

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD
WASHINGTON, D.C.

ISSUED: October 29, 1979

Forwarded to:
Admiral John B. Hayes
Commandant
U.S. Coast Guard
Washington, D.C. 20590

SAFETY RECOMMENDATION(S)
M-79-103 through -106

At 0750 c.s.t. on December 4, 1977, the Spanish motor tankship RIBAFORADA rammed the moored barge MB-5, three wharves, and the cargo ship M/V TIARET on the lower Mississippi River near New Orleans, Louisiana. Two of the RIBAFORADA's cargo tanks were breached. Property damage was estimated to be \$921,000. 1/

The ramming occurred while the pilot, who had assumed navigational control of the vessel, was navigating the RIBAFORADA downriver around Algiers Point. The Safety Board determined that the pilot started the turn too late to safely clear the river's left bank. The pilot was not adequately familiar with the vessel's maneuverability to navigate the vessel around a turn such as Algiers Point, where there is little margin for error in navigating an 805-foot-long tankship.

The Navigation Safety Regulations, 33 CFR 164.35(g), require vessel maneuvering information to be prominently displayed in the wheelhouse. This information was not displayed on the RIBAFORADA. Also, the master did not inform the pilot of the vessel's maneuvering characteristics as required by 33 CFR 164.35 (k). The Coast Guard has established a foreign vessel boarding program to assure compliance with U.S. regulations. To assure compliance with the Navigation Safety Regulations, the Coast Guard should include in its boarding checklist for foreign vessels a requirement to determine that the maneuvering information is properly posted.

The necessary expertise to navigate the RIBAFORADA around Algiers Point was split between the pilot and master. The master was more specifically familiar with the maneuvering performance of the vessel and the pilot was expected to have extensive knowledge of local factors, such as current velocities, depths, and navigational practices important to navigation. Because the master and

1/ For more detailed information read "Marine Accident Report — Spanish Motor Tankship RIBAFORADA Collision with Barge MB-5, Three Wharves, and Cargo Ship M/V TIARET near New Orleans, Louisiana, December 4, 1977" (NTSB-MAR-79-15).

pilot did not discuss the maneuvering characteristics of the RIBAFORADA and the essential features of the downriver voyage (including the rounding of Algiers Point), neither was fully prepared to control the vessel's navigation. The pilot could not properly plan the approach to Algiers Point, determine when to start the turn, and determine how much rudder to apply. The master was handicapped in supervising the pilot's actions or monitoring the vessel's progress in the turn around Algiers Point because he did not know the pilot's maneuvering plan. This lack of knowledge may have led to his reluctance to relieve the pilot immediately or to press his concern when he became apprehensive that the vessel was too close to the left descending bank.

Because the pilot was uncertain of vessel traffic below Algiers Point, he delayed starting his turn until he could see below the point. The pilot said he would have started turning sooner and stayed more to the right if he had known that vessel traffic was clear below Algiers Point. The Coast Guard Vessel Traffic Service (VTS) might have provided information to the pilot about vessel traffic below Algiers Point, but the pilot's VHF radiotelephone was not equipped with channel 11 to communicate with the VTS. Moreover, this pilot said he did not trust the VTS information because some vessels do not report their movements and others make inaccurate reports. The immediate danger to the RIBAFORADA was that a nonparticipating vessel could be approaching Algiers Point even though the VTS might have reported traffic was clear.

The Coast Guard advises mariners that the effectiveness of the New Orleans VTS depends on vessel participation and cautions that the accuracy of VTS information reflects the reports received from participating vessels. Since vessels are not required to participate in the VTS and participating vessels are allowed to continue transiting the VTS area even if they have a radio failure, there is substantial uncertainty about vessel movements in the New Orleans VTS. Nonparticipating vessels, vessels experiencing radio failure, and vessels making inaccurate reports could hazard the navigation of a vessel which had been advised by the VTS that traffic was clear. Because VTS information to vessels approaching Algiers Point is so conditional, it is not adequate assurance that participating vessels can navigate safely around Algiers Point while relying on this information.

During high river stages, the Coast Guard seeks to reduce the risk of collisions near Algiers Point by controlling the movement of vessels with traffic lights. Through visual surveillance near the existing traffic lights, the Coast Guard can provide reasonably complete information on vessel movements near Algiers Point. The Coast Guard could further resolve the dangerous navigation situation created by the existence of conflicts between the points and bends custom and the Inland Rules at Algiers Point by using its VTS to advise vessels nearing the point of meeting traffic on their side of the channel.

