



TREASURY DEPARTMENT

UNITED STATES COAST GUARD

COAST GUARD CUTTER
TALLAPOOSA.

Key West, Fla.,

July 18, 1916.

The Captain Commandant,
Coast Guard,
Washington, D. C.

Subject: Experiences of TALLAPOOSA
during hurricane July 5-6,
and subsequent operations.

Sir:

I have to report that this vessel rode out in the harbor of Mobile, sustaining slight damage as set forth in detail later, a very severe hurricane starting at about 5:30 a.m. on the fifth, with fresh N. E. breezes, and lasting until about the same time the following morning at which time the wind had hauled to South and was blowing a gradually decreasing moderate gale.

The storm center must have approached with unprecedented rapidity and, passing inland slightly to the Westward of Mobile, slowed down very materially after coming over the land, as the barometer fell rapidly and rose very slowly coming to a stand somewhat below normal, the wind continuing to blow a strong breeze to moderate gale from the Southward and Westward for three days after the storm center had passed.

As stated, the storm started with the wind N. E. and blew steadily from that direction with increasing force until about noon when it began to haul very slowly to the Eastward, the force increasing constantly until about three in the afternoon when the maximum was

reached with the wind from the East. Scarcely any appreciable decrease in the force of the wind was noticed until about 11:30 p. m., when there were some quite appreciable lulls of short duration, the wind having by this time worked around to South. About midnight the storm took a fresh hold and blew with great force until daylight, when it moderated to a moderate gale.

During the first stages of the storm the tidal current in the River was strong ebb. About 11:00 a.m., however, the water began to back up against the wind and the current changed to strong flood. By 3:00 p.m. the flood current was running with an estimated force of four to five knots and the water had risen over the wharves. As the wind worked to the Southward, the flood current increased and reached a maximum of about six knots at dusk. The flood current ran strong until midnight, when it eased somewhat; about 3:00 a.m. of the 6th it changed and ran out with even greater force than it had run in. At daylight the water was observed to be five or six feet over the wharves, falling rapidly. Rain fell in an almost continuous deluge during the entire storm. There was little thunder or lightning.

The maximum force of the wind as reported by the weather bureau in published statements was 104 miles an hour for a short period at 3:00 p.m. the average hourly force for the storm being 85 miles. The lowest reading of the ship's barometer was 28.95 from 3:15 to 4:15 p.m. Mobile weather records indicate that about 8.35 inches of rain fell during the storm.

No practical warning of the approach of this storm was received from either the Weather Observer or from the natural phenomena which

usually precede such disturbances. Having had notice that there was a storm central South of Cuba or in the Yucatan Channel, I was on the alert for indications of its approach.

The Fourth was a typical Mobile July day with the usual afternoon thunder shower, normal sunset and tide range. I observed closely the sky at ten o'clock that evening and saw nothing unusual in its appearance. The barometer was slightly below normal at that time and seemed to have a downward tendency. Having experienced two hurricanes in this neighborhood previously, I was reassured by the general appearance of the elements.

The following radiograms relative to this storm were received: July 4th, at 3:30 p.m.-"Disturbance in Southeast Gulf of Mexico but no reports to indicate intensity or exact direction of movement. Probably moving Northeast toward Central Gulf and Gulf shipping advised to remain in Port until further advice this evening."

July 5th,- "Advisory storm warning 9:30 a.m., Panama City to Carrabel tropical storm nearing middle Gulf Coast, moving Northwest. Moderate Southeast gale to-day, probably diminishing tonight. Hold all shipping. Further storm warning later, soon as received."

July 5th, at 10:30 a.m.-"Hurricane warning 11:00 a.m. Mobile to Bay St. Louis. Storm apparently approaching East Louisiana Coast, increasing strong Northeast gale."

Northeast storm warning was displayed at Mobile until 10:30 a.m. July 5th, when the hurricane signal was set. These flags were soon blown to pieces.

