

for unknown reasons. Also contributing to this collision were: the failure of the pilot of the HELENA to sound the danger signal as soon as uncertainty developed concerning the other vessel's intentions; the failure of the officer in charge of the WHITE ALDER to sound a danger signal, followed by a proposed passing signal on the whistle, when the vessels were within one-half of a mile of each other; the failure of the pilot of the HELENA to slacken speed, stop, and reverse when risk of collision became apparent; and the failure of the commanding officer of the WHITE ALDER to reduce speed, stop, and reverse prior to the collision. Other causal factors were: the failure of the WHITE ALDER to respond to the bridge-to-bridge radiotelephone communications initiated by the pilot of the HELENA; the failure of the WHITE ALDER to respond to the HELENA's proposed one-blast passing whistle signal; the failure of both vessels' bridge personnel to make proper use of the available radar information; the sharp bend in the river at Bayou Goula Towhead; and the tendency for the current and wind to push the HELENA's bow to her port in making the turn.

The heavy loss of life on the WHITE ALDER was due to her being overrun by the HELENA, and rapid sinking, trapping the Coast Guardsmen inside the hull.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Safety Board concurs in Recommendation No. 3 of the Marine Board of Investigation concerning the need for bridge-to-bridge radiotelephone communications. The Board testified before the House Merchant Marine and Fisheries Committee in support of H.R. 6971, the Vessel Bridge-to-Bridge Radiotelephone Bill, which was passed by the House of Representatives during the 91st Congress. The Board also testified before the Senate Commerce Committee on March 12, 1971, in favor of S. 699, a similar bill.

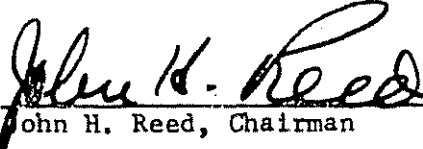
The Safety Board recommends that the Coast Guard:

- M-71-10 1. Take appropriate action to insure that its own vessels guard all of the appropriate operational radio frequencies for the areas of operation.
- M-71-11 2. Consider, in its current study of Marine Boards of Investigation, changing the procedures used in investigations of its own accident-involved activities.
- M-71-12 3. Study the effectiveness of navigation lights in depicting the directional aspect of meeting vessels, including the need for range lights on smaller vessels.
- M-71-13 4. Study the need for supplementing ships' whistle signals with visual or electric indicating devices, such as the amber light required by 33 CFR 95.21.
- M-71-14 5. Initiate action to obtain post-mortem examinations, when legally possible, in its investigation of those cases in which it is possible that the physical condition, possible death before the casualty, or possible physical defect of persons, could have been involved in the casualty.

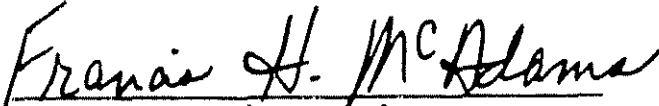
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BY THE NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD:

Adopted this 19th day of May 1971:


John H. Reed, Chairman


Oscar M. Laurel, Member


Francis H. McAdams, Member


Louis M. Thayer, Member


Isabel A. Burgess, Member