

UNITED STATES COAST GUARD



ADDRESS REPLY TO:

MVI
19 SEP 1956
(HOWARD OLSON - MARINE
LEOPARD - a-12 Bd)

Commandant's Action

on

Marine Board of Investigation; collision involving SS HOWARD OLSON and SS MARINE LEOPARD off Point Sur, California, 14 May 1956, with loss of life

1. Pursuant to the provisions of Title 46 CFR Part 136, the record of the Marine Board of Investigation convened to investigate subject casualty, together with its Findings of Fact, Opinions, and Recommendations, has been reviewed.
2. The SS MARINE LEOPARD, a cargo vessel of 10,662 g.t., laden with 11,876 tons of cargo, was en route from San Francisco to San Pedro, and the SS HOWARD OLSON, a cargo vessel in the lumber trade of 2,477 g.t., in ballast, was en route from San Pedro to Coos Bay, Oregon. Prior to 0200 14 May 1956, both vessels were approaching Point Sur on opposite courses, the MARINE LEOPARD on course 156° T, speed 17 knots, and the HOWARD OLSON on course 320° T, speed 8 knots. The weather was dark but clear and fair, small sea and swell, with excellent visibility. Both vessels sighted each other when considerably more than 10 miles apart and had each other under constant observation up to the point of collision. A normal head and head meeting and port to port passing situation existed. In approaching, the MARINE LEOPARD changed course from 156° to 150° to pass closer to Point Sur, but at the same time closed in on the HOWARD OLSON, which when noticed caused the MARINE LEOPARD to slowly return to 156° T. The HOWARD OLSON, when one-half to three-fourths mile from the MARINE LEOPARD, changed course 10° to the left and the MARINE LEOPARD, upon noticing this course change and feeling that there was insufficient room to swing to her own left, changed course to the right and because of the increased rudder on both vessels, the HOWARD OLSON to the left and the MARINE LEOPARD to the right, the vessels collided and the bow of the MARINE LEOPARD entered the starboard side of the HOWARD OLSON at an angle of about 80 to 90 degrees. The HOWARD OLSON took a severe list, her bow broke off, and the vessel sank shortly thereafter, forcing the crew to jump into the sea in a position approximately 4 miles off Point Sur, California. Four crew members of the HOWARD OLSON lost their lives, of which three crew members drowned (aspiration of water and oil) and the fourth crew member has not been recovered.

MVI

(HOWARD OLSON - MARINE
LEOPARD - a-12 Bd)

3. The Findings of Fact, Opinions, and Recommendations of the Marine Board of Investigation convened to investigate subject casualty are approved, but this approval is not to be interpreted as constituting my conclusions or decision on any independent, separate action taken under R.S. 4450, as amended, and regulations thereunder, concerning this collision.


J. A. HIRSHFIELD
Rear Admiral, U. S. Coast Guard
Acting Commandant

Commander
Twelfth Coast Guard District
630 Sansome Street
San Francisco 26, California

19 July 1956
GN/A17-6/C-3833

From: Marine Board of Investigation
To: Commandant (MVI)
Via: Commander, 12th Coast Guard District (d)

Subj: Marine Board of Investigation; Collision between SS MARINE LEOPARD and
SS HOWARD OLSON off Point Sur, California on 14 May 1956 with loss of
life

Ref: (a) COMDT (MVI) ltr of 18 May 1956 (HOWARD OLSON - MARINE LEOPARD -
a-12 Bd)

1. In accordance with reference (a), a formal board of investigation was held during the period 16 - 22 May 1956 at San Francisco, California for the purpose of inquiring into all of the circumstances of the collision.
2. The Board of Investigation, having thoroughly inquired into all of the facts and circumstances connected with subject incident, and having considered the evidence adduced, finds as follows:

- Findings of Fact -

1. The American SS MARINE LEOPARD and the American SS HOWARD OLSON, both freighters, collided while underway in the North Pacific Ocean four miles off Point Sur, California, in approximate position 36° 15.6' north latitude, and 121° 57.6' west longitude, on 14 May 1956, at 0218, Pacific Daylight Saving Time. The HOWARD OLSON broke in two and sank with the loss of one crew member unrecovered and the deaths of three crew members who were picked up in the rescue operation. The MARINE LEOPARD suffered considerable damage to the bow but no casualties to personnel.

