

MARINE CASUALTY

Dear Sir,

I write in haste in order that you will get this report before you form your own preconceived opinions from reports in the world press, for I am sure that they will tend to over-dramatise the affair.

We had just picked up the pilot at sunset and the apprentice had returned from changing the 'G' flag for the 'H' flag, and being his first trip he was having difficulty in rolling the 'G' flag up. I therefore proceeded to show him how, coming to the last part I told him to "let go", the lad, although willing is not too bright, necessitating my having to repeat the order in a sharper tone.

The Chief Officer overhearing from the Chart room, and thinking that it was the anchors that were being referred to repeated the 'let go' to the Third Officer on the forecastle. The effect of letting the port anchor drop from the 'pipe' while vessel was proceeding at full harbour speed proved too much for the windlass brake, and the entire length of the cable was pulled out 'by the roots'. I fear that the damage to the chain locker may be extensive. The braking effect naturally caused the vessel to sheer in that direction, right towards the swing bridge that spans a tributary to the river up which we were proceeding.

The swing bridge operator showed great presence of mind by opening the bridge for my vessel, unfortunately he did not think to stop the vehicular traffic. The result being the bridge partly opened and deposited a Volkswagen, two cyclists and a cattle truck on the foredeck. In his efforts to stop the progress of the vessel the Third Officer dropped the starboard anchor, too late to be of practical use for it fell on the swing bridge operators control cabin.

Up to now I have confined my report to the activities at the forward end of my vessel, aft they were having their own problems. At the moment the port anchor was let go, the Second Officer was supervising the making fast of the after tug and was lowering the ships towering spring down onto the tug.

The sudden braking effect on the port anchor caused the tug to run in under the stern of my vessel, just at the moment when the propeller was answering my double ring Full Astern. The prompt action of the Second Officer in securing the inboard end of the towering spring delayed the sinking of the tug by some minutes thereby allowing the safe abandoning of the vessel.

It never fails to amaze me, the actions and behaviour of foreigners during moments of minor crisis. The pilot for instance, is at this moment huddled in the corner of my day cabin, alternately crooning to himself and crying after having consumed a bottle of Gin in a time that is worthy of inclusion in the Guinness Book of Records. The tug captain on the other hand reacted violently and had to forcibly be restrained by the Steward, who has him handcuffed in the ship's hospital.

I enclose the names and addresses of the drivers and insurance companies of the vehicles on my foredeck, which the Third Officer collected after his somewhat hurried evacuation of the forecastle. These particulars will enable you to claim for the damage that they did to the railings of number one hold.

I am closing this preliminary report for I am finding it difficult to concentrate with the sound of police sirens and their flashing lights. Had the apprentice realised that there is no need to fly pilot flags after dark, none of this would have happened.

I am Sir
Yours faithfully

MASTER