

WAIKOUAITI AGROUND NEAR BLUFF

VESSEL BELIEVED TO BE ON DOG ISLAND

HEAVY FOG ON COAST: DISTRESS SIGNALS HEARD

While on a voyage from Sydney to Dunedin the Union Steam Ship Company's intercolonial vessel Waikouaiti ran aground in thick fog near Bluff about 9 o'clock last night, and at an early hour this morning was believed to be still hard and fast. Definite information about what had happened and the exact point of the mishap could not be obtained this morning, but it is thought that the vessel went ashore at Dog Island, about three miles from the entrance to Bluff harbour. Another theory is that she may be aground at the Spit, between Dog Island and the entrance to Bluff harbour. Although the fog was very thick the sea was dead calm.

The first word that something was wrong was contained in a wireless message from the master, Captain J. Bruce, to the harbour master at Bluff, Captain N. W. Haszard, who happened to be on his way back from Dunedin at the time. The message was passed on to the board's secretary, Mr R. N. Porter. Captain Haszard arrived at Bluff just after the Harbour Board's pilot launch had set out to look for the Waikouaiti and the launch was recalled by morse signal.

By 1 a.m. the stranded ship had evidently been located and Captain Haszard was aboard, as a message was received from him by Mr Porter to send for the tug Awarua.

The mishap came at a particularly bad time for the Harbour Board as its tug is at Port Chalmers undergoing an overhaul.

Instructions were immediately sent to Port Chalmers to undock the tug and bring her to Bluff, and it was thought that she would be ready to sail at 7 o'clock this morning. She will take about 12 hours to reach Bluff. However, it is expected that the Otago Harbour Board's tug, Dunedin, which was preparing to come to Bluff, will be on the scene before the Awarua.

VESSEL ORDERED TO STAND BY

The Union Steam Ship Company's motor-vessel Walana which left Bluff at 3 o'clock yesterday afternoon for Dunedin was recalled at 9 p.m. and ordered to stand by the Waikouaiti. She was expected at Bluff by 2 a.m., but as there was a thick fog along the coast it might have been much later when she arrived.

According to the signalman at Stirling Point the fog at 1 a.m. was "as thick as pea soup." He could see no sign of the Waikouaiti. He said he could not see 50 yards ahead.

It was stated in Bluff this morning that explosions were heard at nine o'clock last night, but little notice was taken of them. It is now thought that they were rockets being fired from the ship in distress. Although it is not confirmed that the explosions were caused by rockets on the Waikouaiti it is the opinion of waterside men that they must have been.

Had it been a clear night flares would have been used and would have been seen by the signalmen at Stirling Point and Bluff Hill. But this method of signalling would have been useless in such thick fog. Long blasts of a steamer's whistle were also heard.

The launch which left at 10 o'clock last night had not returned at 2.30 o'clock this morning. In addition to the harbour master there were on board Mr W. B. Dixon, whose assistance had been sought before the harbourmaster arrived, Mr E. Murray, Collector of Customs, Mr E. Moon, Bluff agent for the Union Company, Captain G. Campbell, stevedore for the Union Company and Mr W. Crozier, who was in charge of the launch.

REQUEST FOR TUG CANCELLED

About 2.10 a.m. a wireless message was received from Captain Haszard by Mr Porter cancelling his previous message asking for the despatch of a tug from Port Chalmers. This may mean that it may be possible to float the vessel off at high tide, which will occur at Bluff at 3.30 a.m.

Two men went by car as far as the road terminus and walked from there round the hill to Wood Point, but although visibility was not bad they were unable to see any sign of the Waikouaiti. If she had been on the Spit, they expected that they would have been able to see her.

Dog Island, where the Waikouaiti is believed to be aground, is three miles from Bluff. It is about half a mile long and a quarter of a mile wide. On the highest point, which is 50 feet above sea-level, is the light-house, the tower of which is 150 feet high. Only the keepers and their families live there.

Built in Germany in 1914 the 3926 ton steamer Waikouaiti (then German-owned and named the Irgard) was taken over after the war by the Union Steam Ship Company. She is well known on the New Zealand coast and has been engaged chiefly in the trade between Sydney and Newcastle and South Island ports. In recent years she was regularly in this trade till replaced five months ago by a new vessel.

The master of the Waikouaiti is Captain J. Bruce; the first officer is Mr S. C. Angus, the second officer Mr C. A. Spencer and the third officer Mr J. W. Wilson.

AGROUND IN FOG

Evening Post, Volume CXXVIII, Issue 130, 29 November 1939,

AGROUND IN FOG THE WAIKOUAITI TOTAL LOSS LIKELY MAILS AND CREW SAFE

While steaming through fog towards the end of a voyage from Sydney to New Zealand ports, the Union Steam Ship Company's 3926-ton steamer Waikouaiti went aground on Dog Island, near Bluff, at about 9.30 o'clock last night, and is still hard and fast. The crew and the mails are safe.

