

REF: VEGA reported passing Dunnet Head

Source: Dundee Advertiser

17 April 1903 VEGA reported passing Dunnet Head

21 July 1903 Capt Cooney & part crew 'Vega' landed at Aberdeen by Danish steamer 'NV. Vega lost 31 May in Melville Bay.

22 July

## ARCTIC DISASTER

### THRILLING JOURNEY IN DAVIS STRAIT

DUNDEE WHALER CRUSHED.

TERRIBLE EXPERIENCES OF CREW.

THE LAST OF THE VEGA.

### LOSS OF AN HISTORIC VESSEL

Another Dundee whaler — the VEGA — the latest addition to, and the most historic vessel in the fleet has succumbed to the rigour of the Arctic. Her crew, after having been subjected to the most rigorous privations, have fortunately escaped the perils which followed the loss of their vessel. On 31<sup>st</sup> May the ship was caught between converging floes in Melville Bay, the passage of which is always difficult, and frequently hazardous in the extreme, and unable to withstand the ice pressure, she foundered, leaving her crew of 45 men on the ice provided with the slenderest means of sustenance, and having as protection against the elements only the clothes they stood in. The disaster occurred about 40 miles off the West Greenland coast in Lat. 74 23 N., Long. 58 45 W., at a point between Duck Islands and Wilcox Head. Its occurrence was sudden and unexpected. The ship was in a position that boded no danger, and, caught right amidships, she collapsed with a facility which caused surprise and dismay to the experienced men on board. The other ships were ahead making all despatch for Cape York to meet the "north water," so that the only means of succour was to be found in the Danish settlements, the nearest of which, Upparnavik, lay some 150 miles to the south. The ship carried seven boats, and in these the Vega's crew commenced their perilous journey. Their provisions consisted of a bag and a half of biscuits and some bully beef. They had no fuel, and it was only by breaking up the boat fittings that fire was obtained to melt ice into drinking water. A succession of gales was experienced but the heavy ice, though it involved most arduous labour in dragging the boats over the ice from one "lead" of open water to another, proved their salvation, for it broke the sea which under other circumstances would have swamped their frail craft. Because of the detours that had to be made, the journey was prolonged far beyond the distance stated. Food was running short, and the men were in the direst straits, some of them suffering from frost-bite when they came within hail of Upparnavik. There their wants were attended to by the officials in charge, but they were still cut off from the outside world. Fourteen of the crew started in two of the boats for Godhaven, 250

miles to the south, and after a most perilous and eventful voyage they reached the settlement. From this point they were conveyed to Aberdeen in a Norwegian steamer and dispersed to their homes. Captain Cooney, who commanded the Vega; Mr George Mathewson, the first mate; and others of the officers are included in the party that reached Dundee.

The Vega was owned by Mr Robert Ferguson, shipowner, Dundee, and was of 367 tons gross and 299 tons net register. She was placed on the registry of the port in the spring of this year, having been bought from Norwegian owners. It was in the Vega that Baron circumnavigated Europe and Asia, making the North-East Passage, and the accounts of his travels are contained in the fascinating work "The Cruise of the Vega." Captain Cooney is to be commiserated in his misfortune, the second that has befallen him. Last year, in a blinding snow storm, his ship, the Dundee whaler Nova Zembla, went ashore in Davis Straits and was abandoned.

#### THE CAPTAIN'S ACCOUNT

Interviewed last night by a "Dundee Advertiser" reporter, Captain Cooney had a thrilling tale to relate. The Vega, he recalled, left on May 10<sup>th</sup> for the fishing grounds. Heavy gales with snow and ice were experienced. Three days later the ship spoke Dundee ships Diana and Balaena, and it was while the ships were in consort that the only whale observed on the east side was seen. The Balaena lowered her boats and gave chase, but the crew were unsuccessful. On 29<sup>th</sup> May the Vega reached Upernivik in time to witness the other ships of the fleet steam out and proceed up the Strait. On the evening of 30<sup>th</sup> May a strong south-westerly wind closed the ice after the other vessels had passed through. During the night the wind moderated, and next morning the ice opened somewhat, the ship went ahead. She was then in latitude 74 23 north, and longitude 58 45 west, the weather being hazy, with variable winds. Immense floes, four feet in thickness were encountered. At intervals during the day, when the ice opened sufficiently, the steamer's engines propelled her forward. At 7.45 p.m. a heavy floe took the ship on the port side, and pressed with tremendous force, the ice on the starboard side remaining stationary.

Meanwhile the engines were reversed to assist the vessel out. To facilitate her relief a charge of gunpowder was exploded under the ice. Immediately after the detonation part of the ice broke off, but the remaining portion screwed on the Vega's hull, bursting the port side amidships. The craft listed heavily to port. Water rushed in through the aperture. The steam and deck pumps were brought into operation, but to no purpose. Realizing the impossibility of saving the vessel, Captain Cooney gave the order to lower the boats and to save such provisions and effects as circumstances would permit. While the master stepped from the bridge on to ice the deck was submerged about three feet. Scarcely had he attained a place of safety when the Vega foundered. The exact time being 8.10.

