

UNITED STATES COAST GUARD  
WASHINGTON, D. C.

MVI  
19 December 1952  
(ALBATROSS -  
ESSO CHATTANOOGA - a-1 80)

From: Chief, Merchant Vessel Inspection Division  
To: Commandant  
Via: Chief, Office of Merchant Marine Safety

Subj: Marine Board of Investigation; collision SS ESSO CHATTANOOGA  
and MV ALBATROSS, off Cape Cod Light, 20 June 1952, with loss  
of life

1. Pursuant to the provisions of Title 46 C.F.R. Part 136, the record of the Marine Board convened to investigate subject casualty, together with its Findings of Fact, Opinions, Conclusions, and Recommendations, has been reviewed and is forwarded herewith.

2. During the evening of 19 June 1952, the motor fishing vessel THE ALBATROSS of 147 g.t. was en route from the fishing grounds to Boston, and the steam tanker ESSO CHATTANOOGA of 10,096 g.t. was en route from Baytown, Texas, bound for Boston. While off Nauset Beach on the high seas the ESSO CHATTANOOGA, proceeding at approximately 16 knots, sighted THE ALBATROSS ahead, proceeding at about 9 knots. The ESSO CHATTANOOGA undertook to overtake and pass THE ALBATROSS on her own port side. Neither vessel had knowledge of the course or intentions of the other and a collision resulted at approximately 0102 3.25 miles off Cape Cod Light. This collision occurred approximately one hour after the ESSO CHATTANOOGA sighted the stern light of THE ALBATROSS. The weather was clear, unlimited visibility, N/ wind, force 4 and moderately rough sea. Following the collision, THE ALBATROSS sank and her master Bjorgvin Kinnarson lost his life by drowning.

3. The Board made the following Findings of Fact:

"1. THE ALBATROSS, official number 251974, is an uninspected, wooden vessel of 147 gross tons, 100 net tons; length 63.7 feet; breadth, 21.5 feet; depth 12.8 feet; built in 1947 at South Bristol, Maine; powered by a 400 H. P. Enterprise diesel engine, 400 r.p.m.; speed, approximately 9 knots. It is owned and operated in the fishing trade by the B & B Trawling Company, Inc. of 201 Main Street, Gloucester, Mass.

1. The ESSL CHATTANOOGA, official No. 241230, is a single-screw, steel tank vessel of 10,096 gross tons, 6073 net tons; length, 503.9 feet; breadth, 60.1 feet; depth, 36.9 feet; built in 1941 at Chester, Pa.; horsepower (indicated) 9900; speed, approximately 16 knots. It is owned and operated in the general petroleum trade by Esso Shipping Co., 30 Rockefeller Plaza, New York, N.Y. It was last inspected at Baltimore on 9 September, 1951.

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"2. The ESSL CHATTANOOGA, official No. 241230, is a single-screw, steel tank vessel of 10,096 gross tons, 6073 net tons; length, 503.9 feet; breadth, 60.1 feet; depth, 36.9 feet; built in 1941 at Chester, Pa.; horsepower (indicated) 9900; speed, approximately 16 knots. It is owned and operated in the general petroleum trade by Esso Shipping Co., 30 Rockefeller Plaza, New York, N.Y. It was last inspected at Baltimore on 9 September, 1951.

"3. THE ALB THROSS had departed Gloucester, Mass. on 13 June, 1952 on a fishing voyage to seaward of Nantucket and was on the return voyage to Boston with its catch of fish when it collided with the ESSL CHATTANOOGA off Cape Cod on 20 June, 1952.

"4. The ESSL CHATTANOOGA had departed Baytown, Texas, on 15 June, 1952, with approximately 15,300 tons of heating oil cargo bound for Boston, Mass., when it collided with THE ALB THROSS on 20 June, 1952.

"5. The collision occurred at 0102 EST, Friday, 20 June, 1952.

"6. The collision occurred in 28 fathoms of water off Cape Cod Light in approximate latitude 42 degrees 4 minutes 15 seconds N., longitude 70 degrees 0 minutes 15 seconds W., with Cape Cod Light bearing 235 degrees true, distant about 3.25 miles.