2. The two vessels involved were:

- a. The MARINE LEOPARD, a U. S. inspected C-4 single screw steam turbine ocean freighter of 10,662.5 gross tons, official number 248882, of 9,350 horsepower, home port, New York, N. Y. Built in 1946 of steel at Richmond, California, owned and operated in the Intercoastal Freight Service by Luckenbach Steamship Company, Inc., 120 Wall Street, New York, N. Y. The vessel, 522 feet in overall length, was equipped with gyro compass, course recorder, radar and automatic steering (iron mike). It carried a crew of 51 and was under command and being navigated at the time of the collision by Frank A. Snow, of Ocean City, New Jersey, age [redacted], Master's License No. [redacted], issue 7-10, with numerous pilotage endorsements. He was being assisted on the bridge by the officer of the watch, the Third Mate, [redacted] of Mamaroneck, N. Y., holding a Second Mate's License.

- Findings of Fact (Continued) -

b. The HOWARD OLSON, a U. S. inspected single screw steam lumber freighter of 2,477 gross tons, official number 215815, of 1,400 horsepower, home port, San Francisco, California, built in 1917, at Ecorse, Michigan, of steel, owned and operated in the Coastwise Lumber Trade by Oliver J. Olson Company, of San Mateo, California. The vessel, 261 feet in length, built with the bridge and housing situated on the after end of the vessel, 170 feet from the stem, was equipped with gyro compass and radar. It carried a crew of 29 and was commanded by [REDACTED], of Long Beach, California, age [REDACTED], Master's License No. [REDACTED], issue 3-3, and at the time of collision was being navigated by the Second Mate, Felix W. Zinkiewicz, Los Angeles, California, holding a license as Second Mate, No. [REDACTED], issue 3-3.

3. The weather at the time was dark, but clear and fair, wind northwesterly, force two, small northwesterly sea and swell, with a slight southerly set, visibility excellent.

4. The MARINE LEOPARD drawing 30 feet 6 inches forward, and 32 feet 10 inches aft, departed Oakland, California, Sunday evening, May 13, 1956, bound for San Pedro, California, carrying 11,876 tons of general cargo. Captain Snow was on the bridge when the vessel took departure from close aboard San Francisco Entrance Sea Buoy No. 1, at 2042 Pacific Daylight Saving Time, which was then employed on the vessel. The vessel thereafter was on a full ahead bell, steaming at approximately 17 knots, with gyro compass and course recorder in operation. Course was set at 165 degrees true and gyro and steering set on iron mike.

5. At 2250, Pigeon Point was abeam to port three miles and course was changed to 156 degrees gyro. Third Mate [REDACTED], relieved the watch at midnight, at which time the vessel was still on course 156 degrees. He obtained a fix at 0035 of 030° true, on Santa Cruz Light, at 17 miles distance, which placed it approximately one mile west or outside of the recommended track on the chart then in use (Exhibit 15). He continued on this course with a slight alteration to avoid a small vessel on down the coast toward Point Sur. During [REDACTED] watch the MARINE LEOPARD had been overtaking another vessel slightly on his port hand, the SS JOHN B. WATERMAN, which vessel was headed in the same direction and closely following the recommended track, travelling at 15.87 knots on course 156° true. At 0155 the MARINE LEOPARD was abeam the JOHN B. WATERMAN and to starboard .6 of a mile.

6. The JOHN B. WATERMAN changed course at 0200 to 153° true and was abeam Point Sur Light at 0216, at 3.2 miles distance.

- Findings of Fact (Continued) -

7. Prior to 0200, a white light, which later proved to be the HOWARD OLSON bound north, became visible bearing about one point on the port bow of the MARINE LEOPARD, distance approximately 17 miles, according to the radar. This was seen visually by Doyle and the lookout on the bow, who reported it as bearing dead ahead.

8. At 0200, Captain Snow, having been called in accordance with night orders, arrived on the bridge. [redacted] informed him of the vessel's position, of the presence of the JOHN B. WATERMAN, and of the approaching vessel which he then estimated at eight or nine miles distance, and which appeared then to bear one point on the port bow by observation. Captain Snow took over the navigating of the ship by ordering, at 0202, the course changed to the next planned course, 150° gyro, to pass closer to Point Sur. The wheel was changed over to manual steering as this course change was carried out.

