

UNITED STATES COAST GUARD
Washington, D. C.

MVI
2 February 1955
(ALPHA - USCGC MORRIS -
a-11 Bd.)

Commandant's Action
on

Marine Board of Investigation (joint); collision USCGC MORRIS -
M/B ALPHA, off California, 2 October 1954 with loss of life

1. Pursuant to the provisions of Title 46 C.F.R. 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. Early morning on 2 October 1954 in an area between San Pedro and Anacapa Island off the California coast, the USCGC MORRIS (WSC 147) of 220 tons displacement and 125 feet in length, was en route from Terminal Island to the Island of San Miguel, and the sailing yacht ALOHA of 18 gross tons, 58 feet length, with her side lights fitted on her foremast rigging, was bound under machinery without sail from Santa Barbara to Newport on a pleasure cruise. At about 0423 the ALOHA sighted the lights of the MORRIS approximately one point on her port bow and thereafter the MORRIS sighted the lights of the ALOHA approximately one point on her starboard bow. As the vessels approached each other, the MORRIS assumed that a starboard to starboard passing situation existed and maintained course and speed, while the ALOHA assumed that the MORRIS was a fishing vessel with no way on and gradually changed course to her right on the assumption of giving the supposed fishing vessel a wide berth. Both vessels were navigated in violation of the applicable collision regulations and were otherwise in error, and as a result, the MORRIS and ALOHA collided at approximately 0458. The ALOHA was sunk and two persons on board the ALOHA perished evidently by drowning.
3. The Findings of Fact, Opinions, and Recommendations of the Marine Board of Investigation convened to investigate subject casualty are approved.

(signed) A. C. Richmond
A. C. RICHMOND
Vice Admiral, U. S. Coast Guard
Commandant

REPORT

of a combined

MARINE BOARD OF INVESTIGATION AND COURT OF INQUIRY

convened at the

Office of the Commander

Eleventh Coast Guard District

on 7 October 1954

by order of the

Commandant, U. S. Coast Guard

To inquire into the collision involving the CGC MORRIS and
MV ALOHA on 2 October, 1954.

15 November 1954

The court, having thoroughly inquired into all the facts and the circumstances connected with the incident which occasioned the inquiry, and having considered the evidence adduced, finds as follows:

FINDINGS OF FACT

1. That the USCGC MORRIS (WCG 147) is a public vessel of the United States, operated by the Coast Guard. The MORRIS displaces approximately 220 tons, is 125 feet in length, and built of steel at Camden, N. J., in 1927. The MORRIS has twin screws and is powered by two diesel engines of approximately 400 h.p. each. The normal full speed is about 11.5 knots at 930 r.p.m. All her equipment is in accordance with U. S. Coast Guard standards for her class.

2. The ALOHA, Official Number 226674, of 18 gross tons, length about 55 feet, was a ketch-rigged pleasure vessel with auxiliary power. The vessel was constructed of wood at Oakland, California, in 1927. The auxiliary power consisted of one 90 h.p. gasoline engine driving a propeller which was offset to port. The vessel had a small gasoline-driven generating plant. The steering wheel, magnetic compass and engine controls were located aft in the steering cockpit. Her bulkheads were not watertight. The master stateroom was located in the after portion of the vessel below decks. Two berths were located therein, one on each side of the vessel. Entrance to the master stateroom was through the main cabin. An escape hatch was located on deck serving the master stateroom. In the main cabin there were four berths and a toilet. This toilet was located on the port side. The vessel was owned by [REDACTED]

3. The ALOHA left Santa Barbara at about 2330 on 1 October 1954, bound for Newport, California, on a pleasure cruise. The ALOHA was operated by Mr. [REDACTED]. Mr. [REDACTED] assisted him in the handling of the vessel. There were three additional persons on board--Mrs. [REDACTED] and Mr. [REDACTED], as guests. Departure was taken from Entrance Lighted Whistle Buoy St. B. (CG 162 No. 182) abeam to starboard at about 0000 on 2 October 1954. From the point of departure the magnetic compass course was 112° at an approximate speed of 7.5 knots; using the auxiliary engine as motive power. Sails were not used.