"7. The collision occurred on the high seas outside the line dividing the inland waters from the high seas with the International Rules of the Road governing the action of both vessels.

"8. On board THE ALB THROSS at the time of the collision were thirteen persons, all members of the crew listed and located as follows:

1. Bjergvin Einarsson, master, on watch
2. [REDACTED] mate, asleep in quarters
3. [REDACTED] chief engineer, on watch
4. [REDACTED] 2nd engineer, in quarters
5. [REDACTED] cook, in quarters
6. [REDACTED] deckhand, in quarters
7. [REDACTED] deckhand, in quarters
8. [REDACTED] deckhand, in quarters
9. [REDACTED] deckhand, in quarters
10. [REDACTED] deckhand, in quarters
11. [REDACTED] deckhand, on watch
12. [REDACTED] deckhand, in quarters
13. [REDACTED] deckhand, on watch

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"9. On board ESSO CHATTANOOGA at the time of the collision was a crew of forty-six persons including the master.

"10. The weather at the time of the collision and for a period prior to and after the collision was fine and clear, visibility unlimited, wind NW force 4, moderately rough sea.

"11. The following persons were on watch in THE ALBATROSS at the time of the collision: Rieckvin Einarsson, master)

[redacted] wheelman ) in the pilot house  
[redacted] lookout )

[redacted] chief engineer, in engine room.

The balance of the crew of THE ALBATROSS (9) were asleep in their respective quarters at the time of the collision.

(No paragraph numbered 12)

"13. At the time of the collision the following persons were on watch in ESSO CHATTANOOGA and were located as listed.

[redacted] master, bridge  
[redacted] 2nd mate, watch officer, bridge  
[redacted] A.B., helmsman, pilot house  
[redacted] A.B., standby, inside after deckhouse  
[redacted] S., lookout, outside on top of pilot house  
[redacted] 2nd asst. engr., watch officer, engine room

The other members of the crew of ESSO CHATTANOOGA were either asleep in their quarters or in such position to be unaware of, or to be unable to observe, the circumstances of the casualty.

"14. At the time of the collision both THE ALBATROSS and ESSO CHATTANOOGA were proceeding at their normal full sea speeds, THE ALBATROSS at approximately 9 knots and ESSO CHATTANOOGA at approximately 16 knots.

"15. A posted lookout in ESSO CHATTANOOGA from one position atop the pilot house was in a position to observe the sea for 360 degrees less the angle subtended by the smoke stack, and his audibility was unobstructed.

"16. There is no single point in the pilot house or on the bridge of ESSO CHATTANOOGA whence an observer could see the sea for the full 360 degrees of the horizon, but every portion of the horizon could be brought into view by a rotational use of several points in turn.

"17. The description of THE ALBATROSS as given by witnesses indicates: That THE ALBATROSS had a pilot house on her after end, the upper portion of which projected above the after deck house; that there was deck outside the pilot house extending aft and on each side; that this deck was accessible from the pilot house by a door on each side of the pilot house;

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that there was a small window in the after part of the pilot house in the portion projecting above the deck house, which afforded a view aft; that there were windows in the forward part of the pilot house affording a view forward; that there was a window in each side of the pilot house at the forward part.

"18. The helmsman and lookout in THE ALBATROSS testified that they maintained their stations inside the pilot house and kept a lookout over only that portion of the horizon lying forward of their beam. [redacted] and [redacted] took their watch in the pilot house beginning at 0000, 20 June. [redacted] had the wheel from 0000 to about 0100, 20 June, and lookout from about 0100 until the time of collision. [redacted] stood lookout from 0000 to about 0100, 20 June, and had the wheel from about 0100 until the time of the collision. At the time of the collision [redacted] was steering and [redacted] stationed at the port window, was keeping a lookout ahead.

"19. Witnesses testified that prior to the collision the master of THE ALBATROSS circulated between the pilot house and his cabin and occupied himself by attendance upon navigating equipment and supervision of the watch including intermittent personal lookout. The helmsman and lookout, also in the pilot house, testified that they did not observe the master ever to have looked astern and at the time of the collision the master was standing at the starboard window of the pilot house and had been there for upwards of fifteen minutes.

