

NVI

17 September, 1951
(SS ANTIPOUS * SS
TRANSAMERICAN)

From: Chief, Merchant Vessel Inspection Division
To: Commandant

Subj: Marine Board of Investigation; Collision involving SS ANTIPOUS and
SS TRANSAMERICAN, Delaware River, 9 May 1951.

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, Conclusions, and Recommendations, has been reviewed and is forwarded herewith.

2. The steam freighter ANTIPOUS of 6,065 g.t., laden with a general cargo, was outbound and the steam freighter TRANSAMERICAN of 7,176 g.t., laden with culk coal, was inbound in the vicinity of Marcus Hook-Chester Channels, Delaware River, on 8 May 1951. The ANTIPOUS exchanged one blast passing signals with a ferry which received an interpretation as a two-blast signal from the ANTIPOUS to and by the TRANSAMERICAN. The TRANSAMERICAN blew a two-blast signal for a starboard-to-starboard passing with the ANTIPOUS and the ANTIPOUS took this signal of the TRANSAMERICAN to be a passing signal with another ferry in the channel. In the ensuing confusion both vessels changed course to the west bank of the river and, although subsequent collision-avoiding action was taken, both vessels collided at about 0206. No lives were lost or serious injuries sustained, but the estimated damage to the ANTIPOUS as a result of this collision was \$1,100,000 and to the TRANSAMERICAN \$73,000. The weather conditions at the time subject casualty occurred were excellent.

3. The board made the following Findings of Facts:

"1. The S.S. ANTIPOUS and the S.S. TRANSAMERICAN collided in the Delaware River near the intersection of the Marcus Hook-Chester Channels on 8 May, 1951 at about 0206 EST. Both vessels suffered severe hull damage as a result of the collision, but no personnel suffered serious injury. One crew member of the ANTIPOUS claimed a rib injury as a result of being allegedly thrown from his bunk by the force of the collision, but a medical examination mad on board casts doubt on the claim.

"2. The vessels involved are:

"2. The S.S. ANTIPOUS, Official Number 245979, a C-2 cargo-type vessel, of 6,065 gross tons, built at Chickasaw, Alabama in 1944, owned and operated by the Pan-Atlantic S.S. Corp. (Waterman Line) of Mobile, Alabama, sailed from her berth in Philadelphia on 8 May, 1951, bound

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for New York. She was under the command of Demosthenis Helms, 246-80th Street, Brooklyn, N.Y., and had Lewis R. Fisher, Pilot on board, acting under the authority of his federal license. Her draft on departure was 13.06' forward, 23.10' aft.

"3. The S.S. TRANSAMERICAN, Official Number 246833, is a Liberty-type vessel of 7, 176 gross tons, built of steel in 1944 at Panama City, Fla., and owned and operated by the American Union Transport Co., Inc. of Battery Place, New York. The TRANSAMERICAN was in-bound, loaded with coal to draft of 25' 06" Forward and 27' 03" Aft, from Newport News, Va., and was under the command of Ernest C. Hull, 9147 - 135th Street, Hollis, Queens, N.Y., and had Edwin G. Macintire of Lewes, Delaware on board as pilot, acting under the authority of his state license.

The weather conditions prevailing at the time was:

"4. The weather, prior to, and at the time of collision was fine and clear, a light, westerly breeze, smooth sea and strong flood tide.

"5. The ANTIPOUS, loaded with general cargo to a draft of 13' 06" Forward, 23' 10" Aft, sailed from Pier "C", Port Richmond, Philadelphia about midnight on 8 May. Captain Helms undocked his vessel, and when she was squared away down the river, turned the con over to Lewis Fisher, who was acting under the authority of his federal pilot's license for the bay and river Delaware. All navigating gear had been subjected to the required tests and found satisfactory prior to departure.