4. At or about the time of getting underway, the two ladies retired, Mrs. [redacted] using the port berth and Miss [redacted] the starboard berth in the master stateroom. After the vessel had taken its departure, Mr. [redacted] retired to a berth in the main cabin. Mr. [redacted] and Mr. [redacted] remained on deck until 0130 when Mr. Boisot took the conn and Mr. [redacted] retired to the main cabin.

5. At or about 0425 Mr. [redacted] sighted the lights of two vessels, one bore about 10° to 15° and the other about 45° on the ALOHA's port bow. At or about 0440 Mr. [redacted] called Mr. [redacted] by sounding several blasts on the ALOHA's horn for the purpose. At or about 0443 Mr. [redacted] came on deck, thereupon Mr. Boisot called his attention to the two vessels off the ALOHA's port bow. At this time, Mr. [redacted] observed that the two vessels bore approximately one point off the port bow and that each one was showing a white masthead light and a green side light. Whereupon Mr. [redacted] relieved the watch. Mr. [redacted] then went below into the main cabin to chart a new course for the ALOHA. The ALOHA maintained her course of 112° compass and speed of 7.5 knots. Mr. [redacted] noted that the relative bearings of the other vessels did not appreciably change, whereupon at 0453 the ALOHA's course was altered gradually to the right in an attempt to pass clear and leave the other vessels on the port hand.

6. At or about 0013 on 2 October, the USCGC MORRIS (WSC 147) left the Coast Guard Base, Terminal Island, bound for the Island of San Miguel off the California coast. The MORRIS was commanded by Lieutenant [redacted], USCG. The complement of the MORRIS consisted of 4 officers and 25 enlisted men. Also on board were 10 enlisted Air Corps personnel and 2 civilian employees of the U. S. Air Force, as passengers. At or about 0055 on 2 October 1954, the MORRIS took departure from a point two miles 215° true from Point Fernin Light, and set course 293° true, speed about 11.5 knots.

7. Between 0200 and 0230, the Commanding Officer left the bridge and retired, leaving [redacted] BMC, USCG, officer of the deck in charge of the watch.

8. At or about 0345, Ensign James A. FROST, Jr. ([redacted] USCGR, relieved [redacted] as officer of the deck. The watch was comprised of [redacted] SN, USCG, as lookout; [redacted] SN, USCG, helmsman; [redacted] RD2, USCG,

quartermaster of the watch; [REDACTED] RMI, USCG, radio-
man; [REDACTED] EN1, USCG, engineer of the watch;
and [REDACTED], DC3, USCG, assistant engineer.

9. At or about 0430 on 2 October 1954, the course of the MORRIS was changed to 287° true. At this time a vessel of moderate size was overtaken and passed by the MORRIS at a distance of about 1 mile on the starboard hand.

10. At or about 0440 the officer of the deck on the MORRIS sighted the ALOHA's masthead light bearing 010° relative. A few minutes later the lookout stationed on the flying bridge sighted and reported the same white light bearing 010° relative.

11. Soon thereafter the ALOHA's green side light was observed with the white masthead light. Then both the red and green side lights and the white masthead light of the ALOHA were visible to the observers on the MORRIS.

12. At or about 0453 the ALOHA began changing course gradually to the right, her green side light disappeared leaving the red side light and white masthead light visible to those on the MORRIS. At this time the relative bearing of the ALOHA from the MORRIS was about 020°.

13. At or about 0456 a radar range and bearing was obtained by an observer on the MORRIS, the ALOHA then bore about 010° relative at a range of 1500 yards.

14. When both vessels were in extremis the ALOHA's rudder was placed at hard right. The rudder of the MORRIS was placed at 20° left and the MORRIS' engines were backed full speed. At the time of the collision the MORRIS sounded the collision alarm which included several blasts of her whistle.

15. At or about 0458 the vessels collided in approximate position 34° 00.5' North Latitude and 119° 12.9' West Longitude. The stem of the MORRIS entered the ALOHA's hull on the port side about 40 feet from the latter's stem.

16. No change of course signal or danger signal was sounded by either vessel prior to the collision.

17. After the impact the MORRIS backed clear of the ALOHA and the ALOHA sank within one minute. Lieutenant [REDACTED] Commanding Officer of the MORRIS, was awakened by the collision alarm. He proceeded immediately to the bridge and assumed charge of the search and rescue operations.

