

UNITED STATES COAST GUARD

Address reply to:
COMMANDANT
U. S. Coast Guard
Headquarters
Washington 25, D. C.

MVI
14 September, 1950
(COLOMBIA (Danish)
EXCALIBUR Cas Bd)

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

Subj: Marine Board of Investigation, collision American steam passenger vessel EXCALIBUR and Danish freight vessel COLOMBIA in New York Harbor on 27 June, 1950.

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 American steam passenger vessel EXCALIBUR of 9645 gross tons, out-bound for France, was in collision at approximately 1233 in the vicinity of Bay Ridge Channel Junction Budy on 27 June, 1950, with the Danish freight vessel COLOMBIA of 5146 gross tons inbound from sea. The weather was clear, visibility good, southeast wind and ebb tide.
3. As a result of this casualty no persons lost their lives and only one minor injury resulted. The COLOMBIA's damage, however, was estimated at \$85,000.00 and that of the EXCALIBUR at \$950,000.00.
4. The Board made the following Findings of Fact:
 - (1) The American passenger steamer EXCALIBUR and the Danish freight vessel COLOMBIA collided in New York Harbor on 27 June, 1950.
 - (2) The EXCALIBUR is a steam passenger vessel of 9645 gross tons, Official No. 256463, built in 1944 and owned and operated by the American Export Line of 39 Broadway, New York, N. Y. The vessel was in command of Capt. [REDACTED] of [REDACTED].
 - (3) The COLOMBIA is a motor vessel of Danish registry, of 5146 gross tons, owned and operated by United Steamship Co. of Copenhagen, Denmark. Her master was [REDACTED] of [REDACTED].
 - (4) At the time of the collision the weather conditions were as follows: Wind southeast, clear weather, visibility good, ebb tide.
 - (5) The EXCALIBUR departed from Pier "D", Jersey City at noon on 27 June, bound for Marseilles, France, carrying 1488 tons of general cargo and 114 passengers. After the vessel was clear of the dock and headed downstream and tugboats dismissed, Capt. [REDACTED] Full Branch Sandy Hook Pilot, took over the con, with the Master,

Chief, MVI Division to
Commandant

MVI
14 September, 1950
(COLOMBIA (Danish)-
EXCALIBUR C-3 Bd)

Captain [redacted], as well as the officer on watch and the quartermaster also on the bridge. The vessel proceeded down the bay with engine telegraph set at full harbor speed, which at 60 revolutions, is calculated to be 12 knots. After passing Buoy 24 about 500 feet off, the course was altered to 175 degrees true, with the vessel heading to pass the junction buoy between the main and Bay Ridge Channels to port. The EXCALIBUR was proceeding on the left-hand or easterly side of the fairway, although it appears that there was no traffic present in the vicinity which would render this procedure necessary. At this point, the COLOMBIA was sighted in the vicinity abreast of the Quarantine Station inbound, bearing anywhere from 2 degrees to 10 degrees on the starboard bow, as testified to by the bridge watch and the pilot of the EXCALIBUR. The distance between the two vessels at that time was estimated to be slightly more than a mile and Capt. [redacted] sounded a two-blast signal for a starboard to starboard passing. No answer to this signal was heard by anyone on the bridge, and the EXCALIBUR continued her course and speed. Shortly thereafter, Capt. [redacted] sounded a one-blast signal, thereby requesting a port to port passing. At that time, the vessels were approximately 1/4 to 1/2 of a mile apart and the COLOMBIA now bearing fine on the EXCALIBUR's port bow. In this connection, it is noted, that whereas the EXCALIBUR's testimony shows that the COLOMBIA's bearing appeared to change from fine on the starboard bow to fine on the port bow, it is not conclusive as to whether the COLOMBIA actually changed course to her starboard after the EXCALIBUR's two-blast signal. The testimony of the COLOMBIA, however, definitely shows that no right change was made. No answer was heard on the EXCALIBUR's bridge to her one-blast signal and the vessel which had commenced a starboard swing, continued swinging to the right, at full speed ahead, until the vessels collided at 12:33 P. M. in the vicinity of the junction buoy. The engine was stopped at about the moment of impact. The collision occurred by the COLOMBIA's bow striking the port side of the EXCALIBUR at an angle of slightly less than 90 degrees in way of the bulkhead between #2 and 3 holds, fracturing the plates from the main deck to the turn of the bilge, thereby opening the ship's side for an area of approximately 35 ft. by 38 ft. The COLOMBIA's bow penetrated into the side of the EXCALIBUR for a distance of about 10 feet. The vessels cleared each other to port by the EXCALIBUR's continuous swing to the right, and the COLOMBIA backing off.

