

Log M-204

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD
WASHINGTON, D.C.

ISSUED: January 5, 1983

Forwarded to:
Mr. Andrew E. Gibson
President
Delta Steamship Lines, Inc.
P.O. Box 50250
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SAFETY RECOMMENDATION(S)
M-82-57 and -58

About 0435 on February 19, 1982, the 893-foot-long U.S. barge carrier SS DELTA NORTE and the 495-foot-long Liberian freighter M/V AFRICAN PIONEER collided in the Gulf of Mexico about 115 nautical miles southeast of Galveston, Texas. Both vessels were operating at full sea speed in fog at the time of the collision. There were no deaths, but two persons on board the DELTA NORTE were seriously injured. The AFRICAN PIONEER was a constructive total loss with an estimated repair cost of \$6 million. Damage to the bow of the DELTA NORTE was estimated at \$9 million. 1/

Although the DELTA NORTE and the AFRICAN PIONEER both were guarding channel 16, VHF-FM radiotelephone, neither vessel made an attempt to communicate with the other. The master of the DELTA NORTE had previously established an overtaking arrangement with the ZOELLA LYKES, but he made no attempt to contact the AFRICAN PIONEER. If the master of the DELTA NORTE similarly had discussed his intentions on the radiotelephone with the watch on the AFRICAN PIONEER and had established a meeting arrangement, the accident might have been prevented.

The collision might have been prevented if the master of the DELTA NORTE had detected the AFRICAN PIONEER on radar sooner and had plotted that vessel's relative movement. When a large vessel like the DELTA NORTE is proceeding at about 19 knots in fog, the radar observer should be attempting to detect other vessels at a range sufficient to allow time to plot and to determine and execute effective evasive actions to ensure a safe CPA in meeting other vessels. When the master of the DELTA NORTE first detected the AFRICAN PIONEER, the two vessels were only about 4.5 nmi apart, and because of the speeds of the two vessels, there was not enough time to plot sufficiently the relative movement of the AFRICAN PIONEER, to determine its CPA and true course and speed, and to determine an effective evasive action before a close quarters situation developed unless the vessels' closing speed had been reduced significantly. The master should have slowed the DELTA NORTE immediately in order to "allow more time to assess the situation" as required by Rule 8(e) of COLREGS, 72.

1/ For more detailed information, read "Marine Accident Report--Collision of the U.S. Barge Carrier SS DELTA NORTE and the Liberian Freighter M/V AFRICAN PIONEER in the Gulf of Mexico about 115 Nautical Miles Southeast of Galveston, Texas, February 19, 1982" (NTSB-MAR-82-8).

While the DELTA NORTE's master should have detected the AFRICAN PIONEER sooner, the accident still might have been prevented if he had closely observed the contact and had accurately plotted its relative movement beginning at 0425. Even if he had made only a 3-minute plot, he would have realized that the two vessels would not pass starboard-to-starboard about 1 nmi apart as he initially believed. Although a CPA of only 1 nmi should have alerted the master to the risk of collision, a 3-minute plot would have indicated clearly that the two vessels probably would collide if no evasive actions were taken. Coupled with the second mate's report that the contact was "on a collision course," this certainly should have indicated to the DELTA NORTE's master that he should take immediate action to avoid a collision.

Rule 6 requires that every vessel "at all times proceed at a safe speed." Among the factors to be considered in determining a safe speed are the visibility, the traffic density, the stopping distance and turning ability of the vessel, and the proximity of navigational hazards. On vessels with operational radar, additional factors should be considered, including the characteristics and limitations of the radar equipment, constraints imposed by the radar range scale in use, and the number, location, and movement of vessels detected by radar. Both the AFRICAN PIONEER and the DELTA NORTE were proceeding at full sea speed in restricted visibility conditions on the morning of the accident. They were operating near many drilling platforms in the Gulf of Mexico and were approaching a junction of two Shipping Safety Fairways. Each vessel had detected other vessels on radar, but neither vessel had reduced speed to allow more time to assess the situation. The Safety Board concluded that both vessels were operating at excessive speed in restricted visibility conditions.

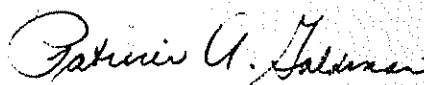
Therefore, the National Transportation Safety Board recommends that Delta Steamship Lines, Inc.:

Issue instructions to masters which encourage the use of VHF radiotelephones by the bridge watch to assist in establishing meeting arrangements on waters not covered by the U.S. Vessel Bridge-to-Bridge Radiotelephone Act. (Class II, Priority Action) (M-82-57)

Issue instructions to masters which emphasize the necessity of complying with the International Regulations For Preventing Collisions At Sea, 1972, with particular regard to the requirements for effective radar plotting and for proceeding at a safe speed in areas of restricted visibility. (Class II, Priority Action) (M-82-58)

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." (P.L. 93-633). The Safety Board is vitally interested in any actions taken as a result of its safety recommendations. Therefore, we would appreciate a response from you regarding action taken or contemplated with respect to the recommendations in this letter.

GOLDMAN, Vice Chairman, McADAMS, BURSLEY, and ENGEN, Members concurred in these recommendations. BURNETT, Chairman, did not participate.


By: Jim Burnett
Chairman