When the storm broke, the TALLAPOOSA was at her usual Mobile berth at the L. & N. R.R. Dock, just South of Government Street.

Order had been passed for steam at 9:00 a.m. with the idea of moving to the coal wharf for water and supplies, and the sailing hour had been set for 11:30. As the vessel was in good position to ride out a N. E. gale, the lines were doubled, all available fenders were placed and as the storm increased, extra lines were run, the 7 inch hawser being used for the purpose. All awnings were sent below and everything about decks secured. The vessel rode easily against the fenders with very little strain on the lines. The wharf above the TALLAPOOSA was unoccupied for about 300 feet to where the fruit steamer FORT GAINES, was made fast; below, an old water barge, two lumber scow-barges, a three masted schooner partially loaded and one of the Bay excursion boats were made fast in the order named. Across the River and slightly below the TALLAPOOSA'S berth several tugs, steamers, dredges and a number of sections of discharge pipes on pontoons, all belonging to the U. S. Engineer, was moored. A little further down on that side at the plant of the Ollinger & Bruce Co., several vessels were moored as well as two floating docks, one occupied by the tug GULFPORT.

The storm caught shipping of all sorts entirely unprepared. No one about the waterfront seems to have had an idea that such a storm was close at hand. The vessels all along the wharves were exactly as usual, no effort had been made to move small craft or even the up river boats to more secure berths as is usual upon notice of an approaching storm. By the time the necessity for extra precautions became apparent it was too late to do anything.

Early in the forenoon the heavy pontoon pipe line broke away from the Engineers station across the River and lodged against the

wharf and shipping below the TALLAPOOSA. As the flood current increased and the wind shifted to the Eastward, the lumber barges astern broke adrift and brought up on the stern lines of the TALLAPOOSA, the water scow having sunk at her mooring early in the storm. These barges were secured by the crew of this vessel as best they could to keep them from ramming the TALLAPOOSA, and extra stern lines were run. At the time I was inclined to be worried by this barge so close astern, but as the storm progressed and other vessels, barges, etc., broke adrift and came charging across the River and up the water front, she proved a fine fender and undoubtedly saved this vessel from serious damage.

About 2:00 p.m. the pipe line and a small gasoline freight boat which had become entangled with it, came rushing up the River; the prow of the gasoline boat jamming under our quarter and scraping across the Ward Room air ports, carried away three of the brass air port rims. A little later the snag boat TWINING with the Army tug, TUSCALOOSA, fast alongside, broke adrift and came directly across the River for this vessel at a speed of five or six knots. Fortunately the outrigger for the stern wheel of the TWINING brought up on the barge astern and broke the force of the blow. The TUSCALOOSA hit us a hard but glancing blow, doing no damage except to paintwork. The upper work on the TWINING brought up against the whaleboat, smashing a couple of planks and breaking the boat boom, after which she drifted clear and passed up stream. A number of schooners, barges and other craft as well as a great deal of heavy wreckage, drifted up stream, but all passed clear of the TALLAPOOSA.

Forseeing that it might become necessary to leave the wharf suddenly, steam was ordered on both boilers early in the day and axes

were placed at hand by every fast.

Shortly after six, two heavy coal barges, drifting up the harbor with the wind and tide, just cleared the TALLAPOOSA. At about 6:30 a heavy coal conveyer barge struck the barges astern of this vessel and lodged. This additional pressure proved too much and the whole wharf to which we were made fast gave way and started up stream. It became imperative to get away from the wreckage.-The port anchor was let go under foot to hold our head and prevent our ramming the FORT GAINES.- All lines were out and the vessel was backed clear of the wharf and scows.- A few minutes later, having worked across the River as best I could judge, the anchors were let go in succession veering to 100 fathoms starboard - 60 fathoms port before the vessel could be brought up. The rain was falling in torrents and the wind blowing at least 90 miles an hour at the time. When the ship came broadside to the wind and caught the full force, she heeled over to a dangerous angle. Almost immediately it became pitch dark; the rain continued in torrents and was driven with such force that it was impossible to look into the wind and but a very short distance could be seen. Shortly after anchoring, an old river steamer with a scow alongside, drifted into this vessel despite our efforts to clear with engines and helm, and the corner of the scow struck our starboard side just abaft the bridge and dented the plate badly - our worst scar. By great good fortune and the use of the rudder and engines, we managed to sheer clear of everything that passed up the River - steamers, schooners, scows, three sections of dry dock with large tug on the blocks and the coal conveyer that had started our wharf, passed close enough to be seen, notwithstanding the darkness and rain.