Various courses and speeds were maintained, until in the vicinity of Paulsboro, N.J., when full speed was ordered, an estimated velocity of 12 to 13 knots through the water. As the ANTIPOUS came on the Chester Range, a ferry passed ahead of her from west to east (from starboard to port). A one blast signal from the ferry, afterwards identified as the CHESTER, was answered by the ANTIPOUS, and the ferry passed ahead well clear.

At this point, Pilot Fisher noticed three vessels standing up the river on the Marcus Hook Range, and he heard a two blast whistle signal, when he estimated the ANTIPOUS to be about a half-mile above Chester Channel buoy #2-C. He also noticed another ferry proceeding from west to east (port to starboard), and considered the two blast signal he had heard had been blown by the nearest of the approaching vessels, (the TRANSAMERICAN), to the ferry. He blew a one blast signal to the TRANSAMERICAN, and heard an answering two blasts. He then blew the danger signal, repeated his one blast, and ordered more

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right rudder. He noticed that the oncoming vessel was swinging rapidly to her left, or the west side of the channel, and when close to her, ordered the ANTINOUS' rudder full left in an attempt to clear. However, before the rudder took effect, the TRANSAMERICAN struck the ANTINOUS on the port side, driving her bow into the #3 hold, and the engine room section immediately aft. According to pilot Fisher, the collision took place 150 yards O40 True from Chester Channel buoy 1-C, a position west of the Channel boundary.

The engine room of the ANTINOUS was flooded immediately, but all on watch managed to get out safely--the fireman and oiler by the engine room ladder, and the 2nd Assistant by the escape hatch. The general alarm was sounded, and all hands mustered at the boats. However, they were dismissed shortly thereafter, when it became evident that, without power, she would not sink. According to the ANTINOUS' witnesses, the collision took place at 0206.

The engine room and #3 hold flooded at once, and unsuccessful attempts were made to close the engine room bulkhead door, since water was leaking into the after holds. The added water weight caused the ANTINOUS to list towards the TRANSAMERICAN, jamming her bow in the hole. On the following day the bulkhead door was successfully closed, and later the water was pumped from the No. 4 and No. 5 holds.

"6. The TRANSAMERICAN was boarded by Pilot [REDACTED] at OVERFALLS Light Vessel at about 2010 8 May, and she proceeded up the Delaware under his direction. All Navigating gear was in good condition and functioned satisfactorily, according to him. The TRANSAMERICAN reduced speed while passing the Sinclair dock at Marcus Hook and resumed full speed after passing it shortly thereafter. At a point about a quarter mile below Marcus Hook Channel Buoy #6-K, he observed the passing situation between the Ferry CHESTER, and the outbound ANTINOUS. He said he heard two blasts from the approaching ANTINOUS, and answered with the same signal; ordered a course change to the left, and as he did so, noticed the ANTINOUS swinging to the right, and he repeated the two blast signal. He also ordered more left rudder. As the vessels closed, and were about 400 feet apart, he heard the danger signal from the ANTINOUS. When he heard the danger signal, he ordered the TRANSAMERICAN's engines full astern, a full right rudder, and as the ships continued to close, the TRANSAMERICAN hit the ANTINOUS on the port side at #3 hold. He also stated he heard no other signals from the ANTINOUS other than the danger signal. According to Pilot Macintire, the collision took place slightly more than 200 yards O40 True from Chester Channel buoy #1-C--a position west of the Channel boundary.

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"7. The Master of the ANTIPOUS was on the bridge when the passing situation developed with the CHESTER, and he remained there with the pilot during the situation with the TRANSAMERICAN. His description of the events up to and after the collision substantially agree with those of Pilot Fisher.

"8. The Master of the TRANSAMERICAN was in the chart room when he heard the first two blast signal from his ship. He immediately went to the wheel house on the deck above, and was there when the second signal was blown.

"9. The Master of the Ferry CHESTER, [REDACTED] of [REDACTED], stated that when he cleared the ferry slip at Chester, he noticed the outbound ANTIPOUS. The vessels were such a distance apart, that while he blew a one blast signal which was promptly answered from the ANTIPOUS, he did not have to make any alteration in course or speed to pass ahead of her.

