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FOG BALLS

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The term "fog ball" (balle de brouillard" or "bouchon de brouillard") is applied along the coast of Belgium to a kind of fog that appears to be especially common in that part of the world. It is a bank of low fog, with sharply defined boundary, moving over land or water with the wind. Fog balls are dreaded by sailors on the North Sea, where they have been the cause of many collisions. They generally appear in clear weather, advancing rapidly, and suddenly plunging the observer in a mass of vapor so dense that objects a few yards away are invisible. In a typical case the phenomenon lasts only 15 or 20 minutes, and then, as the fog passes, the observer suddenly finds himself once more in the clear light of day.

The danger of these drifting fog banks to navigation was brought to public attention after an accident at the mouth of the Scheldt on December 20, 1899, when the steamer "Luciana" ran into the "Maggie McNair," which was lying at anchor. In a lawsuit arising from the accident the captain of the "Luciana" declared that he had been enveloped in a fog ball so suddenly that he had no time to slacken speed before the collision. A fog of the same variety is supposed to have contributed to the tragic sinking of the transatlantic liner "Empress of Ireland" by a collier at the mouth of the St. Lawrence in May, 1914.

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