"20. [redacted] and [redacted] testified that THE ALBATROSS steered a course of  $N\frac{1}{2}E$  magnetic from midnight until time of the collision.

"21. That the helmsman and lookout of THE ALBATROSS testified that the course of THE ALBATROSS was not materially altered from  $N\frac{1}{2}E$  at any time up to and including the time of collision.

"22. That the first indication to the watch of THE ALBATROSS of impending disaster was the appearance and impact of the port bow of ESSO CHATTANOOGA against the starboard side of THE ALBATROSS.

"23. The course recorder chart of ESSO CHATTANOOGA shows the vessel settled on a course of 325 degrees on 19 June with a change of course to 312 degrees at 2350, 19 June. This chart shows an easy change of course to the left to have begun at 0038 $\frac{1}{2}$ , 20 June, and completed at 0040 to 305 $\frac{1}{2}$  degrees. The chart shows a continuance of this course until 0042, when a sharp change of course to the right was begun. At 0043 the change is shown as being halted on 9 degrees for approximately one and one-half minutes, then as being again changed sharply to the left at 0044 $\frac{1}{2}$  to 5 degrees and then an immediate resumption of the sharp change to the right to 90 degrees

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at 0047, 180 degrees at 0048, 270 degrees at 0051, to 0 degrees at 0052, then various headings averaging about 30 degrees until 0338. [REDACTED] second mate of ESSO CHATTANOOGA, stated that the time element in the court recorder was approximately eighteen to nineteen minutes slower than the ship's time; he also stated that the ship's time was accurately set to Eastern Standard Time (75th Meridian).

"24. After breaking off contact with THE ALBATROSS, ESSO CHATTANOOGA made a turn to the right through 360 degrees and returned to the scene of the collision as marked by the still-floating THE ALBATROSS and the dory supporting the twelve survivors of THE ALBATROSS, arriving at approximately 0120.

"25. The entire thirteen-man crew of THE ALBATROSS started to abandon ship as soon as they were able after the collision. Launching of the dories was hampered by darkness and excitement so that, pressed for time and by fear of going down with the sinking vessel, attempts to launch the starboard dories were abandoned in favor of the port dory, which was successfully launched within a very short time after the collision.

"26. Eleven men of THE ALBATROSS crew abandoned in the port dory; a twelfth man, [REDACTED], immersed in the water, hung to its bow.

"27. The master of THE ALBATROSS, Bjorgvin Einarsson, ordered the dory to shove off with the twelve men, remarking that it was already overladen and that he would abandon with the aid of a buoy.

"28. The lifeboat launched by ESSO CHATTANOOGA picked up the twelve men from the dory. They and the dory were taken aboard ESSO CHATTANOOGA and finally landed at Boston when that vessel docked in the afternoon of 20 June, 1952.

"29. The survivors of THE ALBATROSS saw the master abandon. They subsequently saw him in the water hanging onto the buoy and heard him cry for help. They made some futile attempts to get to him. Long before being rescued themselves they lost sight and sound of him.

"30. The master of THE ALBATROSS was not picked up by the ESSO CHATTANOOGA, nor was his body recovered by the Coast Guard.

"31. THE ALBATROSS was equipped with three 15-foot dories which were carried as lifeboats. One dory was stowed under a derrick boom for

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launching on the port side of the upper deck abaft the pilot house, and the other two were nested under another and similar boom opposite on the starboard side.

"32. Witnesses from THE ALBATROSS testified that the steering gear, engine and other controls for the vessel operated normally.

"33. Witnesses from ESSO CHATTANOOGA testified that the engine steering gear and other controls operated normally, and the vessel responded efficiently to the said controls.

"34. The master of ESSO CHATTANOOGA testified that he personally saw lights of THE ALBATROSS ahead on the starboard bow for the first time at about one hour before the collision and that about fifteen minutes before the collision he concluded it to be a fisherman being overtaken; that it was steering an approximately parallel course; that if both vessels continued their respective courses ESSO CHATTANOOGA would pass THE ALBATROSS about one-quarter of a mile off to her own (ESSO CHATTANOOGA'S) side and that his (master of ESSO CHATTANOOGA) subsequent maneuvers were designed to accomplish a passage in that manner.