He further stated that there was not much time interval between his one blast signal and the answering one blast from the ANTIPOUS. In his opinion, the one blast whistle signals exchanged between his ferry and the ANTIPOUS, should not have been confused with a two blast signal. He also saw the upbound TRANSAMERICAN in the Marcus Hook Channel, and as he cleared the ANTIPOUS, he noticed the Ferry CAPE MAY clear the Jersey slip on her westbound trip. He heard a two blast signal from the TRANSAMERICAN; heard the CAPE MAY sound two blasts, and he also observed her to stop.

"10. The Master of the Ferry CAPE MAY, [REDACTED], of [REDACTED], testified that his ferry left the Jersey slip on the 0200 trip, and he noticed the passing situation develop between the CHESTER and the ANTIPOUS. He heard the passing signals exchanged between them, and in his opinion, their signals could have been confused with a two blast signal. He also heard a two blast signal given by the TRANSAMERICAN, and when the signal was sounded a second time, considered it had been blown for him, and he answered with two blasts. Since the channel between his ferry and the Pennsylvania slip at Chester was not clear, he slowed down and later stopped. He noticed the TRANSAMERICAN's engines were backing before the collision, and was an eye-witness as the vessels came together. He then steamed slowly towards them to offer help. Noticing that the vessels were locked together, and apparently not needing such help as he could offer, he waited until they drifted clear of the slip and he then docked. According to Captain Powers, the first two blast whistle signal was sounded by the TRANSAMERICAN when she was near Chester Lighted bell Buoy 1-C, quick flashing green, and at that time the

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the ANTIQUS was off the City pier at Chester, a distance between them of approximately a mile. He also stated he heard the passing signals between the CHESTER and ANTIQUS, and distinctly remembered the sequence of signals sounded by the latter after she cleared the CHESTER - a single blast, a danger signal and another single blast just before the collision.

As the vessels were locked together, the ANTIQUS leaning on the TRANSAMERICAN's bow, wedging it there, they drifted with the tide. At about 1200, 8 May, it was decided to move both vessels to the Marcus Hook General Anchorage in order to lighten the ANTIQUS sufficiently to free the TRANSAMERICAN. Salvage operations commenced the following day and two days later it was possible to withdraw the TRANSAMERICAN's bow.

Soon after the collision took place a Coast Guard tug was dispatched to the scene by the Gloucester base. The assistance rendered by this vessel was adequate and satisfactory.

Neither vessel involved in this collision was equipped with radar."

4. The Board made the following Conclusions:

"1. It is considered that the principal cause of this collision was the failure of the pilot of the TRANSAMERICAN to ascertain the source of the two blast whistle signal which he and other witnesses from that vessel allege they heard from the ANTIQUS. It was definitely established by testimony of uninterested witnesses that the ANTIQUS never sounded a two blast signal from the time she began navigating with respect to the CHESTER and at any time thereafter.

"2. It is considered unlikely that the one blast signals exchanged between the CHESTER and ANTIQUS could have been mistaken for a single two blast signal inasmuch as the crossing situation between these two vessels, which was in plain sight of the TRANSAMERICAN, called for the signals that were actually exchanged, a possibility normally considered by alert seamen. The acceptance of the ANTIQUS as the source of the two blast signal was done in the face of other circumstances equally evident at the time.

Both vessels were at or near the center line of their respective channels when they were about a mile apart, and since there is a difference of 12° in the direction of these channels, this would normally result in one vessel showing the other an opposing side light, in this case the green of the ANTIQUS to the red of the TRANSAMERICAN. A course change to the right is indicated for a downbound vessel entering Marcus Hook channel and vice versa in the

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case of an upbound vessel entering the Chester channel. In spite of this, the TRANSAMERICAN persisted in her error by her change of course to the left and the second two blast signal.

