



National Transportation Safety Board

Washington, D. C. 20594

Safety Recommendation

Log M-347

Date: December 2, 1988

In reply refer to: M-88-61 and -62

Admiral Paul A. Yost, Jr.
Commandant
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Washington, D.C. 20593

On February 15, 1988, the 811-foot-long tanker M/V MAERSK NEPTUNE rammed the 601-foot-long bulk carrier M/V MONT FORT lying at anchor in Upper New York Bay. The MONT FORT was anchored in Federal anchorage 23B located north of the Verrazano-Narrows Bridge near Staten Island. The MONT FORT had anchored only recently, having arrived earlier that same day. The MAERSK NEPTUNE was inbound from sea to the anchorage under the direction of a New Jersey/Sandy Hook pilot. The visibility was generally less than 1/4 mile and at times it was about 300 yards. The pilot of the MAERSK NEPTUNE gradually reduced the vessel's speed as the ship approached the bridge and continued to reduce speed as he entered the anchorage. When the pilot saw the MONT FORT, the direct-drive diesel engine was stopped, placed on full astern, and emergency full astern. Before all headway was removed, the tanker collided with the MONT FORT.¹

At the time of the accident, the New York Harbor Vessel Traffic System (VTS) was in operation. The commanding officer of the New York VTS stated that all vessels subject to the Bridge-to-Bridge Radio-Telephone Act (Title 33 United States Code, Section 1201-1208) were eligible to participate in the VTS. Participation in the system was voluntary. Vessels participating in the system furnished their name, length, draft, speed, destination, and any peculiar navigational aspects of the vessel. VTS radio communications about vessel movements were conducted over VHF-FM channel 14. Vessels reporting to the VTS were furnished with the latest traffic information for their area.

Both vessels were participants in the New York VTS system--the MAERSK NEPTUNE in the vessel movement section and the MONT FORT in the anchorage monitoring section. The VTS procedures in place at the time of the accident did not provide a positive method by which anchorage information was updated while a vessel was en route to the anchorage. There were several instances when the New York VTS could have offered additional information to the MAERSK NEPTUNE as it headed for the Staten Island anchorages.

¹For more detailed information, read Marine Accident Report--*Ramming of the Maltese Bulk Carrier MONT FORT by the British Tankship MAERSK NEPTUNE In Upper New York Bay, February 15, 1988* (NTSB/MAR-88/09).

When the pilot of the MAERSK NEPTUNE left the pilot boat at 1990, he was furnished with anchorage information requested from the VTS at 1730. The information, however, was outdated as soon as the MONT FORT anchored and reported to the VTS at 1810. Since the pilot was assigned to the MAERSK NEPTUNE, the information about the MONT FORT was available and could have been obtained by him. Although this latest anchorage information was not passed on to the pilot boat by the VTS as soon as it was available, the pilot, once again, could have been informed that the MONT FORT had recently anchored in the Staten Island anchorage when the MAERSK NEPTUNE first reported into the VTS system at 1942 and gave notice that it was bound for the anchorage. The VTS watchstander could have noted that the pilot boat had received the anchorage information at 1730 and then updated the information when the vessel checked in with the VTS. While it is understandable that VTS procedures restrict anchorage information to VHF-FM channel 12 to prevent overburdening the vessel movement radio channel (channel 14), the National Transportation Safety Board believes that there should have been a procedure to provide the pilot with updated anchorage information more effectively. Such updated information may have alerted the pilot to enter the anchorage at a slower speed and allowed him to select another position.

On June 10, 1988, the New York VTS discontinued operations due to a reduction in U.S. Coast Guard funding, and it was decommissioned on July 19, 1988. With the disestablishment of the New York VTS, the Safety Board believes that the responsibility for obtaining current anchorage information now rests with the pilot. Pilots of vessels entering the anchorages should be required to obtain the latest information about vessels in the anchorages from the Coast Guard facility that monitors the anchorages, particularly at night and during periods of limited visibility.

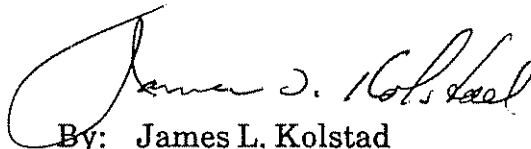
The VTS could enhance the dissemination of anchorage information much like the European systems such as found in Southampton Harbor, England, by recording the information on audiotape and automatically broadcasting the data at specified periods. During limited visibility, the taped messages could include visibility at several key locations around the harbor.

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

Require, under the authority of the captain-of-the-port, that masters, pilots, or persons-in-charge of vessels bound for anchorages in New York Harbor determine the current status of an anchorage before entering. (Class II, Priority Action) (M-88-61)

Broadcast automatically anchorage, visibility, and other relevant information for New York Harbor at regular intervals over an appropriate marine radio frequency. (Class II, Priority Action) (M-88-62)

KOLSTAD, Acting Chairman, and BURNETT, LAUBER, NALL, and DICKINSON, Members, concurred in these recommendations.



By: James L. Kolstad
Acting Chairman