

M-158

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD  
WASHINGTON, D.C.

ISSUED: July 14, 1981

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Forwarded to:

Mr. William N. Johnston  
Chairman and President  
American Bureau of Shipping  
65 Broadway  
New York, New York 10006

SAFETY RECOMMENDATION(S)

M-81-64 and -65

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At some time on October 25 or 26, 1980, the 523-foot-long U. S. freighter SS POET disappeared in the North Atlantic Ocean about 500 nautical miles east of Delaware Bay. No distress signal was heard from the POET, and no trace of the ship or its 34-person crew has been found. The estimated loss for the ship and its cargo was \$4,250,000. 1/

The POET had been struck by another vessel in Zaire on January 10, 1978, but the damage was minor. None of the damage would have affected the structural integrity of the ship; however, temporary repairs in December 1978 were necessary to prevent progressive damage. Hatch cover No. 1 had been damaged on February 8, 1978. This damage, which was temporarily repaired in December 1978, was also minor. The Safety Board believes that the temporary repairs were adequate but that, as a matter of better marine practice, permanent repairs should have been made in March 1980 while the POET was in drydock. The decision by the owner and the American Bureau of Shipping (ABS) to defer permanent repairs for another 4 years until the next special survey was not good practice. The hull damage resulted in local areas of high stress which, under more severe weather conditions than experienced by the POET on October 25 and 26, might have resulted in a serious structural failure. The structural calculations showed that the POET should not have experienced any high stress levels during the storm on October 25 and 26. Therefore, these temporary hull repairs probably did not result in any further damage to the POET.

During February and March 1980, the U.S. Coast Guard conducted a complete and comprehensive biennial inspection of the POET's hull and machinery, and both the Coast Guard and the ABS conducted a complete drydock inspection of the POET. The ABS surveyor conducted a partial intermediate survey which included some gaugings of the hull plating but no internal inspection of any saltwater ballast tanks. The surveyor noted in his report that the intermediate survey was incomplete and that no saltwater ballast tanks were examined. It is not an unusual procedure for the ABS to spread the survey requirement over a period of time. However, examination of the

1/ For more detailed information, read Marine Accident Report--"Disappearance of U.S. Freighter SS POET in North Atlantic Ocean about October 25, 1980" (NTSB-MAR-81-6).

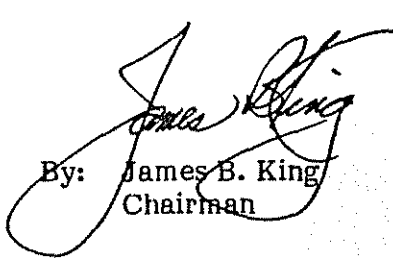
saltwater ballast tanks was necessary for the ship to remain in class and it was the owner's responsibility to insure that the POET's saltwater ballast tanks were examined by the ABS. The Coast Guard has adopted the ABS structural standards. Coast Guard inspectors do not normally inspect a saltwater ballast tank unless there is an outstanding ABS survey requirement, or unless the tank is opened for other reasons, or unless the Coast Guard inspector suspects some problem. The Coast Guard inspector stated that none of these conditions existed during his inspection in March 1980. Therefore, both the Coast Guard inspector and the ABS surveyor were following acceptable procedures when they did not inspect any saltwater ballast tanks in March 1980. However, the ABS surveyor who conducted the August 1980 survey stated that an intermediate survey was carried out when, in fact, he did not examine any saltwater ballast tanks. The Safety Board believes that it is important that saltwater ballast tanks be examined internally as required by ABS rules and that the ABS should insure that the examination of these tanks be carried out when required.

Therefore, the National Transportation Safety Board recommends that the American Bureau of Shipping:

Revise its rules to require that, when hull structural damage occurs between special surveys, permanent repairs be completed by the vessel's next special survey and not be deferred to subsequent special surveys as was permitted on the POET. (Class II, Priority Action) (M-81-64)

By means of a circular letter to all surveyors, reemphasize that saltwater ballast tank survey inspections are required at intermediate surveys. (Class II, Priority Action) (M-81-65)

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

  
By: James B. King  
Chairman