THE PRINZESS ALICE AGROUND IN THE BAY

On the Rocks Under the Walls of Fort Wadsworth Is the German Liner, Held Fast.

LOST HER WAY IN THE FOG

Tugs Fail to Move Liner and Lighters Are Called to Take Out Her Cargo —Ship Reported Undamaged.

Outgoing with more than a thousand passengers aboard, the North German Lloyd Line steamship Prinzess Alice went aground yesterday morning off the sea wall at Fort Wadsworth. The accident happened in the fog. Before the great liner checked her headway her bow went grating and sliding over the rocky ledge surrounding the wall, until she came to a stop under the Fort Tompkins lighthouse and within five feet of the shore.

There was no excitement among her passengers and a very few minutes after the accident word had been sent to the company's office in this city and tugs were speeding to her help. Within five minutes the fog lifted. With high tide in the afternoon tugs attempted to pull her into deep water. They did not budge her and it is planned to take her cargo from the forward hold and make another effort to move her to-day. Her officers report that the hull has not been damaged and she will be able to proceed on her interrupted voyage to Cherbourg, Plymouth, and Bremen.

The Prinzess Alice sailed from her Hoboken Pier at 10 o'clock yesterday morning, and passed Quarantine about an hour later. At that time it was comparatively clear, though a mist hung over the water. Just as she came abreast of the Quarantine station the French liner Bretagne, outward bound for Havre, came abreast of the Alice. She had sailed from the foot of Morton Street at the same time the Prinzess Alice was pulling out from her slip across the river, and had followed the German ship down the river. On the bridge of the Prinzess Alice was Capt. P. Grosch and Pilot John Ackerman, the latter responsible for navigating the vessel in safety through the channels to the open sea. The pilot noticed the proximity of the Bretagne, and, fearing the ships were too close for safety, crowded in nearer the Staten Island shore.

The wall at that point runs near the site of an old fog bell, and on the sea side is reinforced by stones piled up along it. This deposit of stones forms a ledge barely under water at low tide and extending out about ten feet. Beyond this there is a sudden drop to deep water. The Prinzess Alice brought up with her stern in deep water and with enough water under the main mast, according to her skipper, to float her.

The bell on the lighthouse was ringing at intervals of fifteen seconds when the Prinzess Alice struck, but so quietly was it all done that the first known of the accident ashore was when Nelson Ackerman, the lighthouse keeper, went out a few minutes after the accident. He found the fog clearing and the great bow of the liner lying almost inside his doorway. Major W. G. Haan, Commander of the fort, was on the north pier, within a few yards of the ship when the Prinzess Alice struck. He could see nothing through the fog, and it was only the frequent blowing of the whistle that told him a big vessel was in trouble off the sea wall.

As the fog lifted the lighthouse tender Larkspur was passing and the lighthouse man signalled her to aid. Then came the Gen. Meigs, the Quartermaster's boat, and later the Revenue cutter Seneca made her appearance. It was high tide about 2:30 o'clock, and at once the men began to lay hawsers to free the liner.

Soon the small craft working along side the stranded vessel were joined by the tugs Hudson, John Nichols, John K. Gilkinson, Emma J. Kennedy. and the William J. McCaldin. Lines were passed from the stern of the vessel, which was lying pointing west. There was much work to interest the passengers, who lined the vessel's rail, watching the tugs puffing about with the men bending the lines. The effort to free her was made after the engines of the liner had given up. For time and again the screws had churned up the water in the effort to get free without help. When all was ready a short blast on the liner's whistle started the bevy of tugs straining and tugging at the hawsers. In vain they strained. The great hull did not give an inch. Twice the hawsers of the Seneca broke, and at last they were forced to give up the attempt. The Seneca let go her lines, and the engines on the Prinzess Alice stopped at 4:15 o'clock.

Capt. Grosch confirmed the story of the pilot that the vessel had been crowded inshore to allow the Bretagne the right of way.

Pilot Ackerman said that the Prinzess Alice was going at 6 knots when she struck. He only heard the shore bell once. "The truth of the matter is," he said, "we were too close in. What happened you know. We have no holes in the bottom, and are not making water."

The passengers of the Prinzess Alice were in the saloons or between decks when the vessel struck. It was raining and foggy at the time, and so easily did the vessel go on that they did not know she was in trouble until later. Mr. Otto Meyer of this city said that he was much surprised when he came on deck and found that the vessel was so close to the sea wall. There was no excitement, he said, and after the lifting of the fog the tedium of waiting was relieved by watching the efforts to pull the liner into deep water and watching the soldiers in the fort.

"I kept the fog bell going from 7:30 to 8:30 o'clock and then started it again at 9:30," said Keeper Ackerman. "Soon after 11 o'clock the fog lifted, and I went out to look. There was the bow of the Prinzess Alice within five feet of me. 'Hello, when did you get here?' I said to a sailor. 'Just arrived,' he said, and then when I started to ask another question put his fingers to his lips. The next thing was the hail from the bridge, asking for a tender. I saw the Larkspur approaching and signaled her skipper to come alongside the steamer." According to Capt. Henry C. Daniels of the Gen. Meigs, the Prinzess Alice was a whole point out of her course.

After the unsuccessful effort of the tugs to pull the steamer into deep water word was sent to this city, and two Merritt-Chapman boats, the Hustler and the Rescue, and two lighters were sent to the Narrows. The men worked until late in the night taking out hundreds of barrels of oil that were stowed forward. Another attempt will be made to float her early this morning on the high tide.

On the Prinzess Alice are Mrs. Elizabth R. Barrie, Herbert Best, Mr. and Mrs. John A. Butler, Mrs. H. P. F. Dubois, Miss J. D. Favre, Prof. and Mrs. Hans Gudden, Mr. and Mrs. C. C. Jenks, Ernest H. Herb, Mr. and Mrs. Henry Johnson, Mrs. Lydia Lange, Mr. and Mrs. Henry E. Lowe, Mr. and Mrs. Eugene Lowenthal, Mrs. Robert C. Morris, Mr. and Mrs. B. K. Mumford, Charles S. Patton, Mrs. J. Rundle, Mr. and Mrs. Charles Van Vliet, and Mrs. H. A. Wise-Wood.

The New York Times
Published: May 28, 1909
Copyright © The New York Times