9. Captain Snow continued to watch the approaching HOWARD OLSON, then appearing dead ahead, receiving reports from [redacted] at the radar and also from the bow lookout, and at 0210, he changed course to 152°. Then, at approximately that time both side lights and the range lights of the HOWARD OLSON were visible. At 0212, Snow changed course two more degrees to the right to 154. Thereafter only the other vessel's red side light was visible to Snow together with the range lights. At 0214, Snow changed course two degrees more to the right until he was steering 156°.

10. After the MARINE LEOPARD steadied on course 156° the HOWARD OLSON appeared suddenly to swing left and shortly after that the OLSON's green side light appeared. Snow then at 0217, the vessels being about 1/2 mile apart, ordered hard right rudder as the OLSON continued to swing to the left. The MARINE LEOPARD began to swing rapidly to starboard and had turned 50 to 60 degrees when at 0218, the two vessels collided, the stem of the MARINE LEOPARD cutting into the starboard side of the other vessel identified as the SS HOWARD OLSON, slicing in some 30 feet at a point between No. 2 and No. 3 hatches, about 1/3 of the way aft on the HOWARD OLSON, and at an angle of approximately 80 to 90 degrees. At the moment of impact Captain Snow ordered the engines stopped. Thereafter the two vessels remained together for a minute or two as Captain Snow attempted to contact the Master of the HOWARD OLSON by megaphone, and then they parted as Snow ordered full astern on the engines.

11. The SS HOWARD OLSON departed San Pedro, California, in ballast, bound for Coos Bay, Oregon, on 12 May 1956. The vessel's draft at departure was 6 feet 9 inches forward, and 17 feet 4 inches aft. At 2200, on 13 May 1956, the vessel, hugging the coast, had Cape San Martin abeam to starboard, three miles distant, the vessel then on course 320 degrees gyro and true, and travelling

- Findings of Fact (Continued) -

at approximately eight knots, full speed ahead. The 320 degree course was calculated from Point Buchon to bring the vessel up to Point Sur where a new course was to be chosen depending on the weather.

12. Shortly prior to 0140, the light of a vessel approaching southbound was picked up on the horizon on the starboard bow. This later proved to be the JOHN B. WATERMAN. At approximately 0140, the lookout stationed on the starboard wing of the bridge, reported to the Second Mate, Felix W. Zinkiewicz, then on watch, another vessel's white light further from shore apparently approaching southbound, which later proved to be the MARINE LEOPARD, then one point on the starboard bow.

13. At 0148, Zinkiewicz obtained by observation, the radar not being in operation, a bow bearing of 005 degrees true, on the light on Point Sur which had been visible throughout the watch.

14. At approximately 0200 Zinkiewicz saw the green light of the MARINE LEOPARD, still one point on the starboard bow. By this time, the JOHN B. WATERMAN showing range lights and a green running light was some 30 to 35 degrees on the OLSON's starboard bow.

15. The HOWARD OLSON continued on course 320 degrees for approximately another 15 minutes and when the two vessels were 1/2 to 3/4 of a mile apart, Zinkiewicz ordered the course changed 10 degrees to the left, and shortly thereafter blew two blasts on the steam whistle. Before the vessel completed the 10 degree change, the MARINE LEOPARD started turning rapidly to its right, then Zinkiewicz ordered the helmsman to keep coming left; then the other ship's red light appeared and Zinkiewicz rang full speed astern. Less than a minute later the two ships collided. Captain [REDACTED], who had been sleeping in his cabin, had been awakened by the whistle and telegraph. He immediately got up and after looking out a forward porthole in his cabin and seeing the lights approaching close aboard, ran barefoot to the bridge, arriving just before the crash.

16. As the MARINE LEOPARD pierced the HOWARD OLSON, the latter immediately took a severe list to starboard, and about the time that the LEOPARD backed down the OLSON's bow broke off. Zinkiewicz, meanwhile rang the general alarm and abandon ship signal and, as the vessel's list continued to increase, the crew made for the boats, Zinkiewicz ringing stop on the engine telegraph before leaving the bridge.

17. Within a very few minutes the OLSON's starboard list was approaching 90 degrees and the men were forced to jump into the sea. Captain [REDACTED] apparently the last to leave, jumped from the rail on the port quarter. He and the men had to swim to get away from the sinking ship and the water covered with thick fuel oil. The stern section sank shortly thereafter.

