

UNITED STATES COAST GUARD

ADDRESS REPLY TO:



FILE:

MVI

20 June 1955

(PARRAMATTA - SUOMI -  
a-11 Bd)

Commandant's Action

on

Marine Board of Investigation; collision involving MV PARRAMATTA (Swedish) and MB SUOMI off Point Arguello, California, on 21 April 1955 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. Early morning on 21 April 1955, the MV PARRAMATTA (Swedish), a freighter of 4956 g.t., was en route from San Francisco to Los Angeles, and the motorboat SUOMI, a yawl-rigged pleasure vessel with auxiliary power, was en route from Santa Barbara to San Francisco. The weather in the vicinity of Point Arguello shortly before the collision was overcast, intermittent drizzle, wind southeast, force 2, with small choppy sea. The PARRAMATTA and the SUOMI were in a crossing situation. The PARRAMATTA was the burdened vessel and the SUOMI, the privileged. There was no effective lookout on the PARRAMATTA, since the evidence indicates that upon sighting the SUOMI's masthead and port navigation lights, the PARRAMATTA placed her rudder hard left without any speed reduction, and a collision occurred within approximately 30 seconds thereafter. The SUOMI sank immediately after the collision and all five persons on board perished. Aside from a bent jack staff, the PARRAMATTA sustained no damage as a result of the collision.

REMARKS

3. The Opinions of the Board, paragraphs 1 and 2, in effect state that the SUOMI was underway under power and sail and that her operator should have sounded the danger signal permitted by Rule 28 of the International Rules to alert the PARRAMATTA. Since the SUOMI sank immediately after the collision without any trace of having been under sail, and all persons on board the SUOMI perished, there is no evidence in the record to sustain the above Opinions.

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4. The Board in its Remarks, paragraphs 2 and 3, recommended that certain personnel from the SS BENNINGTON and the owners of the SS BENNINGTON, the Keystone Tankship Corporation, be commended for their response and the diligent search for survivors from the SUOMI. The Coast Guard appreciates the diligence of the Master and the crew of the SS BENNINGTON in their search for survivors from the SUOMI, as well as the contribution by the Keystone Tankship Corporation in permitting the use of their vessel, the SS BENNINGTON, in the search for survivors.

5. Subject to the foregoing "Remarks", the Findings of Fact, Opinions, and Recommendations of the Marine Board of Investigation convened to investigate subject casualty are approved.

(signed [REDACTED])

A. C. RICHMOND

Vice Admiral, U. S. Coast Guard  
Commandant

RECORD OF PROCEEDINGS

of a

MARINE BOARD OF INVESTIGATION

convened at the

Office of the Commander, Eleventh Coast Guard District

on 22 April 1955

by order of the

Commandant, U. S. Coast Guard

To investigate a collision between the (Swedish) Motor Vessel PARRAMATTA and the American Yacht SUOMI off the Coast Of California near Point Arguello on 21 April 1955

31 May 1955

The board, 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:

FINDING OF FACTS

1. At or about 0400 on 21 April, 1955, the Swedish Motor Vessel PARRAMATTA and the American auxiliary yawl SUOMI collided at sea approximately 4.2 miles south of Point Arguello, California, with a loss of five lives.
2. The SUOMI, Official Number 258862, of 18 gross tons, length about 50 feet, was a yawl-rigged pleasure vessel with auxiliary power. The vessel was constructed of wood in 1947. The auxiliary power consisted of one 52-hp. gasoline engine driving one variable pitch propeller. The tiller, magnetic compass and engine controls were located aft in the steering cockpit. The navigation lights control panel was located in the main cabin. The bulkheads were not watertight. The vessel had approximately 15,000 lbs. of fixed ballast. Normal full speed under power alone was about 7.5 knots. The vessel was owned by [REDACTED]. The owner of record, as indicated on the Customs document was [REDACTED].
3. The Swedish motorship PARRAMATTA, Official Number 8630, of 4956 gross tons, is an ocean freight vessel of steel construction, built in Sweden in 1942. The PARRAMATTA is owned by the Transatlantic Shipping Company, of Gøteborg, Sweden. General Steamship Corporation of Los Angeles, California, is the local agent. The PARRAMATTA is a single screw vessel with direct reversible engine. Her normal full speed is about 13.5 knots. The engine room telegraph is equipped with an automatic siren. The vessel is not fitted with radar nor automatic pilot.
4. On 20 April, 1955, the PARRAMATTA departed San Francisco, California, bound for Australian ports via Los Angeles, California. The vessel was laden with general cargo, her draft was 22' 6" forward and 25' 4" aft. There were 39 persons on board, including the Master. The officers and crew were divided into three watches of four hours' duration. Each bridge watch was composed of one licensed officer, one able seaman and one ordinary seaman.