Our last and closest call was a big four-masted schooner staggering up the River broadside to the wind and tide.-The TALLAPOOSA cleared her by a matter of a few feet. It was necessary to work the engines at full speed and to give her a very rank sheer. For a while it looked as though the schooners anchors had fouled ours and that she was taking us up stream with her. Our anchors were clear, however, and the schooner was soon out of sight astern.

About 11:30 p.m. there were several very noticeable lulls and I was in hopes the worst was over. Just after midnight the wind piped up again and blew a howling gale until daylight, when it began to moderate. The flood current changed to strong ebb shortly after midnight and nothing of any size drifted by the vessel within sight after midnight.

At 10:30 a.m. of the 6th, the TALLAPOOSA made fast to the M. & O. R.R. dock for water, the coal wharf being apparently badly damaged. I sent an officer to Mayor's office to offer any assistance in our power. This officer did not see the Mayor but did see one of the City Commissioners who expressed his thanks and stated that he would deliver my message to the Mayor and that the Mayor would send me a message if any service was required. I received no message so infer that no service was possible. I also sent an officer to offer the use of our wireless to the U. S. Army Engineers and other branches of the Government Service and the Associated Press. I filed with the Western Union Headquarters a message reporting this vessel safe and also sent radiogram via a steamer off the Mississippi Passes to that effect. All wires were down in Mobile but I was informed that

they would be working very soon. My radiogram, I learned later, was not transmitted due to the fact that the relaying vessel got out of range of the New Orleans commercial station before it could be forwarded.

Members of the crew who had families ashore were given short liberty to ascertain how their homes were.-These men all returned on time and reported that a number of their homes had been unroofed and otherwise damaged. The crew was kept on board in readiness to answer any call from the city, which was in total darkness.

Early in the morning of the 7th, notwithstanding it was still blowing fresh with heavy rain, I concluded to run down to Fort Morgan to be in position to answer any call from outside. It was apparent that both the Pensacola and New Orleans wireless stations were not working so that with all wires down, my best chance for information seemed to be from inbound steamers, most of which plying these waters are without wireless. All of the Mobile Channel beacons were found to have been destroyed or badly damaged and it appeared that the upper part of the channel had filled in to some extent, only 3 1/3 fathoms being found in the axis of the channel.

I remained inside the bar the night of the 7th as it was still blowing and thick, and there was a very heavy sea running making the bar impossible.

While at Mobile a radiogram to the Mobile station (which had been completely wrecked) from the Marconi station on the Quarantine Barge ^{Fort Morgan} stating that he was almost out of gasoline and food. ^{was intercepted.} This message I had sent to the office in Mobile.-As a result of conditions in Mobile the stores had not been sent down. I therefore

loaned the Marconi station a drum of gasoline and offered the operator provisions; the latter were not required as he expected stores by the Quartermaster's steamer. After delivering the gasoline the vessel moved to a berth as close as possible to Fort Gaines to ascertain the conditions there as requested by the commanding officer at Fort Morgan. The vessel anchored about a mile from shore and endeavored to get in touch by wig wag signal, ^{as the weather was too bad for boating.} We could get no acknowledgment although men could be seen on the beach. Buildings, etc., appeared to be undamaged and I so informed the Commanding Officer.

