

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD WASHINGTON, D.C.

ISSUED: September 4, 1981

Forwarded to:

Mr. Spiro Pavlovich, President
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P.O. Box 66
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SAFETY RECOMMENDATION(S)

M-81-81

About 0346 c.s.t., on November 24, 1980, the Liberian chemical tankship COASTAL TRANSPORT and the U.S. Offshore Supply Vessel SALLEE P. collided in the Mississippi River about 4 miles south of Venice, Louisiana. The bow of the COASTAL TRANSPORT struck the SALLEE P. about amidships on its port side. The SALLEE P. rolled over on its starboard side and was impaled upon the bow of the COASTAL TRANSPORT. Three crewmembers of the SALLEE P. drowned and a fourth crewmember was trapped inside his stateroom for 8 hours before he was rescued by divers. The total property damage resulting from this accident, including replacement cost of the SALLEE P. and the temporary repairs to the COASTAL TRANSPORT, was estimated to be \$1,100,000. 1/

The COASTAL TRANSPORT and the SALLEE P. were approaching each other from opposite directions, so a meeting situation was developing. The Inland Rules are explicit in detailing the proper course of action to be taken by vessels in meeting situations. When vessels are approaching each other head and head, the rules call for either vessel to initiate a port-to-port meeting agreement by sounding a one-blast whistle signal, which is to be answered by a corresponding one-blast signal from the other vessel, and for the vessels to pass on the port side of each other. However, if the courses of the vessels are so far on the starboard side of each other as not to be considered as meeting head and head, or end on, the rules call for either vessel to initiate a starboard-to-starboard meeting agreement by sounding a two-blast whistle signal, which is to be answered by a corresponding two-blast signal from the other vessel, and for the vessels to pass on the starboard side of each other. Clearly, a starboard-to-starboard passing was developing, and the SALLEE P. should have been navigated to pass well clear of the COASTAL TRANSPORT on the starboard side. Instead of passing well clear of the COASTAL TRANSPORT, the SALLEE P. turned sharply to starboard across the path of the approaching COASTAL TRANSPORT shortly before the collision. Regardless of the intentions of the SALLEE P.'s operator, that action was completely contrary to the rules and should not have been attempted.

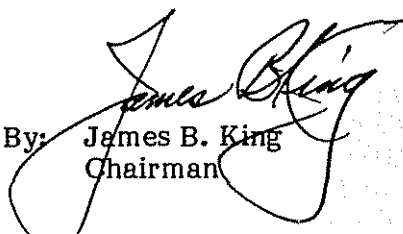
1/ For more detailed information read "Marine Accident Report--Liberian Chemical Tankship M/V COASTAL TRANSPORT Collision with U.S. Offshore Supply Vessel M/V SALLEE P., Lower Mississippi River Near Venice, Louisiana, November 24, 1980" (NTSB-MAR-81-12).

Because there were no survivors who were in the wheelhouse of the SALLEE P., the reasons for the actions taken by the operator of that vessel cannot be determined. The New Orleans Vessel Traffic Center tape recording of channel 67 radio transmissions revealed that one position report was made, but the operator made no attempt to establish a meeting agreement with the COASTAL TRANSPORT by VHF radio. The ENTERPRISE and the COASTAL TRANSPORT's pilots heard no whistle signals from the SALLEE P., but the COASTAL TRANSPORT's wheelhouse doors were closed, so it is possible that signals, if sounded, might not have been heard by that vessel's pilot. However, the only maneuver made by the SALLEE P. which might be considered a response to the COASTAL TRANSPORT was the sharp turn made immediately after the danger signal was sounded--and that turn put the SALLEE P. directly across the path of the COASTAL TRANSPORT. It is possible that the operator of the SALLEE P. was not aware of the presence of the COASTAL TRANSPORT, and did not properly evaluate the situation before turning hard right after being startled by the danger signal. However, if the operator of the SALLEE P. had been participating in the New Orleans Vessel Traffic Service (VTS), he would have been previously informed of the position of the COASTAL TRANSPORT and the collision might have been prevented. Because there is a lack of evidence about what happened in the wheelhouse of the SALLEE P., numerous possibilities exist, and the Safety Board is unable to determine the reason for the SALLEE P.'s sharp right turn across the path of the COASTAL TRANSPORT.

Therefore, the National Transportation Safety Board recommends that the Trans-Atlas Marine Corporation:

Instruct the operators of Trans-Atlas Marine Corporation vessels to participate in the New Orleans VTS system when underway on the Mississippi River in the VTS areas. (Class II, Priority Action) (M-81-81)

KING, Chairman, DRIVER, Vice Chairman, and GOLDMAN AND BURSLEY, Members, concurred in this recommendation. McADAMS, Member, did not participate.

By:  James B. King
Chairman