The Waikouaiti, under the command of Captain J. Bruce, was bound from Sydney with 5500 tons of general cargo from New South Wales for discharge at Lyttelton, Timaru, and Dunedin.

Fortunately, the sea was calm when she went aground, but a slight swell caused the ship to grind, and during the night she took a considerable quantity of water into No. 1 and No. 2 holds. The prospects of refloating the vessel, in view of the quantity of water shipped, are considered unpromising.

According to a Press Association message from Invercargill, the vessel struck rocks 150 yards off Dog Island. The forepart is seven feet under water at high tide, while the stern is high in the air with the propellers showing. The ship will probably be a total loss, but her cargo of hardwood poles, sleepers, and steel from Port Kembla and Newcastle will probably be salvaged by the Gale and Waitaki, which are scheduled to arrive at Bluff this afternoon. The crew of 25 took to the lifeboats with their personal effects, and were towed to Bluff by a Harbour Board launch, arriving at 9 this morning.

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Captain King, marine superintendent of the Union Company at Dunedin, and other officials left Bluff in a launch at 11 o'clock this morning to make an inspection. The weather is fine and the sea calm.

Salvage will present no great difficulty if the sea remains calm, but the ship will be in a precarious position if it comes up rough.

Dog Island, where the vessel struck, is three miles from Bluff. It is half a mile long and a quarter of a mile wide. On the highest point, which is 50 feet above sea level, is a lighthouse tower, which is 150 feet high. Only keepers and their families live there.

The first officer of the Waikouaiti is Mr. S. C. Angus, the second Mr. C. A. Spencer, and the third Mr. J. W. Wilson.

The Waikouaiti was built in Germany in 1914 and named Irmgard. She was taken over after the war by the Union Company and became a familiar vessel in the coastal and intercolonial trade, chiefly between Sydney and Newcastle and South Island ports.

PROBABLY DOOMED

Evening Post, Volume CXXVIII, Issue 131, 30 November 1939

PROBABLY DOOMED STRANDED WAIKOUAITI THE SHIP MAKING WATER CARGO MAY BE SALVED

(By Telegraph—Press Association.)
INVERCARGILL, November 29

Bound from Sydney to Lyttelton, the Union Steam Ship Company's intercolonial steamer Waikouaiti, which went aground on **Dog Island**, three miles off Bluff, in a heavy fog late last evening, is now hard and fast on the rocks about 150 yards off the south-west corner of the island in Foveaux Strait. She seems to be a doomed ship. In her exposed position she is at the mercy of the elements.

The captain, officers, and a few men who remained on board the ship throughout the day, left early this evening for Bluff. Though the vessel is not officially abandoned, any salvage decision will be made in Wellington.

How soon the sea will take its toll depends on the weather. As long as it is fair the ship can be expected to remain in the present position—tilted on her bow, which is towards the north-west, with the stern well clear of the water. She has a list of about 25 degrees to port. Once a westerly storm arrives, she may soon break up. Already there is considerable water in her forward holds, and it seems only a matter of time before it reaches the stokehold.

The crew of the Waikouaiti were never in danger. Their personal belongings were brought ashore on the pilot launch, which reached its berth as murky dawn was breaking. Thirty-eight bags of Australian mail were also brought on the launch, which returned to the Waikouaiti at 7.30 a.m. to tow in most of the crew, who had taken to the lifeboats. A few, including the master, Captain J. Bruce, and the chief officer, Mr. W. A. Todd, remained with the ship.

CARGO RECOVERABLE.

The Waikouaiti struck the rocky point of **Dog Island** in thick fog at 9.15 p.m. She was not bound for Bluff, but was on the way from Sydney to Lyttelton with mails and general cargo. An inspection of the ship was made yesterday by Captain W. J. King, marine superintendent for the Union Company. Decision about salvage has not yet been announced.

The ship will probably be a total loss, but her cargo of hardwood poles, sleepers, and steel from Port Kembla and Newcastle will probably be salvaged.

Members of the crew had little to say about what happened after the ship struck the rocks. It is stated, however, that there was no undue excitement, and, once it was realised that she was hard and fast the men calmly waited till they could be taken off in the morning.

There was, it is stated, no big crash, as the ship struck, but it was soon apparent that she was badly damaged. Water entered Nos. 1 and 2 holds, and she began to tilt a little, the stern being clear of the water. A gentle swell caused slight movement of the ship. The grinding of the hull on the rocks caused some wonder whether she would slip over the ledge, but she was firmly held. Numerous rockets were fired to attract attention, and, though the explosions were heard by some residents of Bluff, few, if any, realised that they indicated a ship in distress.

