

Excerpt from Pacific Graveyard by James A. Gibbs

***Rescue of the American Steam Schooner Washington, November 1911***

One of the most remarkable feats of daring in the history of the North Pacific occurred on November 17, 1911, when Captain C. T. "Buck" Bailey of the tug *Tatoosh* gambled with death in shoal-infested waters to get a line on the steam schooner *Washington*, fast aground on Peacock Spit.

The *Washington* was heavily laden with lumber when she went on the spit, and her delicate position had shoreside bets running ten to one that she would be a total loss.

For twenty endless hours the steamer was buffeted by nasty seas while, aboard, an unsung heroine, Mrs. Mary Fullmer, the only woman among the passengers kept up the courage of all hands with humor and song.

Certainly under the circumstances it would have been an extremely dangerous task to attempt to rescue the passengers, but Bailey wasn't content with that, for he planned to save all or nothing, and when he accomplished the former, it proved the feat of the decade.

In his own modest words, Captain Bailey explained the deed after the *Washington* had been towed to safety.

"As I approached the *Washington*, said Bailey, I could see twelve or fifteen passengers huddled together on the after end of the ship, with the life preservers on. I asked the captain if he had any steam to use in heaving the hawser aboard. He told me no, that the fires were out. then I called to the passengers huddled aft and asked them to go forward and help get the hawser aboard. They did so, all of them running over the deckload of lumber and the debris like scared sheep."

"In about ten minutes' time we got the hawser aboard and it was made fast. Finally we started out with the *Washington* in tow. We came slowly through the breakers. I arrived down off the whistling buoy with the *Washington* at 3:45 o'clock. The passengers and crew acted like they were mad when we got started – threw up their hands, gesticulated and yelled at the tops of their voices. I looked over to the North Head, and at the life-saving station, and there must have been a thousand people there watching the rescue."

Later it was revealed that the *Washington* did not have a cent of insurance on her when rescued by the *Tatoosh*.

In writing to George Plummer, manager of the Puget Sound Tow Boat Company, owners of the *Tatoosh*, Bailey said that he did not care if he received a cent of salvage money for saving the *Washington*, but wished that his crew could be rewarded. The tug was valued at \$91,000, a considerable gamble on such a venture. Olson & Maloney of San Francisco, owners of the *Washington*, settled with the tug's operators in a case that commanded the attention of many shipping men.

*by James A. Gibbs*

*Pacific Graveyard*

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Notes:

John Wilson (née Eskola) received a medal for bravery as part of the crew of the *Tatoosh* in 1911. The medal now resides at the Clatsop County Historical Society. It was donated by Dick Wilson (year unknown). There is picture of the *Tatoosh* rescue in the book, *Pacific Graveyard*, on page 180.

