

M-137

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD  
WASHINGTON, D.C.

ISSUED: September 12, 1980

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Forwarded to:  
  
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SAFETY RECOMMENDATION(S)  
  
M-80-55

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.

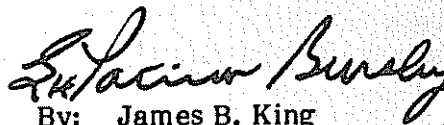
Although the officers on watch on the EXXON CHESTER had been certificated as "radar observer" and made radar observations assisted by an automated radar plotting aid (ARPA), they failed to properly interpret the observations. The master had no formal training on the operation of the ARPA.

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).

Therefore, the National Transportation Safety Board recommends that the Exxon Transportation Company:

Require that masters assigned to a vessel equipped with an automated radar plotting aid (ARPA) successfully complete formal training in its use before assignment. (Class II, Priority Action) (M-80-55)

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



By: James B. King  
Chairman

*for*