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NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD
WASHINGTON, D.C.

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Forwarded to:

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SAFETY RECOMMENDATION(S)

M-80-14 through M-80-17

At 0640 c.s.t., on November 9, 1978, the Greek bulk carrier M/V IRENE S. LEMOS and the Panamanian bulk carrier M/V MARITIME JUSTICE collided in the lower Mississippi River at mile 78.3 AHP, about 15 statute miles below New Orleans, Louisiana. Because of the dense fog, the visibility at the time of collision was less than 400 feet. The vessels struck nearly head on, damaging the bows of both vessels. There were no deaths or injuries. Cost of repairs to the two vessels was estimated at \$4 million. ^{1/}

The collision of the MARITIME JUSTICE and the IRENE S. LEMOS took place near Shingle Point in the lower Mississippi River. Immediately before the collision, and in accordance with the "points and bends" custom, the upbound MARITIME JUSTICE was favoring the left descending bank and was to cross over to the right descending bank after making the turn at Shingle Point. The downbound IRENE S. LEMOS had been favoring the left descending bank and was crossing over to the right descending bank.

The MARITIME JUSTICE had been navigating in near zero visibility for about 1 hour before the collision and had met and passed two downbound vessels, utilizing radar to determine the relative positions of the MARITIME JUSTICE to the other vessels. From the pilot of the first vessel, the pilot of the MARITIME JUSTICE learned that there were two downbound vessels, the EASTERN MERIT and the IRENE S. LEMOS, above Shingle Point. The pilot of the MARITIME JUSTICE slowed his ship to meet the EASTERN MERIT below Shingle Point but agreed to a port-to-port passing with the pilot of the IRENE S. LEMOS at Shingle Point.

To comply with its prior agreement, the MARITIME JUSTICE had to keep near the east bank of the river to meet and pass the EASTERN MERIT below Shingle Point. However, the sandbar on the east bank of the river made it necessary for the MARITIME JUSTICE to remain near the center of the channel below Shingle Point after passing the EASTERN MERIT. As a result, the MARITIME JUSTICE started a wide turn near the center of the channel and the vessel's starboard bow was subjected to the 2-mph current

^{1/} For more detailed information read, "Marine Accident Report--Collision of Greek Bulk Carrier M/V IRENE S. LEMOS and Panamanian Bulk Carrier M/V MARITIME JUSTICE, Lower Mississippi River, Near New Orleans, Louisiana, November 9, 1978" (NTSB-MAR-80-4).

at Shingle Point, which also set her toward the track of the the IRENE S. LEMOS. If the MARITIME JUSTICE had moved to the right in the channel by making its turn to starboard sharper and sooner, the collision might not have occurred.

The IRENE S. LEMOS had been operating in near zero visibility for about 10 minutes before the collision. The pilots of the IRENE S. LEMOS and the MARITIME JUSTICE agreed to a port-to-port passage. The pilot of the IRENE S. LEMOS assumed the MARITIME JUSTICE would make a normal turn, thus permitting the IRENE S. LEMOS to cross the intended trackline of the MARITIME JUSTICE at a safe distance. The normal course for crossing the river was 298° T, but the pilot changed his course 7° to the right to give the upbound vessel more room. However, even that precaution was not enough. The IRENE S. LEMOS should have crossed the river sooner to insure reaching a position at the extreme right in the channel before meeting the MARITIME JUSTICE.

The risk of collision would have been reduced if the pilots had agreed to pass above Shingle Point. This meeting above Shingle Point could have been arranged if the pilot of the IRENE S. LEMOS had slowed his vessel. The vessels could then have passed in a straight section of the river, and one vessel would not have had to cross the trackline of the other vessel. Passing at Shingle Point requires expert seamanship in good weather. In near zero visibility, it was difficult for the pilot of the IRENE S. LEMOS to detect the wide turn by the MARITIME JUSTICE until the collision was imminent.