(6) With the #2 and 3 holds open to the sea and the vessel settling rapidly forward, Capt. [redacted] in considering the safety of his ship, as well as the passengers, ordered the engines ahead, and beached the vessel on Bay Ridge Flats about 1150 yards, 350 degrees true from Buoy No. 24. This was done approximately 18 minutes after the collision. At the time the vessel was beached, it is apparent that the freeboard forward was approximately four feet, but no positive determination was made as to whether she was still settling. There

Chief, LVI Division to
Commandant

LVI
14 September, 1950
(COLOMBIA (Danish)
EXCALIBUR C-3 Bd)

were no casualties, other than one woman passenger who sustained slight injury to her hand while opening the door to her cabin, and all passengers were disembarked to tugs and subsequently landed at Pier "D", Jersey City. The EXCALIBUR remained on the Flats for ten days, during which time salvage operations continued, and a patch was fitted to the opening in the ship's side, and on 11 July, with the holds pumped out and cargo discharged, the vessel was taken to Bethlehem Shipyard, Hoboken, N. J., where she was placed on drydock.

(7) The COLOMBIA was inbound from sea, having arrived at the pilot station off Ambrose at about 11:15 A. M. from Philadelphia, Pa., bound for New York to complete her cargo. Her draft was 22 ft. forward and 24 ft. 5 in. aft. Full Branch Sandy Hook Pilot Capt. [REDACTED] boarded the vessel at that time and proceeded into the harbor under full speed estimated at about 13 knots. Nothing of special interest occurred, until approaching the Narrows, when the EXCALIBUR was observed outbound in the Upper Bay. In addition to the pilot, the bridge watch consisted of the mate on duty and the quartermaster at the wheel. As the COLOMBIA approached the junction buoy at the end of the Bay Ridge Flats, and while well over on the easterly side of the channel, her course was 355 degrees true and so shaped as to leave the junction buoy to starboard with a clearance of about 100 ft. The EXCALIBUR had now made the turn at Buoy 24 and was headed down the bay well over on the easterly side of the channel, and bearing approximately ahead of the COLOMBIA. The EXCALIBUR was then heard to sound two blasts of her whistle, and as there was no traffic in the river which would interfere, Capt. [REDACTED] answered this request for a starboard passing and altered course to the left accordingly. After the COLOMBIA had commenced swinging to the left, and with the EXCALIBUR now bearing on her starboard bow, the EXCALIBUR was observed to alter course to her right, and at the same time sound a one-blast signal. The COLOMBIA's pilot answered this signal and ordered his helm to the right in order to comply with the EXCALIBUR's request for a port to port passing. However, with the vessels closing rapidly, the right helm of the COLOMBIA did not check her left swing and the COLOMBIA's engines were later ordered stopped and reversed. As it appeared to the Master of the COLOMBIA, who had arrived on the bridge shortly before the collision, that the vessel would strike the EXCALIBUR in the engine and boiler spaces, he countermanded the pilot's order and put his helm again hard left, in order to continue his left swing and to avoid striking the EXCALIBUR amidships. The vessels came together as described previously. After the COLOMBIA backed off and the vessels had cleared each other, fire broke out in the forward storeroom of the COLOMBIA as a result of ruptured electrical installations. The New York City fireboat FIREFIGHTER arrived on the scene and ordered the COLOMBIA placed at a dock, and accordingly, she was berthed on the north side of Pier 69, Brooklyn, where the fire was put out. There were no loss of life nor personnel injuries on the COLOMBIA.

VI
14 September, 1950
(COLOMBIA (Danish))-
EXCALIBUR C-3 Bd)

(8) The COLOMBIA's damage was confined to her bow structure forward of the collision bulkhead and amounted to \$85,000.00. The EXCALIBUR's damage is estimated at \$950,000.00."

5. The Board made the following conclusions:

"(1) (a) It is evident that this collision was caused by the lack of agreement as to passing, as well as the outbound vessel being navigated on her left-hand side of the fairway.

(b) Traffic conditions in the harbor at the time of the casualty and prior thereto were light, and in no way justifies the EXCALIBUR's pilot in following a course on the left-hand side of the fairway, and which must be considered a basic factor in this casualty. Whereas the Narrow Channel Rule may not necessarily be cited here, Captain [redacted] certainly violated the safest practice for vessels entering or leaving the harbor, namely, keeping to their own starboard hand side whenever possible.

(c) The situation during the approach was, despite the contention of both the master and the pilot of the EXCALIBUR, a meeting one, and the request for a starboard passing was not in accordance with the governing rule. (Art. 18, Inland Rules). Although the EXCALIBUR did not maneuver to her left, since the COLOMBIA hauled to port after the two-blast signal, it appears that the vessels would have cleared each other to starboard, thus precluding the necessity for the subsequent reversal of whistle signals. Capt. [redacted] was, however, certainly remiss under the Inland Rules in carrying on as long as he did, without obtaining an assent to his signal, and failing to alert or blow the COLOMBIA down, as he obviously did not know the other vessel's intention.