When the pilot launch set out at 10 o'clock on Tuesday night to search for the Waikouaiti, thick fog enveloped the harbour. A report was received that some persons had heard signals from the beach at the back of Bluff Hill, so it was decided to search there first. Visibility was almost nil. After a cautious cruise for half an hour, no sign of a ship in distress could be seen. A course was then set for **Dog**

CALL FOR TUGS CANCELLED.

Through inky blackness the launch groped its way on a compass course, and eventually came up to the Waikouaiti, where it was first thought she would be. Fortunately the sea was as smooth as ever it is.

At first sight it seemed that there was every prospect of refloating the ship, and instructions were sent to Bluff to order the tug Awarua, which is at Port Chalmers for overhaul, to put to sea as soon as possible. In a short time it was announced that the tug would be ready to leave at 5 a.m. today, and that the Otago Harbour Board's tug Dunedin was on the way.

Further inspection of the stranded ship revealed that she was opening and that water was entering the forward holds. It was then apparent that any attempt to refloat her was doomed to failure. Word was sent to the mainland cancelling the previous instructions, and luckily it was possible to get in touch with the Awarua before the dock had been flooded. The tug Dunedin was also stopped, and she returned to port. The Union Company's coastal vessel Waiana, which left Bluff

at 3 p.m. on Tuesday for Dunedin, had been ordered to return and stand by the Waikouaiti, but she too was later requested to resume her voyage north.

The Waikouaiti was taken at least two miles off her course by a heavy set during dense fog.

CREW TAKEN OFF.

First to reach the Waikouaiti after daybreak was a motor-vessel chartered by an Invercargill newspaper, Cheery "Hallos" were shouted by those on the motor-vessel as it got within hailing distance. These were answered enthusiastically by men at the deck rail of the Waikouaiti. The sailors were obviously pleased to see a vessel from the mainland after their long and patient wait. Four or five men were whiling away the time fishing. They evidently accepted the situation with true seamen's philosophy.

On board ship there was a scurry of activity as the men gathered together what possessions had not been taken ashore by the pilot launch on her first trip, and donned regulation lifebelts. Four boats were on the davits ready to be lowered, but only three were used, the other apparently being left for use by those who remained on the ship.

It was a thrilling sight as the boats rattled down to the water and the sailors scrambled down the rope ladders into them. One man, more energetic than the rest, wrapped his legs around a bundle of thin ropes running from the ship to the boat and slid down with amazing agility.

The blade of the ship's propeller, which was uncovered momentarily by each movement of the sea, was damaged, apparently through striking a submerged rock.

As the men began leaving the ship a trail of smoke issuing from the single funnel showed that there was still some life in her. Within a few minutes the pilot launch had the three boats in tow and the short journey to Bluff was begun.

The departure of the boats was watched by the master, Captain Bruce, a solitary figure standing at the corner of the bridge. Several strangely silent seagulls had taken up vantage points in the rigging and at the mast-head.

THE WAIKOUAITI

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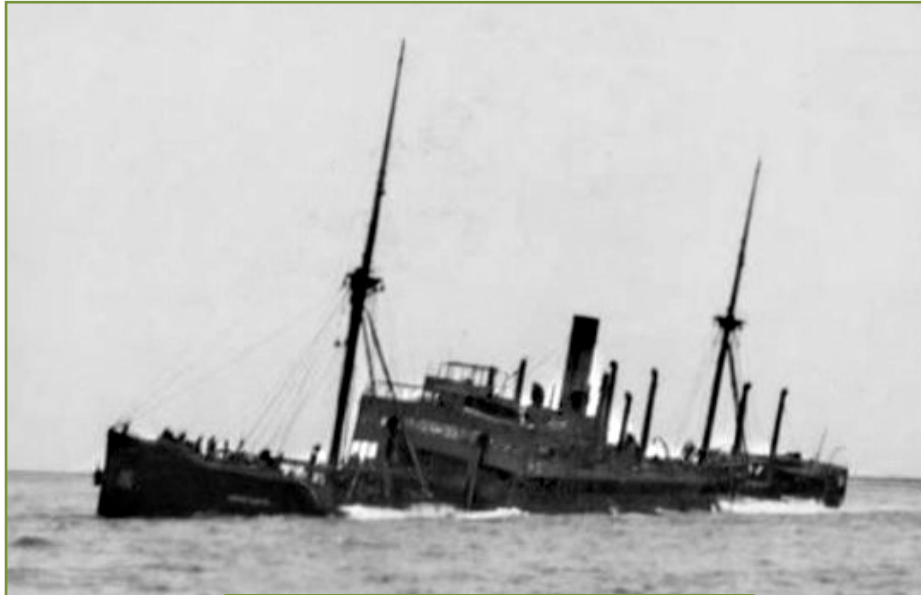
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THE WAIKOUAITI