About 11:00 p.m. radiogram was received from the Fort Morgan station that a man had come ashore from a schooner which had been cast up on the beach about four miles from the Fort.-There were six men still on board. It was then blowing a gale with driving rain. The TALLAPOOSA could render no assistance and the Commanding Officer at Fort Morgan was informed that the only assistance possible could be rendered from the beach. Subsequently I was informed that a detail of men from the Fort rescued these men, the schooner having been driven high on the beach.

Early on the morning of the 8th the TALLAPOOSA crossed the bar, the sea breaking at the time, and stood to the Westward to investigate conditions toward Ship Island, the storm center having passed in that locality. The schooner HENRY W. CRAMP was spoken anchored off Dauphin Island waiting for the sea to run down before crossing the bar. Nothing was observed out of the ordinary except that the buoys at Horn Island were out of place or missing. All the buoys below Sand Island Light House were either missing or out

of place and the rear ranges were down.

Some wreckage was seen off the entrance to Ship Island but none of any size. A Russian barkentine was driven high and dry on Ship Island and a Norwegian bark lay dismasted and aground inside Ship Island abreast the Light House. This latter vessel had signal set for boat. Before a boat could be sent the signal was hauled down and a gasoline boat with one of the Gulfport Pilots came alongside from the bark. From him I learned that the Public Health Station on Ship Island had weathered the storm with slight damage and that the damage at Gulfport and Biloxi had been confined to small craft.--Two schooners had been anchored in the roads during the storm; one loaded with phosphate rock had evidently foundered as part of her had been found on the main land; the other, light, had disappeared and her fate was unknown. A British steamer up from the Florida Straits since the storm reported having spoken the Norwegian bark Elsa, partially dismasted but proceeding under jury rig and refusing assistance. From his account of the storm it appeared it appeared that the storm center had passed between M and G mainland. He also informed me that wires were down at Gulfport so as his information was all that could be obtained in Gulfport, the TALLAPOOSA remained at anchor at Ship Island until daylight when a course was laid to inspect the Chandeleur Islands - a locality not frequently visited and where I thought some vessel might be found in need of immediate assistance. At six a schooner was sighted high and dry on one of the Chandeleur Islands some distance below the Light House and boats were sent in to investigate. It was

found to be three masted schooner LOGUNA, driven so high that even the ship's dinghey could not get alongside of her. She was in charge of the cook, the master and crew having gone to Gulfport in the ship's boat.-This vessel was the light schooner that the Pilot had reported anchored off Ship Island during the storm. The other schooner above mentioned - one of the Dantzler fleet - had been anchored near where the storm started, but the vessels had parted company early in the blow and had soon drifted out of sight of each other. After standing to the Southward far enough to be sure that there was nothing else stranded or in trouble in this vicinity, course was laid for Mobile Bar, hoping either to sight some vessel in trouble or get in touch with some inbound steamer with news of trouble off shore.-Great difficulty was being experienced with the wireless on account of the heavy static-

Upon arriving off the bar a dismasted schooner was sighted to the Eastward of the bar at anchor with distress signal set. This vessel was found to be the American schooner CITY OF BALTIMORE, of Chicago, loaded with phosphate rock, thirty-three days out of TAMPA, which had been dismasted off the mouth of the Mississippi and had worked in under jury rig. She was at anchor, riding broadside to the sea which was breaking over her. A Mobile Bar Pilot had boarded her the evening before and both the pilot and the master were very much exercised for the safety of the vessel as she was leaking and there was great danger of a hatch cover being torn loose, in which event she would go to the bottom immediately. The TALLAPOOSA anchored ahead of her and notwithstanding quite a sea was running, no particular difficulty was encountered in running a line with the

particular difficulty was encountered in running a line with the whaleboat.-After our line was fast, the work was somewhat retarded by the difficulty encountered in heaving up the schooner's anchors.- At my request the pilot came on board the TALLAPOOSA and took the vessel in over the bar. The schooner was anchored in shoal water in the Lower Fleet.