"35. The master of ESSO CHATTANOOGA testified that while on a course of 311 degrees true and in the act of passing THE ALBATROSS about three minutes before the collision and when THE ALBATROSS was bearing about three and one-half or four points on ESSO CHATTANOOGA'S port bow he changed the course of ESSO CHATTANOOGA from 311 degrees true to 304 degrees true. He testified further that at about one minute before the collision he observed THE ALBATROSS turning right so as to be heading an estimated 45 degrees to 90 degrees across the bow of ESSO CHATTANOOGA in a manner involving risk of collision and that he immediately ordered his wheel to the right followed by the order "hard right" and sounded one blast of his whistle. His subsequent testimony was to the effect that ESSO CHATTANOOGA turned sharply to the right in response, and that when contact between the vessels was made he ordered the rudder to the left to avoid picking up anything from THE ALBATROSS in his screw, and that he thereafter ordered the rudder to the right and continued his turn to eventually return to the scene of the collision. Thereafter a search of the waters was made from the decks of ESSO CHATTANOOGA by searchlight, resulting in the recovery of twelve survivors and failure to find the master of THE ALBATROSS.

"36. Damage to THE ALBATROSS visible to her crew and observers on ESSO CHATTANOOGA was confined to the upper works, principally rigging. The deckhands of THE ALBATROSS asleep in the forecabin could see her settling in the water upon coming on deck. The engineer saw water rising rapidly in the engine room, which he concluded was entering through the hull.

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"37. THE ALBATROSS sank fifteen to twenty minutes after the collision.

"38. The second mate of ESSO CHATTANOOGA observed the starboard rigging of the approaching THE ALBATROSS to make contact with the upper part of the flared port bow of ESSO CHATTANOOGA; saw THE ALBATROSS heel over, and with the hull of THE ALBATROSS hidden from his view felt the impact of the collision between the two hulls and then as THE ALBATROSS scraped along the port side of ESSO CHATTANOOGA he observed her deck smash. All other testimony on the manner of initial and subsequent contact substantiated this description.

"39. The master of ESSO CHATTANOOGA notified the Coast Guard collision by radio at 1:30 EST, 20 June, 1952. The following Coast Guard units departed their bases at the times indicated:

CG 36523 - Race Point - 0145 EST

DUKW - Quonset - 0220 EST

CG 83486 - Provincetown - 0340 EST

Aircraft BUFG 1242 - Quonset - 0238 EST.

A close search of the waters was made by these units until about 1000 when routine search by patrol craft and beach patrol took over. Except for the recovery of the two port dories of THE ALBATROSS (returned by CG 36523 to Provincetown) the results were negative.

"40. The crew of ESSO CHATTANOOGA was evidently alerted by passage of an alarm by word of mouth. The general alarm was never sounded. The chief mate was called soon after THE ALBATROSS was passed astern and the general calling of the crew followed. By the time the ESSO CHATTANOOGA returned to the scene of the collision and had THE ALBATROSS close by, the crew were in process of launching the #2 lifeboat under the supervision of the chief mate. The chief mate estimated the time of launching to be about ten minutes after being called; the second mate about fifteen to twenty minutes after the collision; the master fixed the time as being 0120. The chief mate estimated ten minutes (from the time of launching the lifeboat) to have been consumed in picking up the survivors and 0200 was established as the approximate time of the return of the lifeboat alongside to debark the survivors. The lifeboat remained in the water alongside ESSO CHATTANOOGA until after daylight, when it was hoisted on board at about 0500.

"41. The striped fishing gear buoy with which the master of THE ALBATROSS abandoned was seen close by after THE ALBATROSS sank and while the water was being searched, but no one ever saw Bjorgvin Einarsson or his body again.

"42. Search for the missing Bjorgvin Einarsson was continued by searchlight from ESSO CHATTANOOGA until daylight."