5. At or about 1832 on 20 April, 1955, Point Sur, California, was passed abeam to port, distance approximately 3.7 miles, a course of 150 degrees true was set.

6. At or about 2357 the Third Mate relieved the Second Mate on the bridge and remained as officer of the watch. At about 0000 on 21 April, 1955, the helmsman was relieved and the lookout took his station on the wing of the bridge. The able seaman and ordinary seaman took alternate turns at the wheel, each of one hour's duration. After the helmsman was relieved from his trick at the wheel, he would take up the duties of lookout on the wing of the bridge. At or about 0315 or 0320 on 21 April, 1955, the lookout on the PARRAMATTA left his station and went below to make coffee and call the 0400 to 0800 watch. The relieving watch was called at about 0340 and again at 0350. At no time after going below at 0315 or 0320 did the lookout resume his station on the bridge.

7. At or about 0345 the vessel passed Point Arguello abeam to port approximately 3.8 miles off. At this time course was changed to 127 degrees true. The weather was overcast, with intermittent drizzle, wind southeast force 2, small choppy southeast sea. Visibility was in excess of 4 miles. Speed of the vessel was approximately 13.5 knots.

8. The officer on watch was standing on the port wing of the bridge, when a white light of a vessel bearing approximately 2 points on the starboard bow was observed. Soon thereafter the helmsman observed a white light and a red light approximately one-half point on the starboard bow. The white light was to the right of and above the red light. The rudder was ordered left and almost immediately hard left. Standby was rung on the engine room telegraph. Immediately thereafter a collision occurred with another vessel which was later determined to be the auxiliary yawl SUOMI. The collision occurred at or about 0400 in approximate position  $34^{\circ} 30.5'$  North latitude and  $120^{\circ} 39.2'$  West longitude. No whistle signal was sounded by the PARRAMATTA and none was heard from the SUOMI by the former.

9. The Master was awakened by the sound of the engine room telegraph alarm when standby was rung. He immediately went to the bridge, assumed command, and ordered the rudder hard right, having observed a white light on the surface of the water in the wake of the vessel.

10. At or about 0408 speed was reduced to slow ahead and at 0410 the engine was stopped. Meanwhile the vessel had reversed her heading and had traversed the area where the collision occurred. No vessel could be located; however, some small wreckage was observed in the water by the use of a portable Morse Lamp which was the most effective means of illumination available as the vessel carried no searchlight. Additional lookouts were stationed about the vessel without sighting survivors.

11. At or about 0512 the PARRAMATTA transmitted a message stating that she had collided with a smaller vessel 4.2 miles south of Point Arguello at 0400, and that wreckage was visible. Coast Guard units from Point Arguello and Santa Barbara were immediately dispatched to commence a search for survivors. At 0527 the PARRAMATTA resumed her voyage towards Los Angeles Harbor.

12. The only damage sustained by the PARRAMATTA as a result of the impact was a distorted jack staff. The PARRAMATTA sustained no loss of life or injuries to her personnel as a result of this collision.

13. The SUOMI outfitted at Newport, California, for a voyage to San Francisco, California. At or about 2030 on 19 April, 1955, the SUOMI entered Santa Barbara Harbor to refuel and effect repairs to the main engine. Mr. [REDACTED] registered the arrival of the vessel with the Harbor Master as the owner and master. Mr. [REDACTED] was recognized as a member of the vessel's crew. Repairs to the main engine were completed at about 1730 on 20 April, the engine was tested and found to be in good operating condition.

14. At or about 2100 on 20 April, 1955, the SUOMI under power alone, with [REDACTED] in charge, departed Santa Barbara, California, bound for San Francisco. At the time of departure there were four other persons on board, all men. The vessel was then exhibiting a masthead light, side lights and spreader lights. At this time the visibility was unlimited, the sky partly cloudy with northwesterly wind force 2.

