



National Transportation Safety Board

Washington, D.C. 20594

Safety Recommendation

SP-20
Ray M-312A

Date: March 28, 1986

In reply refer to: M-86-30 and -31

Mr. Norman F. McCall
President
Cameron Boat Rentals, Inc.
Post Office Box 398
Cameron, Louisiana 70631

On March 9, 1985, the U.S. charter fishing vessel GULF QUEEN was rammed by the U.S. crewboat M/V ALAN MCCALL in the Gulf of Mexico, about 55 miles southeast of Cameron, Louisiana. The GULF QUEEN, with 20 persons aboard, was anchored in water about 75 feet in depth while members of the fishing party fished. The visibility was approximately 1/4 nautical mile in the fog. The ALAN MCCALL, a 110-foot crewboat, while en route to an oil production platform, was traveling at a speed of about 18 knots when it struck the port side of the wood-hulled GULF QUEEN near its stern. Three persons from the GULF QUEEN were thrown into the water. Two persons were rescued; the third person is missing and presumed dead. The GULF QUEEN flooded and sank. The GULF QUEEN's survivors were taken aboard the ALAN MCCALL and brought ashore.^{1/}

The deckhand aboard the ALAN MCCALL stated that he was in the wheelhouse acting as lookout, but he failed to sight the GULF QUEEN in sufficient time to advise the operator of its presence. If the two were in the wheelhouse, it is unlikely that both would have failed to see the vessel ahead. If indeed the deckhand was in the crewboat's wheelhouse and properly performing his duty as lookout, he should have sighted the fishing vessel in ample time to have alerted the operator to steer clear of it. At a speed of 18 knots, the ALAN MCCALL would have traveled the 1/4 mile in 50 seconds, which would have been sufficient time to alter course. With a reported 1/4-nmi visibility, his visual sighting of the GULF QUEEN at a distance of only about 80 feet clearly indicates that a proper lookout was not maintained.

Despite his lack of formal radar training, the operator of the ALAN MCCALL navigated his vessel on the day of the accident at a speed of 18 knots or more, solely dependent on radar as a method of maintaining a proper lookout. The deckhand testified that he had left the wheelhouse several times, which indicates his performance as a lookout remains questionable. This manner of operation exhibited a complete disregard for the limited visibility that prevailed. His belief that operating a crewboat at 18 to 20 knots in limited visibility is normal procedure in the offshore industry should not be

^{1/} For more detailed information read Marine Accident Report—"Collision between the Fishing Vessel GULF QUEEN and the crewboat M/V ALAN MCCALL in the Gulf of Mexico, March 9, 1985" (NTSB/MAR-86/04).

viewed as sufficient reason for his apparent failure to comply with the International Navigation Rules. The operator apparently overlooked the possibility that other vessels could be in the vicinity and might not present as strong an image on his radarscope as that of a drilling rig or a production platform. In changing the range of the radar to 12 miles shortly before the accident, he stated that when he switched back to the 6-mile range, it was necessary to "fine tune" the radarscope again. It is possible that he failed to tune it correctly to bring out the fainter images. In the absence of other images, his "fine tuning" technique may have been inadequate. With few or no waves of a size present, the GULF QUEEN would not have been lost in any sea return. 2/ It is the opinion of the Safety Board that the USCG licensed operator of the ALAN MCCALL lacked adequate knowledge of the operation and limitations of radar. Moreover, he operated his vessel in limited visibility without maintaining a proper lookout at a speed in excess of the safe speed required by Rules 5 and 6 of the International Navigation Rules for Preventing Collisions at Sea, 1972. The result was the ramming of the fishing vessel GULF QUEEN.

When the operator of the ALAN MCCALL stated that running at full speed during periods of limited visibility is normal operating procedure and more or less the custom in the offshore transportation industry, he probably was correct. High-speed operation in limited visibility, by crewboat operators with only limited experience in such operation and little knowledge of radar greatly increases the risk of collision. The navigation rules concerning speed in limited visibility do not provide for any exemptions because of a particular type of operation. This fact should be pointed out by the crewboat operating company as a matter of company policy in its operating manual. The operator of the ALAN MCCALL, although duly licensed by the USCG to operate vessels of that tonnage and over the routes prescribed, failed to proceed at a safe speed during periods of limited visibility.

Therefore the National Transportation Safety Board recommends that the Cameron Boat Rentals, Inc.:

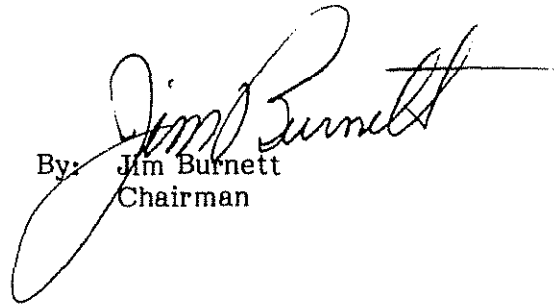
Establish a company policy and instruct your crewboat operators that your vessels shall be operated at a safe speed as defined in both the Inland and International Navigation Rules. (Class II, Priority Action) (M-86-30)

Establish a **policy that** the deckhand or other qualified person assigned to your crewboats **must keep** a constant and diligent lookout in addition to the operator, particularly when operating during periods of limited visibility. (Class II, Priority Action) (M-86-31)

The National Transportation Safety Board is an independent Federal agency with the statutory responsibility "... to promote transportation safety by conducting independent accident investigations and by formulating safety improvement recommendations" (Public Law 93-633). The Safety Board is vitally interested in any actions taken as a result of its safety recommendations and would appreciate a response from you regarding action taken or contemplated with respect to the recommendation(s) in this letter. Please refer to Safety Recommendations M-86-30 and -31 in your reply.

2/ Clutter on a vessel's radarscope by radar signals reflected by nearby waves.

BURNETT, Chairman, GOLDMAN, Vice Chairman, and LAUBER, Member, concurred in these recommendations.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Jim Burnett", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

By: Jim Burnett
Chairman