

Wreck: Gertrude DeCosta



Halifax Harbour – Narrows

Wrecked: March 18, 1950

The Event

In the early hours of March 18, 1950, the fishing schooner *Gertrude DeCosta* collided with the freighter *Island Connector* in dense fog outside Halifax Harbour.

Operating within a confined and active shipping approach, both vessels were navigating reduced visibility conditions when they converged.

The schooner was struck aft and sank within minutes.

The Ship

- Wooden fishing schooner
- Built: 1912
- Length: ~115 ft
- Home Port: Yarmouth, Nova Scotia
- Operator: Sweeney Fisheries Ltd.
- Diesel-powered with auxiliary sail
- Offshore fishing vessel (Grand Banks operations)

Typical operations:

- Longlining (cod, haddock, halibut)
- Dory-based fishing system
- Extended offshore voyages

Why It Was Lost

A combination of navigational factors in restricted visibility:

- Dense fog reducing visibility and distance perception
- Assumption of right-of-way between vessels
- Delayed course correction
- Confined harbour approach with crossing traffic

In fog, distance closes faster than vessels can react.

The Wreck Event

- Lights observed ahead in fog
- Assumption the other vessel would pass clear
- Order given: “Haul her hard over”
- Freighter emerged at close range
- Impact occurred aft of main rigging

44°37.243'N, 063°33.094'W

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- Hull opened immediately
- Rapid flooding

The vessel sank within approximately 1–2 minutes.

The End of the Ship

- No time to launch dories
- Crew attempted to free boats—unsuccessful
- Rigging created entanglement during sinking
- Survivors entered cold water among debris
- Rescue conducted by Island Connector

Crew: 17 – Lost: 11 ~~~~~ The loss was not individual, it was generational.

Diver Notes

- Exact wreck structure fragmented
- Debris field rather than intact hull
- Located within active harbour approaches
- Limited visibility common

Requires

- Advance planning
- Proper vessel support
- Strong navigation awareness

Why This Site Matters

- Represents working offshore fishing fleet of Nova Scotia
- Part of Sweeney Fisheries industrial operation
- Example of collision risk in confined harbour approaches
- Demonstrates limitations of navigation in fog
- High human loss relative to vessel size
- Strong connection to coastal communities

Final Thought

Routine does not fail gradually.

It fails all at once.

In the fog outside Halifax Harbour, there was no time left to correct it.