



# National Transportation Safety Board

Washington, D. C. 20594

## Safety Recommendation

Log M-340B

Date: June 1, 1988

In reply refer to : M-88-36 through -38

Honorable William L. Ball, III  
Secretary  
U.S. Navy  
The Pentagon  
Washington, D.C. 20350

About 1202 on April 21, 1987, the USS RICHARD L. PAGE (FFG-5) (PAGE) collided with the fishing vessel CHICKADEE which was being towed by the fishing vessel MARINER. Six feet of the bow of the CHICKADEE was severed, and it immediately start to take on water. All three crewmembers on the CHICKADEE abandoned the vessel just before it capsized and sank. Crewmembers were rescued shortly afterward. No one was injured. The PAGE sustained only minor damage to its port bow lifeline stanchions. As a result of the collision, the CHICKADEE was a total loss. Damage was estimated to be \$112,000. <sup>1/</sup>

The PAGE was being operated at a high speed because of the need to conduct the full power trial. The commanding officer (CO) and the officer of the deck (OOD) were relying on the radar to detect vessels in their area. However, small vessels detected at shorter distances may only show as intermittent contacts and may disappear sooner in the sea clutter at the center of the radar screen. Therefore, when approaching small vessels, the time between detection of the vessels on radar and their disappearance in the sea clutter may be short. Also, if they only appear intermittently on radar, they may be difficult to track. The Combat Information Center on the PAGE detected a radar contact at 4,800 yards and lost it in sea clutter (about 4,000 yards) 5 minutes later, indicating that a vessel was approaching in proximity to the PAGE. The lost radar contact, which was close to the PAGE, could not be seen and tracked visually. If the PAGE had approached at slower speeds, there would have been more time for detection and tracking and, consequently, more opportunity to avoid a collision by slowing or changing course. If full power trials are conducted in limited visibility, vessel speeds are likely to be too high to detect and track small vessels in time to avoid collision.

The PAGE was operating at 24 knots and was in the process of achieving a maximum speed of more than 27 knots. The Safety Board estimated that the vessels collided about 25 seconds after the left rudder order was given by the junior officer-of-the-deck on the PAGE. The PAGE would have barely responded to the left full rudder order when the CO countermanded with a right full rudder order. Moreover, the backing order would not have had time to appreciably reduce the speed of the vessel. Even with the rudder

<sup>1/</sup> For more detailed information, read Marine Accident Report--"Collision Between the USS RICHARD L. PAGE (FFG-5) and the U.S. Fishing Vessel CHICKADEE, the Atlantic Ocean, April 21, 1987" (NTSB/MAR-88/04).

movement and the backing of the engines, the crew was unable to stop the vessel and probably reduced its speed only to about 20 knots by the time of the collision. At 24 knots, the vessel would have taken about 640 yards and about 100 seconds to stop dead in the water after a backing order. Thus, the option of stopping the PAGE to avoid collision was not a reasonable consideration in this condition of visibility.

The other option of changing course to avoid collision may have succeeded if there was only one small vessel. However, clearly with a longer vessel or a vessel with tow, such as occurred in this case, changing course also was not viable at the speed the PAGE was traveling. Therefore, under the conditions of visibility, the speed of the PAGE was excessive for either collision avoidance maneuver.

Navy vessels are required to have VHF/FM radio equipment to transmit and receive on channel 13, the bridge-to-bridge navigation safety channel, on the navigable waters of the United States. Channel 13 has proved to be valuable for averting collisions on the navigable waters of the United States. In international waters, channel 16 is used for calling another vessel to arrange for further communications, to warn of danger, or to seek assistance if in distress. In this accident, the PAGE communicated with the MARINER after the collision to determine if assistance was needed. The VHF/FM radio could have been used by the PAGE to broadcast a security call on channel 16 before beginning the full power trial and to receive a warning from vessels of their presence. The Safety Board concludes that the Navy should require its vessels to monitor channel 16 unless there is a national security reason that would prevent such monitoring. Further, the Navy should require its vessels to use all available means to ensure that civilian vessels are not in the area and should not conduct high-speed trials in conditions of restricted visibility if it is not certain that there are no civilian vessels in the area of their projected course.

There was no evidence that any of the persons involved in this accident were under the influence of alcohol or drugs. The use of these items was prohibited aboard all of the vessels involved in this collision. However, no crewmembers of any of the vessels were asked to or provided samples for toxicological testing, nor were they required to do so.

Random drug testing of the crew of the PAGE was conducted on a weekly basis with the total crew being tested every 90 days. Before the accident, the last total crew test was completed on March 6, 1987, after the vessel had called at Freeport, Bahamas, and Fort Lauderdale, Florida. Nine crewmembers were found to have used unauthorized drugs. However, the CO of the PAGE believed that no one on watch on the bridge at the time of the accident had used drugs in the past.

Title 33 Subpart 95.035 of the Code of Federal Regulations authorizes an employer or law enforcement officer to direct an individual operating a vessel to undergo a chemical test (for drugs and alcohol) when directly involved in a marine casualty. In all modes of transportation, the Safety Board requires that autopsies include drug and alcohol testing for those persons directly involved in an accident. In addition, postaccident toxicological testing is performed in all fatal accidents involving military aircraft. The Navy does not have a policy for alcohol and drug testing of its vessel personnel who may be involved in an accident with a nonmilitary vessel in U.S. waters or with a U.S. nonmilitary vessel in any other waters. Newly promulgated Federal regulations provide for the testing of a commercial seaman or recreational boater for alcohol and drug use with reasonable cause. The Safety Board believes that an aggressive postaccident/incident alcohol and drug testing program should be an integral component of the Navy's accident investigation and prevention program. The Safety Board believes that the Navy should

amend its policy in OPNAVINST 5350.4 (Substance Abuse Prevention and Control) to require testing of its personnel directly involved in an accident with a nonmilitary vessel.

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

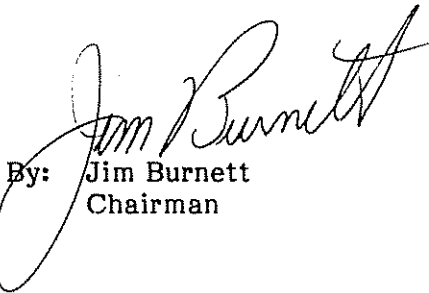
Prohibit U.S. Navy vessels from conducting high-speed exercises in conditions of restricted visibility unless they have determined that there are no civilian vessels in the area of their projected course. (Class II, Priority Action) (M-88-36)

Require that U.S. Navy vessels monitor VHF/FM radio channel 16 in international waters. (Class II, Priority Action) (M-88-37)

Amend OPNAVINST 5350.4 (Substance Abuse Prevention and Control) to require drug testing of U.S. Navy personnel directly involved in an accident with a U.S. civilian vessel in international waters or any civilian vessel in U.S. waters. (Class II, Priority Action) (M-88-38)

The Safety Board also issued Safety Recommendations M-88-30 and -31 to the U.S. Coast Guard and M-88-32 through -35 to The Trawler MARINER, Inc.

BURNETT, Chairman, KOLSTAD, Vice Chairman, and LAUBER and NALL, Members, concurred in these recommendations.

  
By: Jim Burnett  
Chairman