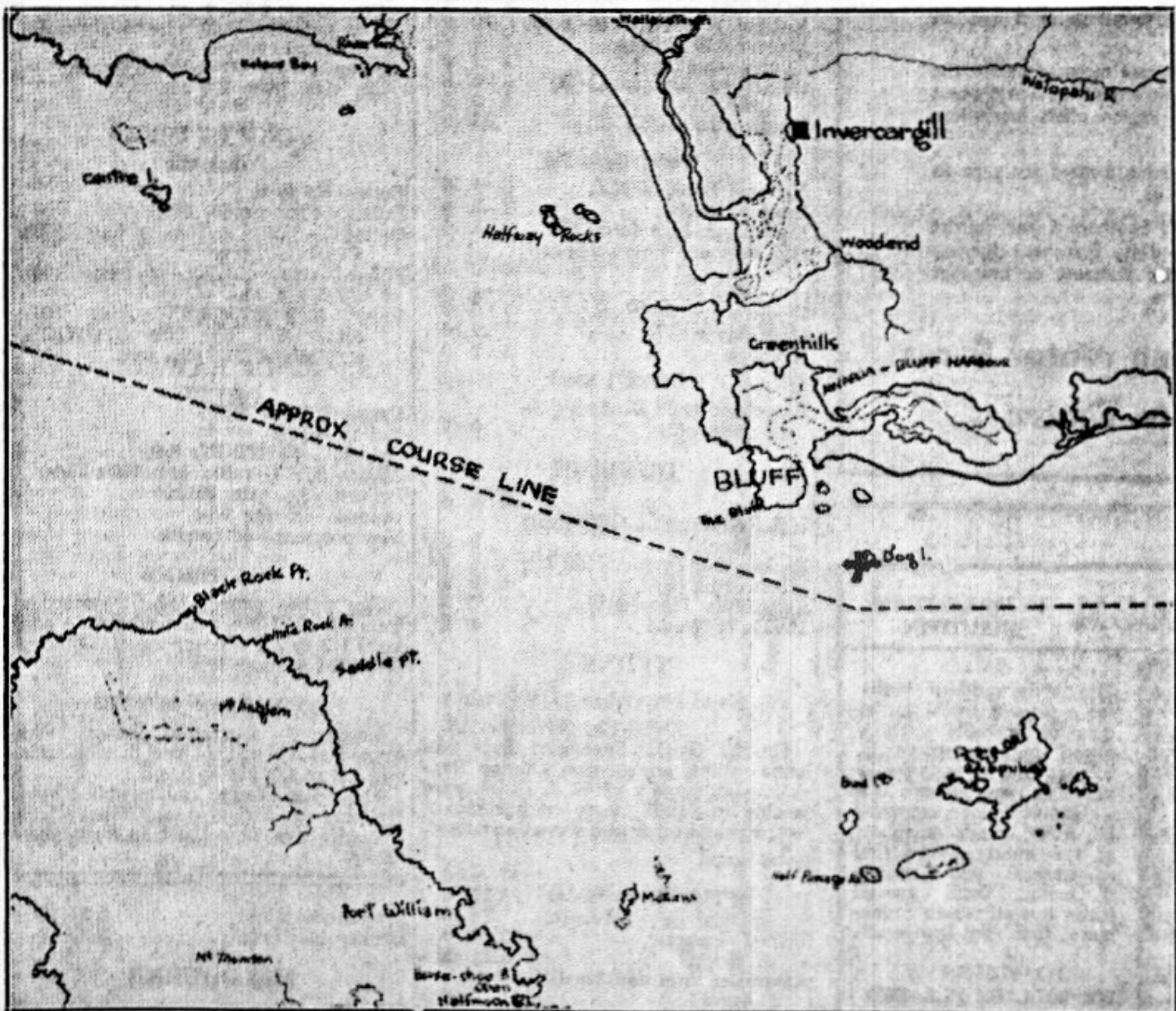
The Union Steam Ship Company stated this afternoon that no further advice has been received concerning the Waikouaiti, which is ashore on **Dog Island**, near Bluff. She was to have been inspected this morning by the company's Dunedin superintendent, the harbour master, and the vessel's captain.

Dog Island... early 1900's





SS Waikouaiti hard aground on Dog Island near Bluff



WAIKOUAITI'S COURSE.—A clear idea of the Waikouaiti's approximate course line in relation to the point where she struck (marked by a cross) is shown in this sketch of Foveaux Strait. The ship was proceeding to Lyttelton from Sydney and should have passed to the south of Dog Island, which is three miles from Bluff.

Southland Times 04.12.1939