(d) The pilot's action in reversing himself and proposing a port passing is considered a major contributing factor to the collision. At that time he should have known that there was no reasonable assurance that such maneuver would succeed, and governed himself accordingly. As the bridge of the EXCALIBUR did not hear any answer to their own signals, and the vessels were closing rapidly, the EXCALIBUR should have been checked down and her engines, if necessary, stopped and backed.

(e) The COLOMBIA's pilot, although he admits that the situation was not clear starboard to starboard, is not censured for assenting to such passing and maneuvering accordingly. In this connection it is to be noted that the COLOMBIA was close to the junction between the Bay Ridge Channel and main channel. In view of the fact that there was ample room, with no traffic to interfere, and the EXCALIBUR's position on the extreme left-hand side of the fairway, Capt. [redacted] had good reason to believe that such a passing could be safely accomplished,

LVI
14 September, 1950
(COLOMBIA (Danish)-
EXCALIBUR C-3 B4)

even without the EXCALIBUR changing course to left. However, his answer to the EXCALIBUR's one-blast signal, and attempt to maneuver for a port passing, is certainly open to criticism. With the COLOMBIA now under a rapid left swing, and the vessels closing at about 25 knots, Capt. [REDACTED] should, as an experienced pilot, have realized that there was insufficient time to reverse his helm, and effectuate and adequate maneuver to the right for a safe port passing. Further, whereas the COLOMBIA's engine was reversed shortly before the collision, it cannot be considered that this action was timely.

(f) As to the master of the EXCALIBUR who was on the bridge, it is apparent that he did not question his pilot, either with respect to the manner in which the vessel was navigated nor the signals sounded.

(g) Capt. [REDACTED] is, however, considered remiss under R. S. 4450, as amended, for failing to take action to prevent collision. He was aware that there was no understanding as to passing, in view of the fact that no answer had been heard to his signals and therefore should have realized that danger of collision existed before the pilot reversed himself. He should have ordered the headway off his vessel and deferred any attempt to pass until the situation was clear. His failure to sound the general alarm after the collision is, under the circumstances, not criticized. His explanation, namely, the sheltered position of the vessel, and his apprehension of unduly alarming passengers, as well as his verbal orders to close watertight doors, is adequate.

(h) Final conclusions as to whether or not the vessel would have remained afloat and stable after the collision cannot be made, due to the inability of witnesses to give sufficient informative testimony with respect thereto. The board is, however, of the opinion that the vessel had reached her flooding level in #2 and #3, and established her minimum freeboard, before she was beached. This opinion is based on the time element involved between the collision and the beaching, which was about 18 minutes, as well as the dimensions of the opening in the ship's side, which extended from the main deck to the turn of the bilge and covered an area of approximately 35' x 38' in way of the bulkhead between #2 and #3 holds."

6. The Board made the following Recommendations:

"(1) (a) That Captain [REDACTED], pilot of the EXCALIBUR, be cited for violation of Article 18 Rule 1, of the Inland Rules.

(b) That the owners of the EXCALIBUR, the American Export Lines, be cited for violation of Article 18, Rule 1, of the Inland Rules.

(c) That Captain [REDACTED] of the EXCALIBUR, be charged with negligence, specifying, in general, failure to proceed with caution

Chief, MVI Division to
Commandant

14 September, 1950
(COLOMBIA (Danish)-
EXCALIBUR C-3 Bd)

to avoid collision. (Refer to New York Case No. 628-41900).

(d) That, inasmuch as both pilots are considered at fault, 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.

(e) That the monetary penalty recommended against Capt. [REDACTED] be held in abeyance pending action by the appropriate State authorities."

REMARKS

7. Appropriate copies of this report will be furnished to the American Pilots' Association for such action as may be deemed proper with respect to [REDACTED] and [REDACTED] acting under the authority of their state pilots' licenses, in charge of the navigation of the SS EXCALIBUR and IV COLOMBIA, respectively, at the time the subject casualty occurred.

8. Recommendation 1 (b) of the Board should have specified the vessel and not the owners for violation of Article 18 Rule 1.

9. 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/ [REDACTED]

Ind-1

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

20 September, 1950
(COLOMBIA (Danish)-
EXCALIBUR C-3 Bd)

Forwarding, recommending approval.

/s/ [REDACTED]

H. C. SHEPHERD

APPROVED: 22 Sept. 1950

/s/ [REDACTED]

MERLIN O'NEILL

Vice Admiral, U. S. Coast Guard
Commandant