MI 27 February 1953 (USS RUCHAPRIN - WASHINGTON 6-5 Bd)

From: Chief, Marchant Vessel Imagestion Division

To: Commandunt

Via: Chief. Office of Merchant Marine Sufety

Subj: Marine Board of Investigation; collision between USS RUCHAMKIN and tanker SS WASHINGTON, off the Atlantic Coast, on 14 November 1952, with loss of life

- 1. Pursuant to the provisions of Title 46 CFR Part 136, the record of the Marine Board convened to investigate subject casualty, together with its Findings of Fact, Opinions, and Recommendations, has been reviewed and is forwarded herewith.
- Shortly after midnight on 14 November 1952, a neval circular formation of heavy ships with forward acreen was in operation on a westerly course off Cape Henry, Virginia. The USS RUCHAMKIN, a fast attack transport of destroyer escort type of 1,800 tons displacement, at a speed of 22 knots, was approaching the north side of the formation from astern on a parallel westerly course. The SS WASHINGTON, T-2 tanker of 10,195 \$. 5., fully loaded, was to the south of the formation and was bound northward at a speed of 14.2 knots. The SS WASHINGTON passed ahead of the formation off her starboard side on a crossing course, except that she passed astern of the two northerly screen vessels off her port side. When sighted, the USS RUCHAMKIN mistook the SS W'SHIMG"ON as a naval vessel in the formation on a parallel course in the same direction and reither vessel had any knowledge that a crossing situation existed until collision was inevitable and its avoidance by any maneuver was impossible. The USS RUCHAMKIN and the SS WASHINGTON collided at approximately 0215, 14 Movember 1952, 55 miles 920 from Cape Henry Light. The night was dark, calm ses, and excellent visibility. The estimated damage to the USS RUCHAMKIN was 1803,706 and to the SS WASHINGTON unknown but relatively less. As a result of this casualty, thirty-two persons aboard the RUCHAMKIN were injured and the following persons on board that vessel lost their lives:

Allred, Kenneth U. CPL
Eckert, Edward J. Jr. CPL
Fulwiler, John T. PVT
Kenny, Raymond CPL
Pcma, Fascuale PVT-2
Bode, Ralph A. PFC

3. The Board made the following Findings of Fact:

- "1. The USS RUCHLMKIN, APD 89, is a fast attack transport of destroyer escort type, 306 feet long, 36 feet 11 1/2 inches beam, 1800 tons displacement with turbo-electric propulsion capable of giving a speed of 22 plus knots. On 14 November 1952 she was an route from Little Greek, Virginia to join a naval formation off the Virginia Capes.
- *2. The SS WASHINGTON (ex-CONTRERAS), official number 243111, is a T-2 type tank ship of 10,195 tens, turbo-electric drive, of Wilnington, Delaware and owned and operated by The Texas Company of New York, N.Y. She is \$23 1/2 feet long, 68 feet beam, was loaded with a full carge of petroleum products bound from Atreco, Texas to Philadelphia, Pa. on a time chartered voyage for Atlantic Refining Company to which the cargo was consigned. The SS WASHINGTON was last given annual inspection and drydock examination at los Angeles, California in March, 1952.
- "3. The RUCHAMKIN and the MASHINGTON were in collision at 0213 MASHINGTON time, 0215 RUCHAMKIN time on 14 Rovember, 1952 at a point approximately 55 miles, 92° true from Cape Henry Light. The bow of the WASHINGTON entered the port side of the RUCHAMKIN abaft the bridge structure at the after troop compartment and the port engine room. Angle of contact was approximately 90 degrees.
- "4. All times bereafter used are Eastern Standard Time as kept on the WASHINGTON. (It is assumed that the bridge clock of the RUCHANKIN was synchronized with those of other ships in the formation it was to join).
- was officer of the deck and had the comm of the RUCHAMIN, under supervision of the commanding officer who was present on the bridge, from 0001, 14 November 1952 until relieved by the commanding officer, Lieutenant Commander U.S.M. (1988), instants before the collision.
- was second mate of the WASHINGTON and was in charge of the navigati m of the WASHINGTON from COOL through time of collision on 14 November 1952.
- was asleep in his cabin stateroom when collision occurred and had not been called prior thereto but proceeded immediately to the pilothouse when awakened by the collision.