While navigating the RIBAFORADA toward Algiers Point, the pilot was using the radiotelephone to determine whether he would meet any vessels near the point. Although his calls were not answered, he was not convinced that traffic below the point was clear. He had previously experienced situations where vessels

were not either listening or answering on channel 13 VHF. Communication over channel 13 VHF at the time of the accident was difficult because of poor user discipline. Similar problems with bridge-to-bridge radiotelephone communications were discussed in an earlier accident report. ^{2/} In that report, the Coast Guard stated that it had the authority to enforce the requirements of the Vessel Bridge-to-Bridge Radiotelephone Act, that it would monitor that frequency regularly, and that it would cite and levy penalties against violators. The Coast Guard monitoring activities since that time show that improper use as well as illegal transmissions are continuing. However, the Coast Guard has said more recently that its enforcement efforts have been hampered by difficulties in identifying violators and measuring signal strengths of suspected illegally high-powered transmissions.

Acting at the request of the Coast Guard, the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) has changed the frequency for bridge-to-bridge operations in the Southern Louisiana section of the Mississippi River. Channel 67 will replace channel 13 in most of the lower Mississippi River up to mile 242.4 AHP near Baton Rouge and in the Inner Harbor Navigational Canal and in the Mississippi River Gulf Outlet Canal. This change should reduce the congestion which has been a problem in bridge-to-bridge radiotelephone communications in the lower Mississippi River. However, the Safety Board believes that some problems will remain, such as failure to guard on the proper bridge-to-bridge channel. The Coast Guard, in conjunction with the FCC, should improve the effectiveness of its monitoring and enforcement program to curb these problems.

Therefore, the National Transportation Safety Board recommends that the U.S. Coast Guard:

Expedite the installation of vessel surveillance systems and institute mandatory participation in the Vessel Traffic Service for the Mississippi River near Algiers Point. (Class II, Priority Action) (M-79-103)

As an interim measure pending installation of vessel surveillance systems for the Vessel Traffic Service, operate the Algiers Point traffic lights continuously. (Class I, Urgent Action) (M-79-104)

Include in its foreign vessel boarding program checklist a requirement to determine that maneuvering information is displayed as required by 33 CFR 164.35(g). (Class II, Priority Action) (M-79-105)

^{2/} "Marine Casualty Report — SS KEYTRADER and SS BAUNE Collision in the Mississippi River on January 18, 1974 with Loss of Life" (USCG/NTSB-MAR-77-1).

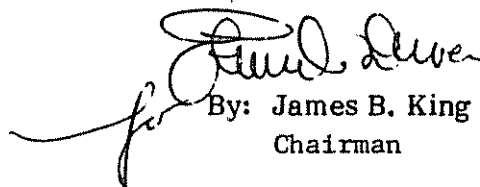
Establish, with the assistance of the Federal Communications Commission, a monitoring and enforcement program and a public information program to reduce improper use of the bridge-to-bridge radiotelephone channels on the lower Mississippi River. (Class II, Priority Action) (M-79-106)

The Safety Board also reiterates the following recommendations which were made to the U. S. Coast Guard as a result of previous accident investigations: 3/

Require that every master of an oceangoing vessel inform himself of the pilot's plan to maneuver his ship in or out of a harbor and that the master determine, with the pilot's assistance, the critical aspects of the maneuver, including the pilot's plan for emergencies. The master should then be required to instruct his crew to insure that high-risk tasks receive priority. (M-74-15)

Amend 33 CFR 164.11(k) to require that masters and pilots discuss beforehand and agree to the essential features and relevant checkpoints of maneuvers expected to be undertaken. (M-77-33)

KING, Chairman, DRIVER, Vice Chairman, McADAMS, GOLDMAN, and BURSLEY, Members, concurred in the above recommendations.


By: James B. King
Chairman

3/ "SS AFRICAN NEPTUNE Collision with the Sidney Lanier Bridge, Brunswick, Georgia, November 7, 1972" (USCG/NTSB-MAR-74-4); "SS EDGAR M. QUEENY Collision With the S/T CORINTHOS, Marcus Hook Channel, Pennsylvania, January 31, 1975" (USCG/NTSB-MAR-77-2).