



United States Life Saving Service Reports

Fiscal Year ending June 30, 1914

STRANDING OF THE ITALIAN BARK CASTAGNA

FEBRUARY 17, 1914 - NAUSET & CAHOONS HOLLOW STATIONS

The loss of the 843-ton Italian bark *Castagna* on the coast of Massachusetts February 17, 1914, was an instance of shipwreck attended by hardship and suffering on the part of the imperiled crew such as has been rarely reported from a life-saving station. The *Castagna*, of Sovona, Italy, laden with guano, went ashore on Cape Cod in the early morning of the date mentioned while en route from Montevideo, Uruguay, to Weymouth, Mass., and 5 of her crew of 13 persons perished of cold - 4 of them before the life-savers of the Nauset and Cahoons Hollow Stations were able to reach the vessel and 1 after the rescuers had brought him ashore. The names of those lost were Guiseppe Gavi, master; Mario Patrone and Veleo Satiroff, seamen; Ballestrino Paolo, cook; and Francesco Remigio, cabin boy. The eight survivors, all suffering severely from frostbite, were taken from the wreck by boat after every effort made to effect a rescue by the breeches-buoy apparatus had proved of no avail, due to the inability of the sailors to handle the lines aboard ship.

The *Castagna* sailed from Montevideo December 1, 1913. For two weeks or more previous to the date of the stranding she had been fighting her way up the United States coast in a succession of fierce gales. Her crew, nearly all of whom were natives of a warm climate, would have suffered from the rigors of northern latitudes even had their voyage been unattended by misfortune, for they seem to have been unprovided with winter clothing and scantily supplied with even storm garments. They were not prepared, therefore, to withstand, after a fortnight of continuous bad weather, the

exposure in a freezing temperature to which they were subjected while clinging to the masts of their vessel after she struck the shallows off Cape Cod.

When the master of the *Castagna* realized his dangerous proximity to the coast, an attempt was made to wear ship in an effort to get to sea again. Owing to the physical condition of the crew, however, and to the iced-up condition of rigging, sails, and lines, this maneuver could not be successfully executed. Being unable to work off the land, the crew next had recourse to the anchors, hoping to check the drift of their vessel, in the expectation that daylight would bring them a tug.

But here again their efforts were defeated, the ice being so thick on the forecastle that the anchors could not be let go. So the ship continued to drift before wind and sea, finally taking bottom at 5 a.m., 3-1/2 miles south of the Cahoons Hollow Life-Saving Station.

Finding himself in the breakers, the master ordered a light signal displayed as a token of distress, and the crew soon had the satisfaction of seeing an answering signal burned from the land - the Coston light of the beach patrolman making his way southward from the station named.

The seas were running in furiously when the bark struck, inundating the narrow width of beach clear up to the precipitous sand bluffs which skirt the shore line in this locality. The boarding waves, whose foaming crests were flung by the gale as high up as the crosstrees of the vessel, soon tore loose the two deck houses and carried them over the side along with the last of the ship's two boats.

Owing to the exposure and hardship previously suffered by the crew, they were ill-prepared to face the ordeal they were now to undergo with their vessel fast on the shoals. But for the lack of suitable clothing, some, if not all, of the five persons lost would in all probability have reached shore alive and in fair physical condition, notwithstanding their hard trip up the coast. When the seas drove the men

to seek refuge aloft, most of them were bareheaded and barefooted, some were clad only in trousers and undershirt, and at least one had on no clothing at all except an oilskin, which afforded small protection against the icy blasts and freezing spray that continually swept the vessel. Under the circumstances it is not surprising that some perished within a short time after the bark struck. It followed as a matter of course that none of the crew was in condition to cooperate with the life-savers when the latter endeavored to effect their rescue sometime afterwards by throwing a line across the vessel.

An hour after the sailors went aloft two of them - one the master - lost the use of their benumbed limbs, and fell to their death, both being swept overboard when they struck the deck, while two others (the cook, in the main rigging, and the cabin boy, in the mizzen rigging), drenched by the spray of the over-leaping waves, froze fast as they clung to the masts. When the bodies of these two were lowered to the deck by the life-savers who succeeded later in boarding the wreck it was necessary to use an ax to free them of their covering of ice.

The eight persons who were rescued had nothing but words of praise for the two life-saving crews who came to their rescue. The *Castagna* was discovered at 5:20 a.m. by the patrol of the Cahoons Hollow Life-Saving Station. The patrolman telephoned the news to his station keeper from the ``halfway'' house. It was promptly sent along the service line to the life-saving station - Nauset - 4-1/2 miles below the scene of the stranding. By 5:45 a.m. both crews were on their way to the wreck, each with a horse and cart and certain parts of the beach apparatus, their burden being thus divided in order to make better speed over the rough road to be traveled.

A boat was not taken at the time owing to the state of the sea and on account of the difficulty of transporting it through the heavy snow; also, because of the belief of the stations keepers that the work ahead, owing to the short distance at which the vessel lay off the beach, could be more readily accomplished by means of the breeches buoy - as indeed it could have been but for the condition of the

bark's crew.

