



# THE SINKING OF THE GODDARD

## A SURVIVOR'S ACCOUNT

**“H**old on, if you can,” shouted Capt. Edward McDonald seconds before the A.J. Goddard slipped below the icy waters of the Yukon’s Lake Laberge during a violent storm on Oct. 12, 1901.

The deaths of McDonald and two others are described by survivor Julius Stockfield, the Goddard’s engineer, in a recently discovered North-West Mounted Police report. Stockfield and the ship’s woodchopper, C.P. Snyder, were rescued.

The report names the victims as McDonald, of Aberdeen, Wash., cook Fay Ransom of Montana and fireman John Thompson of Victoria, BC.

Stockfield told NWMP officers investigating the wreck that the ship “had been labouring in a heavy sea.” He reported waves of 12 feet raising the steering gear

out of the water and rendering the vessel unmanageable until it was hit broadside by a fatal wave.

The fire in the steambox had been extinguished by the waves. Stockfield crawled over the hurricane deck into the ship’s bow, while Thompson was on his knees praying. He “implored” Stockfield to save him. The engineer threw off his mate’s shoes and tossed an armload of cordwood overboard, yelling at Thompson to jump off and hold onto the wood.

Stockfield then jumped from the sinking ship and started to swim for shore. After making no headway, he turned back to the Goddard, and saw McDonald and Snyder clinging to the pilothouse. Ransom was holding a piece of wreckage “ ... and appeared to be doing all right.”

“I finally got hold of two pieces of cordwood and, being a strong swimmer, struck out for shore with

the hope of being able to reach it and send assistance,” Stockfield reported.

He said that “after two hours’ desperate struggle,” he managed to get within 200 feet of shore, where he was rescued by men he identified as “Messrs. Clarke and Ironside.”

“After vigorous measures,” Stockfield said, he was “restored to life.”

Clarke and Ironside, after being told of the wreck, walked a mile and a half down the lake to get a boat. They found Snyder lying unconscious in a corner of the pilothouse, about three-quarters of a mile offshore. The three others were gone.

The report said the lake was patrolled continuously “until the close of navigation with a view to finding these bodies, but no sign of them could be seen.”

After they were discovered next spring, the bodies were buried by the NWMP.

Doug Davidge, president of the Yukon Transportation Museum who played a key role in discovering the shipwreck 107 years later, says that although there is “substance” to Stockfield’s account, some statements are suspect.

For example, it’s physically impossible for waves on Lake Laberge to reach heights of 10 feet. Stockfield also reported that the ship turned over at one point, but when it was found in 2009 it was lying upright on the silt-covered lake bottom, with items such as an axe still on deck.

Some have questioned Stockfield’s statement that he spent two hours in the frigid water before being rescued. They believe he would have succumbed to hypothermia before that. **W**