

The Kyle's Last Trip to the Ice

Contributed by Phil Earle, Carbonear

In truth the Kyle had two later trips than this 'last trip to the Ice', one towing her with the MV Claimer from Carbonear to Harbour Grace and lastly that stormy night a year later when all alone she went hard aground in Riverhead.



The Kyle in Harbour Garce

For some days in the beginning of '65 seal hunt, before the ships got into the ice where the main body of the seals were, the Kyle was caught in some bad weather in the 'outside' loose ice. On the night the storm turned its worst the wind went to a nord' east blizzard which blew the ice onto the Labrador coast with a vengeance. The outside power of the storm rafted the landward ice putting pan on top of pan. It was the misfortune of the Kyle to be caught, 'jammed' and helpless, in this moving ice. She was east in the Straights of Bell Isle and carried along in a westward direction with the fast moving (3-4 knots) ice flow and current.

Some time around midnight, at the peak of the 100 mile an hour blizzard, the Kyle was driven in on a massive grounded iceberg. The sealers and most of the crew, ~ 100 men, went over the starboard side onto the ice. The ship's port side was pushed onto the berg by the force of the storm and 10 miles of seaward ice. As the flow of ice carried the Kyle scrapping past the berg her steel plates, rivets, stanchions, and beams bent, cracked and groaned. Some of her port side steel rails were buckled by the bergs protrusions and pieces of the berg crashed down onto her deck. (The skipper, my father Capt. Guy Earle, never left the bridge at any time during these events and the only comment I ever heard

from him later about it was that during the moments of impact with the berg - "My heart was down in me boots"!)

When the Kyle finally got past the berg she was nipped again by the ice. The men in the blizzard on the pans now realized she wasn't going to sink so they gradually came back on board. On assessment, the Kyle had damaged some plates, knocked out some rivets, bend her rails and had sustained damage to her inner ribs and beams enough to cause her to leak considerably but not enough to stop the crew from trying to save her. Water was coming in fast in her bilges and into the hole and all effort was taken to keep ahead of it. All pumps were working and tubs were lowered into the hole as giant bale buckets and winched by the boom to be dumped over board.

The stokers found that the coal was going afloat in one of the bunkers and a tremendous stream of water was shooting from her bottom to the skylight. The coal was removed from the area and the leak was soon found to be coming from a rivet hole. A steel crow bar was pointed and driven into the hole and braced with 4-5 tons of concert.

On further examination at day light, it was found that there were many rivet holes on the port side at water level through which spirited 100's of gallons of water into to ship each time she rolled into the sea. They devised a plan of driving heavy bolts into the rivet holes from the outside and fastening nuts to them on the inside. A man was lowered over the side in a boson's chair with bolts and mall in hand and between the rolls of him in and out of the water and being beaten around the side of the ship and trying to find a hold, he drove the bolts through so the men on the inside could screw on the nuts. After three attempts and changes of cloths all 21 holes were sealed. The over all strength of the ship was not impaired and with the leaks fixed the Kyle proceeded to pursue the hunt. Two weeks later she returned with a successful voyage landing her capacity of some 20,000 pelts. Afterwards she was anchored in Carbonear and was found to have too much damage to be repaired. Later that year she was towed and anchored in Harbor Grace.

The Kyle was made of Swedish steel, 3/4 inch plates with bumper plates around her water line of 1 inch. There's no question of the great workmanship and strength put into her by her builders at Newcastle upon Tyne. For 54 years she never lost any of it in plying the roughest ocean in the world the north Atlantic and serving the people of Newfoundland and Labrador.

It has been said of our coastal people that they have produced as fine a seamen as ever went afloat, and I am one that would agree. In their long Maritime history there have been many great ships and voyages and I will venture to say that the Kyle, in the duration of her service and her function as a coastal steam ship serving the people and sealing vessel, was as great and as unique as any in our history.

The Kyle ever refused the fate of going to a watery grave, like she did that night 41 years ago in her rendezvous with an iceberg, like all vessels do that are used and pushed beyond their abilities when aged.

She was something else that lady, the Kyle. She had a mind of her own, you know. Sure didn't she finally see to it not to sink at her anchors in Harbour Grace Harbour or not stay there a little longer wherein eventually she'd be taken away for scrap? No Sir, not this lady. Instead she went perfectly on her own, with out a soul aboard, all the way up the middle of Harbour Grace Harbour to be high and dry in Riverhead? And sitting there, perfectly upright too, just like a lady of Dignity would do!

Ah yes, she's as grand a lady as we ever had.

Phil Earle, Carbonear