- "8. The RUCH MKIN was proceeding to join a bent line screen formation of four ships screening a circular formation of heavy ships, five of which were on the periphery, spaced at angular intervals of 60°, 1000 yards distant from the USS FREMONT, the guide ship, in center of circle with an unfilled station on the periphery 120° relative from the guide.
- "9. The line of the screen was more than a mile ahead of the guide of the easy ship formation. Formation speed was 14 knots and formation course was 257°.
- "10. The ships in the screen and in the heavy ship formation were exhibiting navigational lights.
- "11. From 193/, 13 November 1952, through time of callision, RECHARIE exhibited navigational lights consisting of mastheed, range, side, and stern lights. In addition she exhibited from about 0200 to and through collision a speed signal consisting of two white pulsating 32 point lights in horizontal line near the truck of the foremast.
- "12. RUCHAMKIN proceeded castward from off Camp Fendleton, Virginia to join the formation. Being south of the formation she gradually rounded to the eastward of the formation commencing at 0104 swinging through north and finally steadled on course 2650 true at speed of 22 knote at 0201 when she was about 3 2/3 miles north and east of the heavy ship formation guide.
- "13. WASHINGTON exhibited mayigational lights consisting of masthead, range and side lights. Navigational lights, including the green side light of the WASHINGTON, were sighted by the FREMONT at a distance of about seven miles bearing 2290 true.
- "14. WASHINGTON passed 4.7 miles west of Target Lighted Buoy "TB", northeast of Caps Hatters, at 2048 on 13 November 1952. From that point WASHINGTON steered course 007 1/2° true 659° gyro at a speed of 14.2 knots.
- "15. At about 0100 WASHINGTON made a temporary change of course to port to clear vessels sighted three points on the port bow and then resumed course 009° gyro.
- 46. Shortly after 0200 WASHINGTON made a 14 degree course change to the right to put on the port bow red lights of two vessels sighted almost dead shead and shortly thereafter resumed base course of 009° gyro. No whistle signal indicating direction of course to starboard was made.
- "17. WASH: NCTON passed shead of the two southernmost screening vessels, astern of the one just north of these, and ahead of the six vessels in the heavy ship formation.

- "18. WASHINGTON passed about of CAPRICCRRUS, the ship 60° relative from guide at 0208. At 0208, when WASHINGTON passed ahead of CAPRICCRRUS, WASHINGTON and RUCHAPMIN were 2.4 miles apart on courses crossing at an angle of 1028 degrees.
- al9. Second mate did not become sware of presence of RUCHARIN until a half minute before collision at which time he immediately gave the command for left full raider followed by several short blasts of the whistle and ringing up of full astern on engine room telegraph. Budder was at full left and engine was going full astern at instant of collision.
- "20. During the time of approach of the WASHINGTON on the naval formation blinking signal lights from ships within the formation were observed by James L. Saith, the helmanan, on the WASHINGTON from 0155 to 0225.
- "21. Formation course circuge from 270 to 257 true wes made at 0147. Engine speed reductions from 14 knots to eight knots and from eight knots to five knots were made by the formation at 0202 and 0203 respectively.
- 722. The presence, minutes prior to collision, of a number of vessels under way on the starboard bow was known to second officer Riche of the WASHINGTON.
- her lights were sighted by Lieutenant Commander U.S.W., Commanding Officer of RUCHAMKIN, who was on the port bridge wing. It was not determined by Lieutenant Commander until about one minute before collision that the WASHINGTON was a vessel other than one of the formation. Change of course to 270 degrees true was made immediately and seconds later course change to 275 degrees was made. One-half minute before collision command of right full rudder (which is 35°) was given, but the rudder had been moved right only 28° when collision occurred. No whistle signals indicating that RUCHAMKIN was directing her course to starboard was made at any time.
- *24. About the time WASHINGTON aleared formation on attempt was made by USS FREMONT to communicate with WASE. NOTON by blinker searchlight.
- *25. The weather on the morning of 14 November 1952, prior to and at time of collision, was dark, clear, bright starlight, no moon, calm sea, light airs and excellent visibility.
- *26. Surface radars on both RUCHAMKIN and WASH WGTON operated satisfactorily from OOC1 through time of collision on 14 November 1952.
- *27. HUCHAMKIN and MASHINGTON maintained proper lookouts and otherwise were full manned for the safe navigation of the vessels.
- #28. Before collision there were no failures of material or equipmentson either RUCHIMEIN or WASHINGTON other than that of the gyro course resorder on the latter vessel.

*29. At the time of collision of for some hours prior there'so FUCHAMKIN was operating singly, having not join! discretion.

*30. RUCHAMKIN was immobilized as a result of the collision on was, to sed to Marfalk Davel Shippard.

"31. WASHINGTON was able to proceed at reduced speed to Philadelphia, Pa. after having stood by to render assistance as required by 33 URC 367 until 0348.

