

M-136

**NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD  
WASHINGTON, D.C.**

ISSUED: September 12, 1980

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Forwarded to:

Admiral John B. Hayes  
Commandant  
U.S. Coast Guard  
Washington, D.C. 20593

SAFETY RECOMMENDATION(S)

M-80-53 and -54

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About 1713 e.d.t., on June 18, 1979, the U.S. tankship S.S. EXXON CHESTER and the Liberian freighter M.V. REGAL SWORD collided in dense fog in the Atlantic Ocean southeast of Cape Cod about 1 nautical mile (nmi) east of the Boston Harbor Traffic Lane Inbound. As a result of the collision, the REGAL SWORD sank and the bow of the EXXON CHESTER was extensively damaged. However, no one was injured. 1/

The EXXON CHESTER was navigating in dense fog with visibility barely past the vessel's bow. Although the master had watched a radar target's range decrease from about 6 nmi, on a bearing of about 5° to port, and disappear in his radar sea return at 3/4 nmi, he did not reduce his speed of about 10 knots to a safer speed. The master heard a vessel's foghorn forward and to port when the radar target was 4 nmi away. He waited until the distance was 3 nmi before turning and did not attempt to use the vessel's bridge-to-bridge radiotelephone. If the master's radar interpretation was correct, his right turn maneuver should have increased the closest point of approach (CPA); however, it did not and the target vessel entered his radar sea return. He had ceased watching the radar at the 3-nmi distance and, thus, had no idea of the bearing on which the target vessel entered his radar sea return. He made another right turn, having no idea of its effect on the situation. In an effort to improve the situation, he made it worse. After he saw the REGAL SWORD crossing his bow, his last minute effort, to avoid the collision by coming hard left, failed.

As a result of its investigation of an accident in the Mediterranean Sea on June 12, 1978, 2/ the Safety Board recommended that the U.S. Coast Guard:

Require more frequent examinations for renewal of a radar observer's endorsements by deck officers of the U.S. Merchant Marine to maintain their proficiency in using the maneuvering board for solving radar target problems. (Class II, Priority Action) (M-79-72)

1/ For more detailed information read, "Marine Accident Report--Collision of U.S. Tankship EXXON CHESTER and Liberian Freighter M/V REGAL SWORD in the Atlantic Ocean, near Cape Cod, Massachusetts, June 18, 1979" (NTSB-MAR-80-11).

2/ For more detailed information read, "Marine Casualty Report--Collision of U.S. Bulk Carrier SS YELLOWSTONE and Algerian Freighter M/V IBN BATOUTA Mediterranean Sea, June 12, 1978" (NTSB-MAR-79-11).

On March 3, 1980, the Coast Guard replied that it did not concur with the recommendation, but stated,

"The Coast Guard will soon publish a Notice of Proposed Rulemaking under docket number CGD 76-193a that would require all radar observer applicants to complete an approved radar training course at least once every five years. This five year interval is also reflected in the International Convention on Standards of Training, Certification and Watchkeeping for Seafarers, 1978. Specifically, Regulation II/5 of this convention entitled Mandatory Minimum Requirements to Ensure that Continued Proficiency and Updating of Knowledge for Masters and Deck Officers applies. The convention has not yet been ratified."

Although the officers on watch on the EXXON CHESTER had been certificated as "radar observer" and made radar observations assisted by an automated radar plotting aid (ARPA), they failed to properly interpret the observations. The master had no formal training on the operation of the ARPA. Expedious processing of CGD 76-193a appears necessary.

Title 33 CFR 26 implements the provisions of the Vessel Bridge-to-Bridge Radiotelephone Act which requires vessels of tonnage equivalent to that of the EXXON CHESTER and the REGAL SWORD to have a VHF radiotelephone to use for safe operation on the navigable waters of the United States. The regulation further requires that a listening watch on a given frequency be maintained and, when necessary, that transmissions be sent confirming navigation intentions of vessels. Had both vessels been required by international agreement to meet a comparable bridge-to-bridge radiotelephone regulation in international waters, the collision might have been averted by a timely confirmation of the intention of each vessel by VHF radiotelephone. The use of VHF bridge-to-bridge radiotelephone on a common navigation channel should be made mandatory for all but very small vessels on all international waters. Although the Intergovernmental Maritime Consultative Organization (IMCO) has had such a proposal under consideration since September 1978, there is no indication it will be adopted in the near future.

As a result of its investigation of the June 12, 1978, accident in the Mediterranean Sea, the Safety Board recommended that the U.S. Coast Guard:

Establish a timetable for expediting Coast Guard action to promote the adoption by the Intergovernmental Maritime Consultative Organization of a requirement for the use of bridge-to-bridge radiotelephone in collision avoidance. (M-79-74)

On March 3, 1980, the Coast Guard replied that:

"The Coast Guard concurs with this recommendation. The international use of bridge-to-bridge radiotelephone for navigational purposes was on the agenda for consideration at the 23rd session of the IMCO Subcommittee of Safety of Navigation which met 3-7 September 1979. This item was introduced, but because of a lack of time, discussion was deferred until the next meeting which is scheduled for February 1980. The Coast Guard submitted a position paper for that meeting supporting

adoption of an international bridge-to-bridge radiotelephone frequency. The Coast Guard does feel that there are serious obstacles to adoption because of language difference and vessel identification problems."

The Coast Guard's position paper, which supported adoption of an international bridge-to-bridge radiotelephone frequency, was submitted at the February 1980 session of the IMCO Subcommittee of Safety of Navigation and was endorsed by many member countries. However, lack of time at that session precluded final resolution of the issue, and the item was placed on the agenda for the January 1981 session.

The Coast Guard anticipates acceptance of the concept at the 1981 session. The task of implementing the requirement would follow that formal acceptance. The Safety Board believes that the Coast Guard should take steps to insure that this issue is placed on the agenda for the January 1981 session in a position that would insure the time necessary to take necessary action to gain acceptance.


Both the EXXON CHESTER and the REGAL SWORD had adequate radiotelephone equipment, but failed to use it properly. The master of the REGAL SWORD used poor procedure by not adequately describing his position or that of the vessel being called, and the master of the EXXON CHESTER did not use his equipment to attempt to communicate with REGAL SWORD until the vessels had collided.

Therefore, the National Transportation Safety Board recommends that the U.S. Coast Guard:

Expedite the processing of the Notice of Proposed Rulemaking under Docket CGD No. 76-193a which would require radar applicants for observer endorsements to complete an approved radar training course at least once every 5 years (Class II, Priority Action) (M-80-53)

Request that the agenda for the January 1981 session of the Intergovernmental Maritime Consultative Organization's (IMCO) Subcommittee of Safety of Navigation be modified as necessary to insure timely discussion of and adoption of an international agreement requiring use of bridge-to-bridge radiotelephone for navigation purposes in international waters. (Class II, Priority Action) (M-80-54)

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

  
By: James B. King  
Chairman

for