#### ON THE ICE

The crew, numbering 44 souls, scantily equipped and clothed, sorrowfully started southwards for Upernivik, distant as the crow flies about 150 miles. To render their plight the worse southerly winds drove a pitiless snow right in their teeth. It was terrible work hauling the seven boats across floes to open water, which was crossed only to encounter fresh fields of hummocky ice. Two biscuits per day were allowed each man, and as there was no time to procure water ere the ship disappeared the only method of obtaining a drink was by burning the boat's fittings to melt the ice. Often as many as 20 men were required one boat over difficult parts of the floe, the operation having to be repeated till all the boats were deposited at the edge of the floe where they could be launched into the open water. The first boat reached

Upernivik on June 5<sup>th</sup> and the remaining six arrived two days later, they having been caught and detained in the ice. Thus was concluded most perilous and adventurous journey over the ice and intervening waters, performed under conditions of the most rigorous nature. At this stage it was found that one man, William Mills, second engineer, was suffering from frost-bite, he affected part being his foot. Other members of the crew complained of similar ailments but fortunately none of the other cases were serious. The sick were all medically treated by the Governor who treated the other shipwrecked sailors with the upmost kindness. On 13<sup>th</sup> June there was an abatement and two boats containing 14 men among whom was Captain Clooney, left for the southern settlements, the other members of the crew electing to remain and await the returning ships. The boats reached Nugsuak, or Four Island Point on the 15<sup>th</sup> and, after resting a day, resumed the journey south. At this stage they parted company. That under the spectioneer reached Lieveley on the 18<sup>th</sup> while Captain Clooney's boat arrived at Ritenbink settlement on the same evening. This five days' journey in the boats was one of the most trying experiences. Dead calm prevailed, and every inch was traversed by mans of the oars. It was impossible to rest comfortably in the open boats so that between the physical exertion and want of sleep the crews when their destinations were made were at the last stages of exhaustion. At Ritenbink the Director of Greenland personally saw that the men received every attention. On learning that sickness prevailed amongst the portion of the crew left at Upernivik, he generously summoned his doctor, in company with whom he at once sailed in his own vessel to Upernivik, his expressed intention being to bring 20 of the men home to Peterhead. On the 27<sup>th</sup> Captain Clooney and his men left for home in the Norwegian steamer Nor. This vessel had stores for Lieveley, and here the other six men were also taken on board. Captain Olsen and his crew treated the unfortunate seamen with great kindness, attending to their every want. Yesterday afternoon, the Nor being off Aberdeen, the Vega's men took to their whale boat and rowed to that port. The Dundee men arrived at Tay Bridge Station last night at 9.45.

Mong the Vega's crew were several sailors hailing from Montrose, Ferryden and Gourdon, and four of these arrived at Montrose last night namely George Lawrence, 23 Ferry Street Montrose; Alexander Gray, Alexander Ritchie and Walter Freeman – all of Gourdon. The story they had to tell was one of peril, hardship and endurance.

THE VEGA DISASTER  
NAMES OF CREW  
THE RETURN OF THE SHIPWRECKED

It was learned in Dundee yesterday that the members of the Vega's crew who were left behind at Uppernivik will arrive home about the 15<sup>th</sup> or 16<sup>th</sup> of next month. As was reported in yesterday's "Dundee Advertiser," the Director of Greenland, who was at Lieveley, on being informed hat there sick amongst the men at Uppernivi, expressed his willingness to convey twenty of their number to Peterhead. If this official carries out his original intention the majority of the men should be home much earlier, but assuming events take their ordinary course the shipwrecked mariners will sail in the Norwegian steamer Nor on her return to the Danish Settlements, and should reach Dundee about the date mentioned. The following s a list of the men at Uppernivik:-

John Allan, Mate, Dundee.  
John Hutchen, engineer, Pitfour Street, Dundee. William  
Milne, blacksmith, 100 Albert Street, Dundee.  
Ole Jergenson, carpenter, Sandefjord.

John Grant, cook, 31 Princes Street Dundee.  
George Mitchell, Bosun, boatswain, 8 Bell Street, Dundee.  
John Cameron, boat steerer 3 North William Street, Dundee.  
Joseph Malone, sailmaker, 6 Ryehill Lane, Dundee.  
John Smith, B.S., 2 Old Shorehead, Arbroath.  
James Anderson, B.S., 2 William Street, Ferryden.  
William Ferrier, B.S., 17 Fisher Street, Dundee.  
Joseph F. Singers. fireman, 165 Prince Street, Dundee.  
John Willamson. fireman, 33 Hill Street, Dundee.  
E. F. Warner. A.B., 79 Crichton Street, Dundee.  
J. Dixon. line manager, 6 Littlejohn Street, Dundee.  
D. A. McLeod. O.S., 43 Hill Street, Dundee.,  
R. Petrie. O.S., 24 Kinloch Street, Dundee.  
W. Moffat. A.B., Crichton Street, Dundee.  
William Swan. A.B., 6 South Street, Arbroath.  
P. Henessey. A.B., 29 Tay Street Dundee.  
P. Swankey.L.M., 17 Ladybridge Sreet, Arbroath.  
A. Spink. O. S., 17 South Street, Arbroath.  
Joseph Swankey. O.S., 15 Old Shore Head, Arbroath.  
William Swankey. O.S., 14 South Street, Arbroath.  
Robert Smith. O.S., 14 South Street, Arbroath.  
Robert Wilson. O.S., 24 Lyon Street, Dundee.  
D. Smith. A.B. 5 High Street, Arbroath.  
J. Stewart. O.S., 13 West Dock Street, Dundee.  
Alex. Crichton. 25 Temple Lane, Dundee.  
H. Anderson. L.M., Ferryden.

Those mentioned below have returned to their homes:-John Cooney. Master, Dundee.

Alex Aitken. Steward, Dundee.  
William Smith. B.S., Arbroath.  
Alex. Ritchie. A.B., Arbroath.  
George Lawrence. L.M., Dundee.  
A. Cargill. A.B., Arbroath.  
J. G. Anderson. Harpooner, Dundee.  
A. Gray. A.B., Gourdon.  
George Mathieson. first harpooner, Dundee.  
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