15. Another vessel, the SS HAWAIIAN PILOT, an ocean freight vessel bound from Los Angeles Harbor to San Francisco, California, at a speed of approximately 17.3 knots passed approximately 3 miles to seaward of Point Conception at about 0256 on 21 April, 1955. At this time course was changed to 304 degrees true. At or about 0346 the HAWAIIAN PILOT was abeam of Point Arguello approximately 4.2 miles off.

16. During the passage from Point Conception to Point Arguello a small craft under sail showing one white light was observed on the HAWAIIAN PILOT's port beam approximately one mile to seaward.

17. In response to an urgent Coast Guard notice, the SS BENNINGTON, which was then bound from Los Angeles, California, to Portland, Oregon, searched the area where the collision occurred from 0525 until 0845. At 0525 some wreckage was observed (transom of SUOMI dory). Later a pillow, section of spar, an uninflated life raft and other debris were sighted. At or about 0640 a body, which later was identified as that of Ralph Howard Cooper of San Mateo, California, was sighted 2.8 miles 180 degrees true from Point Arguello Light. The body and wreckage, which included one 30-inch approved ring buoy, were recovered by a Coast Guard motor lifeboat from Point Arguello Lifeboat Station. The following day another approved ring buoy was recovered by the CGC MINNETONKA in the same general area. The search was continued until 1530 on 22 April, 1955, with negative results.

#### OPINION

1. On a dark night with intermittent light rain, the SUOMI was underway using power and sail, exhibiting a masthead light and side lights.
2. The SUOMI was on a crossing course approaching the PARRAMATTA from starboard and as the privileged vessel, her operator should have sounded the danger signal permitted by Rule 28 of the International Rules to alert the PARRAMATTA
3. When it became evident to the operator of the SUOMI that collision could not be averted by the action of the burdened PARRAMATTA, he should have taken such action as necessary to avoid immediate danger.
4. That at the time of collision there were five persons on board the SUOMI, namely:
  1. Henry Meiggs
  2. William Lawrence Meiggs
  3. Colonel William S. Conrow
  4. Sandy Wilson
  5. Ralph Cooper,

four of whom perished in the vessel. The fifth, Ralph H. Cooper, who was the operator at the time of collision, died as a result of amputation

of the right leg and pelvis with partial evisceration of the abdomen due to contact with the PARRAMATTA propeller.

5. The SUOMI sank immediately after the impact.

6. The damage to the PARRAMATTA jack staff was the direct result of contact with the mainmast rigging of the SUOMI.

7. The PARRAMATTA was underway at full speed exhibiting the navigation lights required for a vessel of her class.

8. The officer of the watch upon sighting the masthead light of the SUOMI on his starboard bow incorrectly evaluated the situation. The SUOMI's port side light and white masthead light, as reported by the helmsman, indicated a crossing situation. The PARRAMATTA's rudder was then placed at hard left and immediately thereafter the collision occurred. The SUOMI was struck on her port side amidship. The PARRAMATTA's engine remained at full speed until eight minutes after the collision.

9. The failure on the part of the PARRAMATTA to keep a proper lookout contributed directly and materially to the collision.

10. The failure of the PARRAMATTA 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.

11. The U. S. Coast Guard Lifeboat Station personnel at Point Arguello discharged their duties in the highest tradition of the service.

12. The Master and crew of the SS BENNINGTON, owned by Keystone Tankship Corporation of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, responded promptly and conducted themselves in the highest tradition of the sea in searching the area for survivors.

#### RECOMMENDATIONS

1. It is recommended that the Coast Guard propose at the next International Safety Convention, or sooner, that seamen on vessels of the class of the PARRAMATTA be divided into equal watches of sufficient number so that a proper lookout can be maintained at all times.



2. It is recommended that the Master and crew of the SS BENNINGTON be commended by the Commandant of the U. S. Coast Guard for their prompt recognition of the situation, response and the diligent search made for survivors.

3. It is further recommended that the Keystone Tankship Corporation of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, owners of the SS BENNINGTON, be commended by the Commandant, U. S. Coast Guard, for the extended use of their vessel in searching for survivors.

4. Inasmuch as no seamen licensed or certificated by the Coast Guard were involved, it is recommended that no further action be taken.

(signed) [REDACTED]  
JOSEPH A. BRESNAN  
Captain, U. S. Coast Guard  
President

(signed) [REDACTED]  
LLOYD L. STOLTZ  
Commander, U.S. Coast Guard  
Member

(signed) [REDACTED]  
LIONEL H. DE SANTY  
Commander, U. S. Coast Guard  
Member and Recorder