18. [REDACTED] escaped from the ALOHA and were rescued within 5 minutes by the MORRIS. Mrs. [REDACTED] and Mr. [REDACTED], who were below decks at the time of the collision, are missing and are presumed to have perished when the ALOHA sank. There were no serious physical injuries sustained by the survivors.

19. The MORRIS sustained minor damage to the bow plating. The crew and passengers on the MORRIS sustained no injuries.

20. The survivors of the ALOHA were landed at the Coast Guard Base, Terminal Island, California, at or about 1425 on 2 October 1954. The MORRIS, assisted by Coast Guard and Naval air craft and surface craft, conducted an extensive search for additional survivors for approximately three hours with negative results.

OPINION

1. On a dark night with good visibility, the USCGC MORRIS and the ALOHA made visual contact at a distance of more than 5 miles. There was sufficient sea room for maneuvering. When the operator of the ALOHA first made visual contact with the MORRIS, he saw the masthead light and green side light of the MORRIS bearing about 10° to 15° on his own port bow. At this time it should have been apparent to the operator of the ALOHA that a crossing situation existed under the International Rules and that the ALOHA was the privileged vessel.

2. Had both vessels held their respective courses and speeds from the time they first sighted each other, they would have passed clear starboard to starboard at a distance of several hundred yards. The officer of the deck of the MORRIS was correct in assuming that risk of collision did not exist so long as this condition continued.

3. At a distance of 1-1/2 to 2 miles from the MORRIS, the operator of the ALOHA erroneously decided that the MORRIS was stopped and drifting, and began altering course to the right in an attempt to pass the MORRIS on his own port hand. The ALOHA failed to indicate this change of course by appropriate sound signal.

4. When the officer of the deck of the MORRIS was informed that the ALOHA had changed course to the right, as indicated by the disappearance of her green light, it should have been apparent to him that the situation had changed, that risk of collision now existed, and that the MORRIS, as the burdened vessel, was obligated to take appropriate action.

5. The failure of the operator of the ALOHA to maintain his course and speed, as required by Rule 21, and to indicate his change of course to the right by appropriate sound signal, as required by Rule 28, contributed directly and materially to the ensuing collision.

6. The failure of the officer of the deck of the MORRIS to discharge the responsibility of the burdened vessel, as required by Rule 19, and to take appropriate action, as required by Rules 22 and 23, contributed directly and materially to the collision.

7. The officer of the deck, Ensign James A. FROST, Jr., of the MORRIS, became confused by the unexpected change of course by the ALOHA and should have called his Commanding Officer immediately or stopped his engines until the situation cleared.

8. The Commanding Officer and crew of the MORRIS promptly and efficiently rescued the three survivors of the ALOHA and conducted an extensive and thorough search for the two missing persons.

9. The Commanding Officer of the MORRIS, Lieutenant [REDACTED] had issued adequate instructions to his watch officers by means of his night orders, and retired to his quarters. Lieutenant [REDACTED] was in no way responsible for the collision.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. That Ensign James A. FROST, Jr. [REDACTED], USCGR, be officially reprimanded for (1) his failure to observe the "Rules to Prevent Collisions;" (2) his failure to obey the night orders relative to the minimum distance at which other vessels were to be passed; and (3) for his failure to stop his ship and call the Commanding Officer when in doubt.

2. That while the operator of the ALOHA was jointly responsible for the collision, no specific recommendations can be made for the reason that the ALOHA was a pleasure vessel and not required to carry personnel licensed or certificated by the Coast Guard.

(signed) Clarence C. Paden
CLARENCE C. PADEN
Captain, U. S. Coast Guard
President

(signed) Joseph A. Brennan
JOSEPH A. BRENNAN
Captain, U. S. Coast Guard
Member

(signed) Lionel H. De Santy
LIONEL H. DE SANTY
Commander, U. S. Coast Guard
Member and Recorder

The court then, at 1230, adjourned to await the action of the convening authority.

(signed) Clarence C. Paden
CLARENCE C. PADEN
Captain, U. S. Coast Guard
President

(signed) Lionel H. De Santy
LIONEL H. DE SANTY
Commander, U. S. Coast Guard
Recorder

(signed) Hugh C. McCaffrey
HUGH C. McCAFFREY
Lieutenant Commander, U. S. Coast Guard
Counsel for the Court