*32. Modical and other assistance was given RUCHAMKIN by other maval vessels.

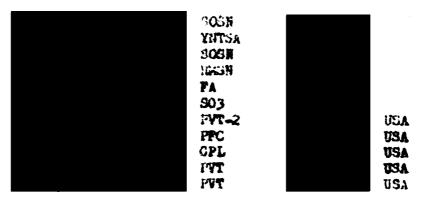
*33. There were no vessels other than the ten vessels in formation, MCdarkin and AASHIMCIDS in the vicinity at the time of collision.

"M. The following U. S. Army personnel who were in the after troop compartment in RECHARKIN at time of the collision died as a result of the collision.

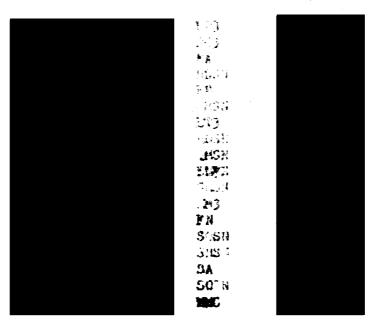
ALLEUD, Remosth U.	CPL	USA
ECKERT, Edward J. Jr.	CPL	usa
fulwillik, John T.	PVT	usa
KENNY, Raymond	CPL	USA
POMA, Pasquele	PUT-2	usa
BODE, Ralph A.	PFC	usa

Of those the first five named were pronounced dead prior to their arrival at the Morfolk Maval Base and FFC Bode died on 16 November 1952, at the U.S. Maval Hospital, Portsmouth, Virginia.

"35. The following personnel on the RUCHAKIH were injured and transferred to the U.S. Neval Rospitel, Portsmouth, Virgine, for treatment.

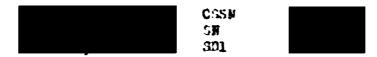


*36. The following personnel in RUCHAEKIN were shakes up and sent to burracks, U.S. level Amphibious Bess, Little Creek, Virginia.



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*37. The following personnel in the RUCHLMEIN were injured and transferred to the Naval Air Station Infirmary, Morfolk, Virginia:



bow lookout on the forecastlehead of the massific the time of the collision suffered back injuries as a result of the collision. He was ambulatory when he appeared as a witness before the Board on if Hovember 1952. No other personnel in the MASSICON were reported to have been injured as a result of the collision.

and shell plating were opened for a height of 18; feet commencing at about the 20 foot waterline. The torn stem and storbourd shell plating were curled over to the port side. All damage was confined forward of the collision bulkhead. Satimate: cost of repairs and replacement of lost equipment is about 460,000.

"40. The RUCHLEKIN suffered extensive damage above and below the waterline on the port side between frames 98 and 125, and from keel to superstructure. Flooding by see water and/or fuel oil was sneountered in the following compartments: 8-4, "ngine Boom; C-201 EL, Crew's quarters; C-2018, Medicul Store Room; C-201-2 EL, Laundry; C-201 L, Crew's quarters, C-203 A, Troop Stores C-204 AL, Crew's quarters, C-207 E, Steering Geer Space; C-2F, C-1 F, C-3r, b-4F, 6-4F, C-4F, C-7F, C-6E, Shaft Bearing Compartment; C-5E, Shaft Bearing Compartment; and C-301M and C-10M. Estimated cost of repairs is \$803,706.

"41. There were no complaints about the conduct after the collision of personnel of either wessel."

4. The Board expressed the following Opinions:

- *1. The use of radar was not demanded by rea on of excellent visibility which would make determination of burdens and privileges of vessels de-pandent upon visual observation of navigation lights exhibited and of relative Except thereof.
- "2. Second mate Riche Enew that if he maintained course and speed of machine "Off he would pass through what he new was a neval formation approaching his vessel from the starboard.
- "3. After passing cle r of the navel formation the attention of second mate Riche in the WASHINGTON was directed towards the heavy ships of the formation which were about to pass astern of MISHINGTON, and for that reason he did not learn of the presence of RUCHAMKIN until the two vessels were in the jews of a collision.
- MUCHANKIN, when lights of WASHI GTON were first sighted assumed that they were the lights of a vessel of the heavy ship formation that he was overtaking on a searly parallel course.
- "5. From 0208 the starboard hand rule applied and the WASHINGTON was the burdened vessel in a crossing situation.
- *6. Failures of RUCHAMKIN and WASHINGTON to sound whistle signals indicated the changes of courses made prior to collision did not contribute to the cause of collision.
- by the ordinary procision of seamen in his failure to avoid crossing ahead of the movel formation, and by reason thereof he was responsible for the development of a crossing situation which involved risk of collision of MASULT. GTON with MUCHAMKIN. Second mate Riche by his failure to timely change course or speed or both, to avoid crossing shead of the RUCHAMKIN was solely at fault for the collision.
- *8. Although Lieutenant Commander failed to evaluate correctly the crossing situation until about 1 minute before collision the holding of course and speed up to that instant by RUCHMKIN was a fortuitous compliance with the rule requiring the privileged vossel to do so.

