

One disaster victim's body found; search for eight missing resumes

By RANDY DEVINE
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Rescue operations were scheduled to resume today for eight people still missing and presumed drowned following the burning late Thursday night of the 82-ton motor schooner, Del Roy, two miles northeast of the tip of Merasheen Island in Placentia Bay.

A search of the disaster area Friday by six vessels, two helicopters and two planes was successful in locating one body — that of Mrs. Leo (Regina) Pomeroy. It was flown to St. John's.

Nine of the 15 people aboard the 16-year-old Del Roy are presumed to have drowned around 11:30 p.m. Thursday after fire broke out in the engine room and spread to most areas of the schooner forcing abandonment of the vessel. The passengers took to a dory that overturned shortly after passengers and crew were aboard.



Captain Ray Burkshire

Those who lost their lives in the icy waters of Placentia Bay were: Mrs. Leo (Regina) Pomeroy, 44; her six-year-old son William, her 10-year-old daughter Linda, and another daughter Linda, aged 12, all of Placentia; Mrs. Patrick (Mellie) Pomeroy, 52, of Placentia (it's not known if they are related); Earnest Pitcher, 24, a member of the armed forces stationed in British Columbia; and three crew members of the ill-fated Del Roy, William Garrett of English Harbour West, and John Yard and Leo Bullen, both of Mose Ambrose, Fortune Bay.

Those who survived the disaster were Captain Reuben Evans and his brother Clarence, 16, of English Harbour West; Carmen Pitcher, 26, of Placentia; Marjorie Ennis, 14, of St. John's; Loylia (Roy) Pomeroy of Placentia, son of Mrs. Leo Pomeroy; and Judy Snow, address not immediately known.

The survivors were brought to the Come By Chance cottage hospital around 4 a.m. Friday where they were treated for exposure and exhaustion. Carmen Pitcher was transferred to the St. John's General Hospital where she received further medical treatment and a hospital spokesman said Friday night that her condition is satisfactory. The others have been released from hospital.

The Del Roy was owned by Gordon Pettie of English Harbour West and was under charter to National Sea Products plant at Arnold's Cove.

Captain Ray Burkshire, 34, of Arnold's Cove, skipper of the 60-ton schooner, Bertha Joyce, the vessel that saved the six people from a watery grave, was interviewed by the Telegram aboard his schooner Friday at the site of the disaster and he told of the rescue.

"We left Isle Valen about the same time as the Del Roy but we were about eight miles ahead of him. I saw his light when we were at the end of Merasheen Island but he went out of sight behind

waters in the bay was the biggest factor in their finding the distressed people.

"Usually the radar will not pick up anything small unless the weather is calm," he told this reporter.

"In another 10 or 15 minutes they would all have been gone."

He said the water is about 50 fathoms in the area where the mishap took place.

The Del Roy had a crew of five and the remaining people were friends and families of fishermen who were using the 25-mile-long Merasheen Island as a summer fishing base. They had gone to the island Monday and were on their way home when the blaze broke out.

"The fishermen want their women to visit - you do these things to oblige these fishermen," Mr. Pettie, owner of the Del Roy, said in explaining the probable reason why women and children were aboard the schooner.

The Del Roy is one of several vessels used in carrying fish from the islands in the bay to the plant at Arnold's Cove.

Mr. Pettie said the vessel was not intended to carry passengers. She was fitted with a dory but the lifeboat had been left on the wharf at Arnold's Cove. The schooner was powered by two 23 horsepower motors.

It is believed that this was the first time the fishermen's families had been back to Merasheen Island since they moved to Placentia four or five years ago under the government resettlement program.

Meanwhile, Transport Minister Don Jamieson has announced that a full-scale inquiry will be held into the disaster. A preliminary inquiry was held Friday evening at Arnold's Cove and Mr. Jamieson released some of the details surrounding the cause of the accident.

Captain Evans and his 16-year-old son Clarence were in the wheelhouse of the Del Roy when the captain noticed that the radar had gone blank. The son went and informed the chief engineer of the trouble and the engineers went below deck to try and correct the problem.

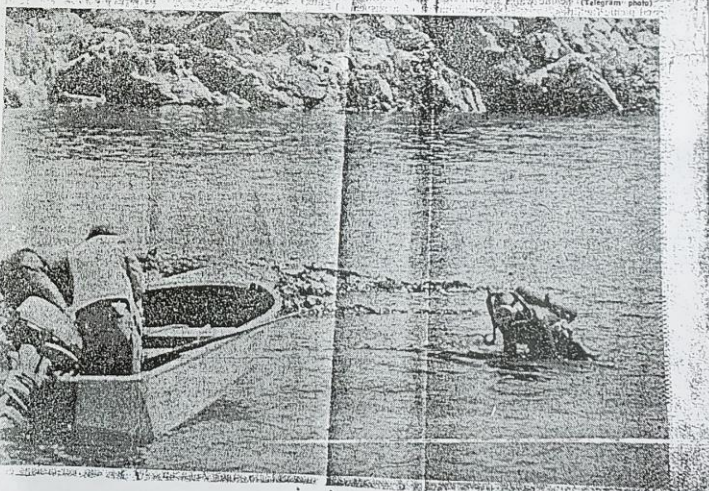
"When he opened the door of the engine room he was forced back by the flames and heat escaping from the room," the minister said in his statement.

"The two 23-horsepower engines were still running and the captain had no way of stopping them. The schooner was making eight or nine knots."

The captain decided the vessel would have to be abandoned and the dory was put over the bow of the Del Roy. All passengers were put aboard that dory while the captain held the small craft to the side of the schooner.

"About this time there was an explosion but not enough to injure anyone," said Mr. Jamieson.

"Captain Evans let go of the dory and the Del Roy was still travelling at a rate of eight or nine knots and either the



Del Roy schooner on fire (Telegram photo)