Early on the morning of the 10th the ship stood out of the bar. When abreast of Sand Island Light, two men were observed making signals. One man held the book while the other by the use of the semaphore made the signal "no water!"-The whaleboat was immediately sent in with all boat breakers filled but upon landing found there was nothing available to store the water in. A rock had damaged the cistern and all barrels, etc., had been washed away with the boathouse and boats. The Keeper also requested that his stores be brought from Fort Morgan as he was almost out of food and had no boat.-These stores were secured and delivered, after which the vessel stood out over the bar, careful soundings being taken on the range obtained from the pilot the day previous. A large tank steamer, deeply loaded, was outside waiting for an opportunity to cross in and asked for the information.-The least depth obtained was 22 feet and he was informed to that effect.-The pilots had been prevented making soundings by the continued heavy weather.

The steamer above mentioned had come up from Tortugas after the storm, but had sighted nothing. A British steamer arrived off the bar about this time and informed us that she was up from Tortugas but had seen nothing.

Stood to the Eastward.-After the storm the wind continued to the Southward and Westward and I concluded that any vessel or wreck at all subject to the influence of the wind would fetch in that direction. Also a strong Easterly set was noticed at Mobile bar.

Twelve miles to the Eastward a vessel was made out high on the beach.-Stood in and found her to be the three masted schooner ALBERT D. MILLS, all masts standing, high on the beach, no one on board and the sea breaking over her. Her crew was apparently camped on the beach. This is the vessel reported on the night of the 7th as four miles East of Fort Morgan and which I thought I sighted when we first crossed the bar.

As there was nothing the TALLAPOOSA could do, continued to the Eastward and stood into Pensacola for news. All of the outer buoys at the bar were out of place, or missing, but the ranges were all in place. The British steamer ST. ANDREWS, in the day before from Tortugas, had reported the bark ELSA 44 miles off the bar under jury rig. An officer was sent for detailed information and ascertained that two tugs had gone out for the vessel, her position being definitely known. The St. ANDREWS had no other news. As the tug had twenty-four hours start and the ELSA was in no danger, the TALLAPOOSA remained in Pensacola until the following morning.-No further news was obtained.

On the morning of the 11th stood out, passing the bark ELSA in tow in the harbor. The course was laid to the Eastward and well off shore. The tug "Storm King" of Pensacola was spoken and informed that the ELSA, for which he had been working, was in. The master had seen nothing in trouble and had spoken the steamer Le ROY (formerly the Revenue Cutter Dexter) bound up from Cuba with two barges and

he also had seen nothing except a quantity of lumber off Cape San Blas.

At 9:45 a.m. received Headquarters radio directing me to search for barge "Magnolia." At the time I was engaged in a search for her as I had received the information contained in Headquarters radio on the 9th at 10:00 p.m. broadcasted from Key West. It was impossible to make any estimate of what direction or distance the "Magnolia" would be driven during the storm; five days had elapsed since she broke adrift and after the storm passed, the winds had been to the Southward and Westward and quite fresh. My judgement was that the "Magnolia" or any other vessel presenting any surface to the wind would drift in a North-Easterly direction. I figured that the wind had been strong enough to generate a current in that direction.-In addition, wireless communication with New Orleans (Commercial and Naval Station) was almost constant with an occasional report from some vessel at Mobile bar and later we were in touch with the Commercial station at Tampa, so that it appeared best for me to cruise, pending definite information, in the section not crossed by vessels bound for these points. I was also sure that had the "Magnolia" not lost her masts, she would make the best of her way under sail to one of these tracks and be picked up or reported. After receiving Headquarters orders I continued search along these general lines.

