his British Chart in several places. I put a + down, roughly

... reported  
 ... surface  
 ... reported to me by  
 ... August, 1904. (I have not got  
 ... I cannot give exact date). It  
 ... from Nagu  
 ...

...  
 ... in about  
 ...  
 ... the end of that I  
 ... position

in accordance with

...  
 ...  
 ... return ...  
 ... whaler, but the  
 ... (roughly) ...  
 ... "Hilfcred"

... I personally told Captain  
 ... leave in the  
 ... and told it to go

in the position he had mentioned, because he had reported it, and advised him not to go near it, but I am quite positive that there is no rock showing above the surface anywhere in that direction. A Shoal was reported to me by Herr Seidel in Mwanza about August 1904. (I have not got my official file with me so I cannot give exact date). It was seen by him breaking in a N.W. direction from Magu Point, marked Vorgeh Bayn on the German Map.

Information was at once given to both Captains.

Herr Seidel was again asked about it by me in Bukoba in January last, but could give no further information.

The statement of Captain Sutton at the enquiry that I placed the Shoal on the German Map in approximate position from information supplied by Herr Seidel three months before, is not in accordance with the facts.

On passing up the Coast from Bukoba on my way to Antebbe last January, I was not able to go and search for it. On my return from Antebbe I had its position, which is well known to fishermen, pointed out to me from Bugabu, and Magu Point on the 11th, 12th and 13th April last. The weather was too bad to go out to it in a whaler, but the bearings I took, and the time taken by canoes (roughly) to reach it were noted.

When going back to Port Florence in the "Winifred" in April last, I placed this shoal on the "Winifred" German map in Captain Farnall's presence, and warned him to keep well away from the spot.

On arrival at Port Florence I personally told Captain Sutton on the pier, (he was preparing to leave in the "Svebil") that I had located this rock, and told him to go



and see the Chart in the "Unifred", Captain Hutton himself acknowledges that a warning was supplied to him. Mr. Townsend informed me that he took the German Man to him, to show him the rock, and in his evidence states that I had told them that there were shoals off Vorgeh-Lanost and ordered them to keep ten or twelve miles out on that account. Captain Farnall complied with my instructions and has always kept well off the shore.

The warning given in April last appears to have been totally disregarded by Captain Hutton, who states in his letter of July 1st, 1841 that he steered his usual course of S. 14° W. (and then held on the West of Fajabwa Island to clear the Sand Shoal with 12 feet on it off the Fugabu Coast. This would also have cleared the rocky Shoal I had given him warning of.

If Fajabwa Island was passed at nine miles distance a correct course was observed till then, but I have not the ship's log to refer to, nor are any bearings quoted in the report of enquiry, that can be used to test this statement.

The theory of an hitherto unreported current on the Lake, which caused the ship to be set so far to the Westward after passing Fajabwa Island may at once be dismissed as ridiculous. I know of no such currents and when navigating the "Unifred" across the centre of the Lake on her first voyage, I arrived on the East side at the place I intended to.

Note that although the magnetic course directed to be followed was S. 11° W., the course steered by the compass was stated to be S. 40° W., the compass therefore was out of adjustment no less than 29 degrees. Captain

Hutton

Hutton states in the enquiry that he found the deviation of the compass by transit bearings of known position, and by the sun, but also adds that as he had no Nautical Almanac, he did not use the latter method. The compasses can be easily corrected by using points in transit on the British Sea. Captain Foreland of the "Sybil" informs me that there is now not more than 3° of error on any point of her compass.

On the trip from Port Clarence to Rukoh the "Sybil" would not have been running on a southerly course till she passed Rukoh Island. I therefore think that the compass error was not found at all that trip, and Mr. Gray states in his evidence that he was unable to find it while he was on deck.

Captain Hutton states that there was a strong breeze and heavy S.E. swell, but the speed of the ship was found by "point to point bearings, distances taken from the Chart, and number of revolutions from the Engineer".

As no land was visible and the number of revolutions would be entirely useless for speed finding against a heavy swell and strong breeze, by his own statement, no correct speed was being obtained at all. The patent log should most certainly have been in use, and it as was not, I consider there was a total lack of the most ordinary precautions on the part of Captain Hutton, who through want of them ran his ship ashore. It is quite true that the British and the German Habs are not properly joined up, but I cannot agree with the remark of the board of Enquiry, that the navigation is fraught with difficulty in the present uncharted state of the coast, or that that fact should

be strongly borne in mind in this case, there is no difficulty at all in steering a course  $S. 14^{\circ} W.$  (mag) from  $\frac{1}{2}$  a mile East of Davaau Island, and on arriving near the German Coast, to keep about 10 miles off it.

Both Captains have been frequently told that the German Coast line there, is about 15 miles too far to the East in longitude, and there is a note on the map to that effect.

It is well known to exist thereabouts since about the year 1864, and if the "Winifred" can be navigated in accordance with directions, why should she "blow back to land" with difficulty? Captain Hutton states in his letter of July, 1895, that it is a general idea that the S. E. quarter of the lake is "the most dangerous part being well studded with rocks, reefs and shoals, a few of them only being noted approximately, etc. etc." this may be true of the lower S. E. quarter, but it is not the case as far as the part of the lake at present used by the steamers is concerned. The only known danger on the route to Swains from Davau, that the steamers are directed to follow, are the two shoals now in question, and the steamers have no business to be off the routes laid down for them at present.

If the angles given by Captain Hutton and from my knowledge of the Coast, his position on the German Map by him to be about  $1^{\circ} 54' S. 50' 10'' E.$  this would put him about 24 miles from the shore on the German Map, and near a position on the British Map of  $1^{\circ} 54' S. 51.50'' E. 14^{\circ} W.$  from  $\frac{1}{2}$  a mile East of Davau Island would have

taken him 3/4 miles east of this position.

Fishermen stated there was only one Shoal thereabouts, I can easily identify the spot the ship struck on, with them next week. As my opinion on the accident was asked for at the Colonial Office by Mr. H. J. Read, I request that a copy of this letter may be forwarded to him by next mail.

I have &c. &c.

Sd/- J. Mitchell, Commander,  
Surveyor in Charge,  
Lake Survey Expedition.

4 Nov 1905

Sir,

DRAFT.

The Secretary to the Bd of Trade

I am directed to transmit to you for the info of the Board of Trade, with refer to the letter from this Dept of the 24<sup>th</sup> of August last, a copy of a despatch from the Officer Adminis the Govt

of the E.A.P. <sup>inclosing a report by</sup> ~~with its enclosure~~ Commander Whitehouse R.N. <sup>at</sup> respecting the grounding of the S/S Sybil

I am to explain that Commander Whitehouse is the Officer in charge of the Survey of Lake Victoria Nyanga.

I/c

R.L.A.

MINUTE.

- Mr. Curie 2/11
- Mr. Deak
- Mr. Antrobus.
- Mr. Cox.
- Mr. Lucas.
- Mr. Graham.
- Mr. M. Ommanney
- The Duke of Marlborough
- Mr. Lyttelton.

*[Handwritten signature/initials]*

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incl in orig