- ag. That the loss of lives in the MUHA. A. N was one to the negliganus and the instrontion to his duties of Oliver F. Eduha."
- 5. The Roard made the following Lecommensations:
- with instantion to suty in failing to sissover the presence of SCHEMETE immediately after passing clear of the neval formution and with neglect of duty in that he failed to exercise the prescution of the ordinary practise of sames and passed the d of a nevel formation of width he was burnased to deep alors.
- *2. That the case be referred to the Department of Justice for the prosecution of Uliver F. Edcha for violation of 18 USC 1115."

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- Opinion paragraph 2 of the Board that Second Mate iche knew that Òa if he maintained course and speed of the WARM NOT W, he would pass through what he knew was a neval formation approaching his vessel from the starboard is not concurred with. In this connection, the Board in view of its questioning the master, second mate and the radio officer on board the MASHUMOTTN as to whether they received information through Notice to deriners or otherwise with respect to the presence of maval amphibious operations off Jape Henry on or about 14 November 1952, should heve offered evidence as to whether or not any such information was netually issued. So for as is escentainable, neither the liverographic Office nor the Coest Guard in Sashington, D. C., or in the 5th Coast ward listrict issued any Notice to lariners or made any radio broadcasts to the effect that saphibious acval formations would be operating 50 miles off cape Henry. The Notice to inviners issued by the commander, 5th Coust heard Matrict on 10 November 1952 to the effect that on 14 November 1952 amphiblous operations would be conducted in the vicinity of the Cape Pendleton berch area, would not cover the area where the subject collision occurred any was only for local distribution.
- ollision avaiding action is inexcusable. The opinion of the Board, per graph 8, to the effect that LODA Jauxann failed to evaluate correctly the crossing situation before the collision occurred is concurred with since the evidence clearly indicates that the USS HUHAKIN took no cognizance of the fact that merchant or other non-formation vessels might be in the vicinity.

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She proceeded at high speed into a group of vessels, the identities, courses, speeds and distances of which she was apparently unaware. Her commanding officer assumed that he passed a naval vessel on the starboard quarter of the circular formation and further mesumed that a vessel with regulation lights off this port box was a navel vessel in the formation on a parallel course in the some direction, but which in fact was a merchant vescel on an intersecting collision course. The commanding officer of the RUCHAMKIN was evidently so intent on fulfilling his navel mission in maneuvering in the vicinity of, and taking his station in the formation that he fedled to properly identify the MASHINGTON, or determine her course and speed, and thus neglected the normal precautions for safe navigation. This reglect of precautions under the circumstances cannot be condoned marely because of the chance situation that the RECHAMKIN had the MASHIMITON on her port rather than starboard bow under a strained interpretation of Article 19, particularly in view of Articles 21, 27 and 29, International Regulations for the Prevention of Collisions at Sea,

- 8. The evidence in the record of investigation of subject casualty does not establish that there is any evidence of criminal culpability on the part of any p rson and accordingly duplicate copies of such record will not be transmitted to the U.S. Attorney General for the institution of criminal action.
- 9. Subject to the foregoing remarks, it is recommended that the Findings of Fact, Opinions and Recommendations of the Marine Search of Investigation be approved.

/s/ EDW . A. RICHMOND

EDW. A. RICHMOND Acting Chief, MVI Division to Commandant

27 February 1953 (USS HICHARKIN - RESHUNGTON 4-5 9d)

FIPST MODERN NT TO MVI memorandum of 27 February 1953

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30 March 1953

From

Chinf, Office of Merchant Marine Jafety

To

1 to 1 1/200

Comandant

Subj:

Marine "card of Investigation; collision between USS RUCHAMKIN and tanker SS VASHINGTON, off the Atlantic Coast, on 14 Hovember 1952, with loss of life

Powerded, recommending approval.

/s/ H, C, SHTPHEARD H, C, SHEPHEARD

APPROVED: 1 April 1953

/e/ MERLIN O'NEILL

MERLIN O'NEIN.
Vice Admiral, U. S. Coast Guard
Commandant