The mate and the pilot did not discuss the proposed port-to-port meeting with the IRENE S. LEMOS at Shingle Point. The pilot did not inform the mate about what other vessels the MARITIME JUSTICE would meet or where they would pass the vessels. Especially in the dense fog conditions, the pilot should have discussed with the mate (1) whether the MARITIME JUSTICE should slow or anchor because of the dense fog and (2) where other vessels could be passed safely.

The master of the IRENE S. LEMOS was on the bridge and did question the pilot of the IRENE S. LEMOS concerning the passing of the MARITIME JUSTICE at Shingle Point shortly before the accident. However, the pilot did not keep the master informed of the information the pilot had received over the radiotelephone regarding the vessels the IRENE S. LEMOS would meet or what passing agreements were made. When the master questioned the pilot concerning the MARITIME JUSTICE, the pilot had already agreed to the meeting in English Turn Bend. There is a need for pilots to confer with ships' masters on any high risk maneuvering agreements made over the bridge-to-bridge radiotelephone well in advance of the execution so that the master can evaluate the maneuver and instruct his crew.

Currently, Vessel Traffic Service (VTS) on the lower Mississippi River has a low level of effectiveness because of the lack of surveillance, lack of participation, inaccurate positions provided by users, user deviation from reported operations, and users not maintaining a radio watch on the designated frequencies. Without some form of surveillance and a high rate of participation to increase the reliability of information, the New Orleans VTS does not provide any more information as to conditions in the immediate vicinity than the pilots themselves can obtain from passing vessels. However, participation by all members of the Crescent River Port Pilots Association would improve the accuracy of the information provided.

Although it did not contribute to this accident, the pilot of the MARITIME JUSTICE did not sound fog signals in accordance with the Inland Rules of the Road. It is not

sufficient to rely only on radar observations when passing other vessels in the Mississippi River during reduced visibility. Members of the Crescent River Port Pilots Association should also comply with the Inland Rules of the Road concerning fog signals.

The National Transportation Safety Board reiterates its recommendation that it made to the Crescent River Port Pilots Association and the Board of River Port Pilots Commissioners for the Port of New Orleans as a result of an accident investigation near New Orleans, Louisiana, on December 4, 1977. 2/

Include in the prescribed procedures for pilots under their jurisdiction a requirement that pilots specifically ascertain vessel maneuvering characteristics before getting underway, and that they discuss with the master before getting underway the essential features and relevant checkpoints for maneuvers to be undertaken. (Class II, Priority Action) (M-79-107)

Furthermore, the National Transportation Safety Board recommends that the Crescent River Port Pilots Association:

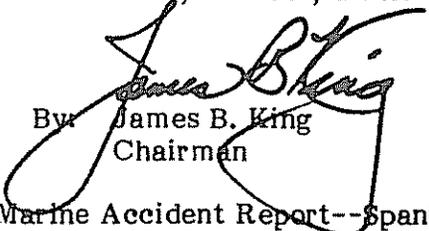
Promulgate a policy that member pilots refrain from meeting or overtaking other vessels at bends on the lower Mississippi River which present difficult navigational problems during conditions of reduced visibility. (Class II, Priority Action) (M-80-14)

Promulgate a policy that member pilots confer with ships' masters on any high risk maneuvering agreements made over the bridge-to-bridge radiotelephone, well in advance of the execution. (Class II, Priority Action) (M-80-15)

Promulgate a policy that member pilots participate in the New Orleans Vessel Traffic Service to improve its level of effectiveness and reliability. (Class II, Priority Action) (M-80-16)

Instruct member pilots regarding the importance of complying with Article 15 of the Inland Rules of the Road which states, in part: "In fog, mist, falling snow, or heavy rainstorms, whether by day or night, the signals described in this article shall be used as follows, namely: (a) A steam vessel under way shall sound, at intervals of not more than one minute, a prolonged blast." (Class II, Priority Action) (M-80-17)

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

By 
James B. King
Chairman

2/ For more detailed information read, "Marine Accident Report--Spanish Motor Tankship RIBAFORADA Ramming of Barge MB-5, Three Wharves, and Cargo Ship M/V TIARET, New Orleans, Louisiana, December 4, 1977" (NTSB-MAR-79-15).