At 4:00 p.m. July 11th, in latitude $29^{\circ}-18'$; longitude $86^{\circ}-55'$, two spars, evidently the lower masts of a schooner with some wreckage of sails attached, were sighted.-No effort was made to destroy them as I did not consider them a sufficiently dangerous obstruction to detain the vessel.

A crows nest was improvised and a lookout was posted aloft.

The moon was almost full so the search was continued at the same speed at night as during the day, various courses being run. At 4:00 a.m. of the 12th a relayed message from the ITASCA was received, reporting that that vessel had been engaged in the search for the "Magnolia" but was returning to Key West, and also giving location of a dangerous derelict. There was an apparent error in the latitude given in this message. At 11:15 received reply to inquiry from the steamer FLORIDA, also engaged in the search, giving me the information in regard to ground covered by that vessel. I also endeavored to get the same information from the ITASCA but could not reach her at the time.

At 2:40 p.m. of the 12th a message was received from the steamer COMUS reporting apparently the same derelict. The TALLAPOOSA headed for the reported position, the course to that point being as good a line of search as any.

At midnight of the 12th, having arrived in the vicinity of the derelict, the vessel was stopped and drifted until daylight when the wreck was sighted. ^{in lat 26-12 long 85-31-} Before stopping, a vessel bound out of New Orleans was spoken: she had no news and was warned of the presence of the derelict. During the search general call was sent out every hour and a number of vessels answered, but none had any information in regard to the MAGNOLIA.

At 9:05 a.m. of the 13th a message was received from the FLORIDA that that vessel had located the MAGNOLIA 62 miles SSE from Mobile Bar. Operations were immediately started on the wreck which proved to be the schooner CARRIE STRONG, the name on the bow being plainly visible with the water glass. She was bottom up,

the stern, cabin and after part of the deck and some of the planking gone, spars and rigging hanging by the head gear. This derelict was a very dangerous obstruction in that it was heavy, barely awash and right in the track of vessels bound to and from New Orleans and Mobile. This is amply demonstrated by the number of vessels that passed while the TALLAPOOSA was working on the wreck. A mine was placed and the spars and rigging attached to the bow were cleared and shattered. The heavy tow line was made fast by means of a chain strap through a hole in the forward part of the keel. An improvised thimble made by the engineers force out of two inch pipe, was used to protect the line there being no thimble or shackle large enough in the ship's outfit.

At 4:00 p.m. started ahead on a course for the Dry Tortugas, the nearest land, and an excellent haven for derelicts in my opinion. The CARRIE STRONG took position on the port quarter, well off, and proved a heavy tow. At daylight next morning it was found by observations, that no appreciable headway had been made so preparations for breaking the wreck up were made. It was my opinion that, could the hull be broken in two, athwartships, the bow end would certainly sink being weighed down by the anchors and chains and other heavy gear, and the after end would probably sink when rid of the new lumber in the cargo as the vessel was old and water-logged.

Detailed report of Lieut. Williams, who was in direct charge of the mine operations, is forwarded herewith. These operations were successful only to a degree and the wreck was again taken in tow, the hulk stern first, which proved to be an improvement as it trailed

along directly astern and a speed of slightly under two knots was maintained ^{for approximately 180 miles} until the wreck was grounded inside the reefs near the entrance to North Key Harbor, Dry Tortugas, at 6:00 a.m. of the 18th, out of the way of all traffic. A moderate sea was encountered during the 17th and a large part of the cargo worked out through the holes that had been made by the mines. The constant and heavy strain on the ten inch line has taken most of the life out of it and as this line has seen hard service before, it will be necessary to replace it in the near future.

In light of recent news reports it may be of interest that when found, at least a dozen large sharks were found around this wreck and they were so bold that when the first boat was lowered, they came alongside and struck at the oars. A number were caught and killed while work was in progress.

After beaching the derelict the TALLAPOOSA proceeded to Key West for oil and stores and minor adjustment of the machinery. The vessel is, however, ready for immediate service.

Respectfully,

Commanding.