That some doubt existed in the mind of the Master of the TRANSAMERICAN is evident in his testimony that the ANTIPOUS was plainly altering her course to the right, contrary to the intent implied in a two blast signal; however, he was not on the bridge when the signal was first heard and he relied on the information given him by the pilot, yet he took no timely action to remedy the situation. The Second Mate, [REDACTED], showed a lack of perspicacity in his action of looking aft to ascertain the source of the first signal heard while paying slight attention to a possible crossing situation, although one existed in plain sight with the westbound ferry CAPT. MAY. This lack of heed to existing conditions aroused doubt as to the quality of the watch being maintained on the TRANSAMERICAN. The doubt regarding the quality of the watch was strengthened by the way and manner in which [REDACTED] testified, and he was therefore named a party in interest while so doing. His lumpy performance included inaccurate bell and log book entries, unauthorized changes in the engine room bell book and an absence of adequate bridge log entries. The time of collision given by the ANTIPOUS was therefore accepted as the most accurate obtainable.

It is considered that the ANTIPOUS' maneuvers were correct and in compliance with the law up to the point of sounding the last one blast whistle signal indicating her insistence on a port to port passing. The maintenance of her speed and failure to stop are considered justified actions in the light of an attempt to avoid collision by getting out of the channel and the invisibility of stopping and backing in the channel in the face of three approaching vessels. These maneuvers were considered to be in extremis, and the action taken at the last moment to avert the collision was a matter of judgement in which both the pilot and master concurred.

"3. The board took notice of the failure of the Master of the ANTIPOUS to comply with the regulations in regard to fire and boat drill which according to his log were not held once a week as required, further, the operation of the engine room bulkhead door was open to question. It was considered that this factor of safety was not given sufficient attention at fire and boat drill and that the manner of handling this important detail was not in accordance with the practice of good seamanship. However, there was no evidence of deliberate negligence or inattention to duty, and in view of this, the board awarded Captain [REDACTED] an admonition for failure to comply with the regulations on fire and boat drills. The board also considered

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that the unsatisfactory performance of the TRANSMERICAN Second Mate, [REDACTED] was at least partially explained by his absence from the sea for some length of time and a recent family death. In consideration of these circumstances an admonition was awarded him.

5. The Board made the following recommendations:

"1. That the pilot of the TRANSMERICAN, Edwin G. MacIntire, be cited for the violation of that much of Title 33, Chapter 3, Section 203, Article 18, Rule 1, U. S. Code, which reads; "When steam vessels are approaching each other head and head, that is, end on, or nearly so, it shall be the duty of each to pass on port side of the other; and either vessel shall give, as a signal of her intention, one short and distinct blast of her whistle, which the other vessel shall answer promptly by a similar blast of her whistle, and thereupon such vessels shall pass on the port side of each other."

"2. That the Master of the TRANSMERICAN, Ernest C. Hull, be charged with misconduct for failure to take timely action to avert collision.

"3. That inasmuch as pilot MacIntire was acting under the authority of his state pilot's license, a copy of this report and the proceedings of the Board transmitted herewith be provided to the American Pilots' Association, 423 Washington Building, Washington, D. C., for their information and appropriate action.

"4. That the monetary penalty recommended against pilot MacIntire be held in abeyance pending action by the appropriate State authorities.

REMARKS

6. Upon approval of the Board's report, such report will be forwarded to the American Pilots' Association for action with respect to the State pilot's

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license of the pilot on board the TRANSAMERICAN at the time subject casualty occurred.

7. No comment is made respecting the Board's Recommendation No. 2 because such recommendation is addressed to matters which should be, or have been, handled independently of and apart from my action on this Record.

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

/s/ P. A. OVENDEN
P. A. OVENDEN
Acting

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17 January, 1952

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

Forwarded, recommending approval.

/s/ R. A. SMYTH
R. A. SMYTH
Acting

APPROVED: JAN 21 1952

/s/ MERLIN O'NEILL
MERLIN O'NEILL
Vice Adm., U. S. Coast Guard
Commandant