- Findings of Fact. (Continued) -

18. On the LEOPARD, before putting the engines full astern, Third Mate [REDACTED], at Captain Snow's direction, sounded the general alarm and over the public address system notified the crew that the smoking lamp was out. He then ran to his boat station at No. 2 motor lifeboat, and at the chief mate's direction got his crew into the boat, lowered away and was waterborne and away at 0223. He circled the LEOPARD's bow, passed the floating bow section of the OLSON and circled around into the debris picking up survivors illuminated by the LEOPARD's searchlight playing on the scene. [REDACTED] and his crew picked up 23 oil covered survivors in 45 minutes and then returned to the LEOPARD. Meanwhile the LEOPARD's other boat was in the area as well as a boat from the WATERMAN, which was about 3/4 mile away at the time of the collision and had stopped to assist, on hearing and seeing the collision. Three crew members were picked up by the LEOPARD's No. 1 lifeboat and two by the WATERMAN's lifeboat. The boats returned to their respective ships where the survivors were hauled aboard and given prompt first aid and other assistance.

19. While the boats were being lowered Captain Snow, by radio, was reporting the collision, notifying the U. S. Coast Guard at San Francisco and the Luckenbach Steamship Company, at San Francisco. The Coast Guard responded. While this was being done the carpenter checked the bilges and found the ship in safe condition, reporting this to Captain Snow. The survivors were later transferred to the custody of the U. S. Coast Guard. One man was taken ashore by helicopter, and the remainder taken by cutter, to Monterey where they received medical attention. Three of the OLSON's crew members who had been picked up in lifeboats, could not be revived and were declared by the coroner to have died from asphyxia due to aspiration of water and oil. One crew member from the OLSON was missing and was neither seen nor recovered, and a few suffered minor injuries. The dead were:

Andrew F. Scheib, Book No. 55485, Third Mate
[REDACTED]
Los Angeles, California

Richard M. Mc Hugh, Book No. 050455, First Assistant
Engineer
[REDACTED]
Portland, Oregon

Frank H. Krohn, Z-75586, Second Assistant Engineer
[REDACTED]
San Francisco, California, and

[REDACTED], Z-26631, Cook/Steward
[REDACTED]
Oakland, California (missing and presumed dead).

- Findings of Fact (Continued) -

20. The HOWARD OLSON was a total loss. The damage to the MARINE LEOPARD consisted of damaged plates to both sides of vessel's bow, above and below the waterline, and including internals inway of same, as well as the loss of the starboard anchor.

21. The place of collision as calculated by the Board is approximately $36^{\circ} 15.6'$ north latitude and $121^{\circ} 57.6'$ west longitude, 4 miles 226° true from Point Sur.

- Opinion -

It is the opinion of the Board that the two vessels were meeting on a head and head situation under Rule 18 of the International Rules of the Road, that the proximity of the JOHN B. WATERMAN did not bring the case within the rule of special circumstances because Zinkiewicz, the mate on watch on the HOWARD OLSON, stated that he was not concerned with the presence of the WATERMAN, that Zinkiewicz violated Rule 18 in not changing his course to starboard to make a port to port passing, and that Captain Snow violated Rule 18 of the International Rules of the Road, for not blowing his whistle when making his course changes to starboard. The failure to station the lookout on the bow of the HOWARD OLSON instead of on the bridge wing did not contribute to the casualty.


The Board considers that the actions of both Captain Snow on the MARINE LEOPARD and Second Officer Zinkiewicz on the HOWARD OLSON warrant not only action under R.S. 4450, as amended, for negligence, but also in view of the loss of life such action as found necessary by the U. S. Attorney General for possible criminal negligence within the meaning of Title 18 USC 1115 and 2196.

The Board is of the opinion that there was no negligence of other of the two vessels' personnel, and that there was no material failure or lack thereof contributing to the casualty. There appeared to be no U. S. Coast Guard personnel involved as contributing to the casualty, nor any aids to navigation involved in this respect.

- Recommendations -

The Board recommends that suspension and revocation proceedings under R.S. 4450, as amended, be instituted against the licenses of Captain Snow and Mr. Zinkiewicz and that a copy of the case and record be forwarded to the U. S. Attorney General for possible action as noted in the Opinion above.

No other action is recommended.


J. A. KERRINS
Captain, U. S. Coast Guard
Chairman


L. C. WALLEN
Commander, U. S. Coast Guard
Member


A. C. HOENE, JR.
Lieutenant Commander, U. S. Coast Guard
Member-Recorder