Chief, MR Division to  
Commandant

NAVY  
19 December 1941  
(ALB. ENG. 5 - 2730  
CHATTANOOGA - 2-1 00)

2. The record made the following Conclusions:

"1. As the two subject vessels, going in the same general direction, were in progress of rounding Cape Cod en route Boston, Mass., during the night time, and when they were about three miles off Cape Cod Light, a situation arose in which THE ALBATROSS proceeded at approximately 9 knots was being overtaken by ESSO CHATTANOOGA proceeding at about 16 knots. ESSO CHATTANOOGA had had THE ALBATROSS in sight for approximately an hour before the collision and had observed her relative bearing to progress from an initial starboard bow bearing to a port bow bearing.

"2. In this situation it was a simple case of one vessel overtaking another under the International Rules in which ESSO CHATTANOOGA had the duty of keeping clear and THE ALBATROSS had the duty of maintaining her course and speed.

"3. At about three minutes before the collision as the two vessels were drawing closer ESSO CHATTANOOGA, keeping THE ALBATROSS on her port bow under reasonably close surveillance and with the intention of passing THE ALBATROSS on her (ESSO CHATTANOOGA'S) port side, was steering a course approximately paralleling that of THE ALBATROSS. The said course was designed to effect the passage without risk of collision. This design was predicated on an assumption that THE ALBATROSS was aware of her presence and knew of her own obligation to hold course and speed. THE ALBATROSS at this time was steering a course designed for the safe negotiation of the waters off Cape Cod and progress toward her home port, and, being unaware of the ESSO CHATTANOOGA close behind, her activities were based on an assumption of her freedom to maneuver at will.

"4. At about one minute or more before the collision the course of THE ALBATROSS was altered radically to the right without signal or reason apparent to the watch in the ESSO CHATTANOOGA, so that now with the two vessels in close proximity and on converging courses imminent risk of collision was immediately established. This maneuver by THE ALBATROSS was very soon detected by ESSO CHATTANOOGA whose course was immediately directed to the right in a sharp turn away from THE ALBATROSS. This maneuver was accomplished by a one-blast signal by ESSO CHATTANOOGA. THE ALBATROSS in the meantime apparently continued at sharp variance with, and to the right of, her original course so that the action of ESSO CHATTANOOGA was more or less nullified, and the situation rapidly deteriorated from imminence to inevitability of collision at perhaps some twenty seconds before the fact of collision.

Chief, NW Division to  
Commander

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(ALB TO SS - 1230)

CHATTANOOGA - 1230 (1)

"5. At the time of the collision ESSO CHATTANOOGA was on a course of approximately 50 degrees to the right of her original course and had progressed very materially to the right and ahead of the point on her initial track marked by the beginning of her turn.

"6. The course of THE ALBATROSS at the time of the collision was not exactly determined by the Board, but the evidence indicated that it was appreciably to the right of that of ESSO CHATTANOOGA so as to support the evidence of contact between the bluff part of ESSO CHATTANOOGA's port bow and the starboard side of THE ALBATROSS. Such contact in turn accounts for the lack of damage to ESSO CHATTANOOGA and for the condition of THE ALBATROSS that was apparent to observers as she slid along the side of ESSO CHATTANOOGA.

"7. The Board has taken no action in this case other than to investigate it and to prepare the report since no defects or deficiencies in material or aids to navigation were disclosed and since Bjorgvin Einarsson, the deceased master of THE ALBATROSS, was the only person found at fault."

5. The Board expressed the following Opinions:

"1. The excellence of visibility, the period of time during which the two vessels were in sight of one another, and the failure of the watch in THE ALBATROSS to hear the whistle signal of ESSO CHATTANOOGA or to see the vessel is conclusive evidence of the failure of THE ALBATROSS to maintain a proper audible and visual lookout.

"2. The planking or frames, or both planking and frames, of THE ALBATROSS were possibly fractured, and the seams and butts of her planking were probably opened by the force of the collision so that water entered her hull and caused her to sink with the loss of the life of Bjorgvin Einarsson.

"3. The frantic haste with which THE ALBATROSS was abandoned is open to mild criticism since it resulted in a failure to take a fuller advantage of the vessel's lifesaving equipment and that this was the dominant factor in the immediate cause of the loss of the life of Bjorgvin Einarsson.