The first and second lines shot out fell across the main topgallant brace - too far up for the sailors in their chilled and feeble condition to reach it. A third line landed over the mizzen topmast stay. One of the men tried to get it, but it slipped before he could reach it, and fell to the deck. The boarding seas deterred the crew for a time from leaving their position aloft, but as the line apparently offered them the only chance of saving themselves they finally mustered up the courage to descend and secure it. After much effort they drew the tailblock on board with the whipline rove through it. They succeeded in making the block fast to the bitts aft. They did not have the strength or dexterity, however, with their bodies benumbed and their hands frozen, to make the block fast high enough above deck to enable the line to run clear.

Because of the helplessness of the sailors, the life-saving crews were soon convinced that they would have to resort to a boat if a rescue were to be effected at all. Five surfmen were accordingly dispatched with a horse to the nearest station - Cahoons Hollow - for the Monomoy surfboat. They had the boat abreast of the wreck by 8:30 a.m. after a hard pull over a rough country, through a heavy fall of snow.

The sea having subsided considerably by this time, the boat was launched. The life-savers pulled for the inshore side of the bark, which lay broadside to the beach, hoping to find sufficient shelter there to enable them to board the vessel in safety. In this they were disappointed, however, for the seas, sweeping around both ends of the bark, swerved in toward each other and met a short distance inshore, forming an area of broken water in which it was have been impossible to hold a boat long enough to consummate the work in hand.

It so happened that the swift-running 'longshore current had piled up the sand inshore of the vessel, making the water very shoal in places, so shallow in fact that the surfboat actually struck bottom several times. One of these bars or shoals had made up within a few yards of the bark. A surfman threw the anchor over on this bar, then the boat

was allowed to drift in toward the wreck at the end of a line. When the boatmen had gone thus as close in as they dared, they shouted to the ship's crew to come down out of the rigging, telling them that they would save them. Taking advantage of a moment when the water was comparatively quiet, two or three surfmen now left their boat and waded down to the wreck. A sailor thereupon slid down a rope that hung over the side of the vessel, and was carried to the waiting surfboat. In this manner eight were taken off - all, so far as could then be determined, that remained alive.

The condition of the sailors was so pitiable that no time was lost trying to board the vessel in search of other possible survivors. On the contrary, all speed was made for the beach. Once ashore the sailors were taken in charge by residents of the locality and practically carried the mile and a half to the Marconi wireless telegraph station at South Wellfleet, where they remained for several hours.

While the seamen were being carried to shelter, Keepers Tobin and Walker of the two life-saving stations named took a boat's crew and again put off to search the ship for other possible survivors and bring ashore the bodies of those that could still be seen in the rigging.

Arriving alongside, they threw a grapnel on board with a line attached. Keeper Walker and two of the surfmen then climbed up to the deck of the bark hand over hand. Before proceeding to their task of recovering the bodies from the rigging they made a search of the ship and found a man prostrate on the poop deck. He was clad only in trousers, shirt and vest. He was alive, but unconscious, and incapable of action. The surfmen lowered him over the side to their comrades, who carried him ashore and sent him on the way to the wireless station. The man died, however, almost as soon as they left the scene of the wreck with him.

While this sailor was being transferred from the bark to the waiting surfboat Keeper Tobin came near losing his life. He and one of his boatmen having received the helpless man in their arms while standing hip deep in the

water, were proceeding with him along a newly formed sand bar toward their boat, when Tobin found himself sinking in quicksands. The surfmen pulled him out just in time to save him from drowning. When extricated, he was so weakened and chilled that he had to be carried to the boat, and when the party landed, sent to the wireless station for treatment. He was put to bed there, and remained for several hours under the care of the physician who had been summoned to attend the sailors.

After Keeper Tobin and the sailor were landed, the boat put off once more to the wreck and brought ashore Keeper Walker and the surfmen who had boarded the bark with him, together with the two bodies taken by them from the rigging.

At the wireless station everything possible was done to relieve the sufferings of the rescued sailors. The life-savers worked assiduously for hours applying snow and ice water and other approved remedies to their frostbites. In this attention they were afforded every aid by the wireless-station employees and residents of the neighborhood. In the afternoon of the same day of the wreck the survivors were carried to a hospital in Boston. Subsequent information concerning them is contained in the translation of a report of the loss of the *Castagna*, made under date of March 7, 1914, by the royal consul of Italy at Boston. The consul says: --

``On their arrival in this city the shipwrecked men were, on the royal office's request, put into the Carney Hospital, where they are still lying and receiving every care and attention. Mate Luigi Olivari, seamen Luigi Merloni, Maggiore Carlo. Baribaldi Maurizio, Nils Helvelson, and Angel Todorof are expected to recover without suffering any amputation, while Steward Luigi Bianchi died on the 3d instant from the effects of infection, and the young Austrian seaman must undergo an amputation, the outcome of which is uncertain.''

The *Castagna* and her cargo, valued together at \$75,000 were totally lost.

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[\[USCG Home Page\]](#)

Added: January 2002