"4. Except for the failure of ESSO CHATTANOOGA to alert her crew by use of the prescribed general alarm signal the action taken by that vessel in picking up the survivors was reasonably prompt and efficient. Failure to sound the general alarm probably delayed preparation of the lifeboat for launching, but it is not shown that this delay had any effect on the time the boat was actually launched since the vessel itself had to be returned to the scene of the collision and in position to safely lower the boat.

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"5. The action of the Search & Rescue Division of the Coast Guard in response to the call for assistance was prompt and efficient.

"6. Neither material, aids to navigation, atmospheric conditions, nor stress of weather was a factor in any way of the cause of the collision.

"7. It might have been more prudent on the part of the master of ESSO CHATTANOOGA at 0057 to have delayed starting the change of course from 311 degrees true to 304 degrees true until she was finally past and clear of THE ALBATROSS. However, the change of course at that time would have nevertheless carried the ESSO CHATTANOOGA well clear of THE ALBATROSS in the event that vessel had not radically changed her course, hence no particular fault is found on that score.

"8. The failure on the part of the master of the ESSO CHATTANOOGA, when attempting to avoid collision by a radical change of course to the right, to back the engine at full speed possibly indicates a lack of understanding of the principles involved in emergency maneuvers as this action would probably have resulted in a more rapid turn to starboard and in a lessening of the speed differential and hence the damage, if the collision could not be avoided altogether. Probably the engines could not have been backed in the short period between the time when the danger became apparent and the time the collision occurred. Nevertheless the board is of the opinion that the master of the steamship ESSO CHATTANOOGA would have been in a stronger position had the engine telegraph been set at full speed astern.

"9. The cause of the collision was the erroneous maneuver of THE ALBATROSS. She altered course to the right in a situation where she was required to hold her course and speed. This maneuver was made in ignorance of the true situation, and such ignorance was the result of a failure of THE ALBATROSS to keep a proper lookout. Probably the course change was made as a result of lack of attention on the part of the helmsman.

"10. The fault attaches to the person in control of the navigation of THE ALBATROSS, namely, Bjorgvin Einarsson, who failed to keep or cause to be kept a proper lookout, and either caused or allowed his vessel to alter course and progress sufficiently to the right of her original track to place her to the right of the projected track of the on-coming ESSO CHATTANOOGA."

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6. The Board made the following Recommendations:

"The Board recommends that this case be closed; that the facts be filed statistically as corroborative proof of the necessity for legislation to place vessels in the fishery trade under a form of inspection and certification designed to raise the standards of seaworthiness and skill of personnel to a point providing navigation with greater safety to life."

REMARKS

7. There is some doubt whether the Board's resolution of the testimony in this case has accurately reflected the cause of this collision. However, while it is realized that the testimony is conflicting, it would seem that the ESSO CHATTANOOGA's change in course from 311° to 305° without first ascertaining the course and speed of the ALBATROSS, thus placing her on a collision course with that vessel, may have caused or contributed to the collision. In the absence of a factual determination from the testimony of the movement attributed to the ALBATROSS just prior to the collision, the Opinions and Conclusions that there was probable fault by that vessel for failure to keep a proper lookout are not concurred in.

8. Subject to the foregoing remarks, it is recommended that the Findings of Fact, Opinions, Conclusions and Recommendations of the Marine Board of Investigation be approved.

/s/ [REDACTED]

EDW. A. RICHMOND  
Acting

Chief, MVI Division to  
Commandant

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FIRST ENDORSEMENT TO MVI memorandum of 19 December 1952

M  
26 March 1953

From: Chief, Office of Merchant Marine Safety  
To: Commandant

Subj: Marine Board of Investigation; collision SS ESSO CHATTANOOGA  
and MV ALBATROSS, off Cape Cod Light, 20 June 1952, with loss  
of life

Forwarded, recommending approval.

/s/ [REDACTED]  
Acting

APPROVED: 26 March 1953

/s/ [REDACTED]

~~MERLIN O. NESTLE~~

Vice Admiral, U. S. Coast Guard  
Commandant