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EMPA

Our delegates at the EMPA meeting in Rotterdam, May 1982 — Bob Glover, Clive Wilkin and Dan McMillan

THIRTY DAYS HATH DEFENDER

Condition 9 in the UK Pilots' Policy requires every member to report to the Insurance Company IN WRITING WITHIN THIRTY DAYS of the happening of any event out of which a claim may arise. Since it is not possible to say with any certainty that a particular incident will lead to an enquiry or legal proceedings, members should in their own interest inform Navigators & General in writing of ALL INCIDENTS, however trivial they may be.

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THE "BETELGEUSE" DISASTER

at Whidday Island, Bantry Bay

P J H Tebay (Chairman Technical Committee)

(Although this article has been published elsewhere it is considered to be of prevailing interest where Government, shipowners and some port authorities seem so anxious to dispense with the impartial judgment of local pilots in serving the overall interests of a District — Ed)

In the early hours of the 8th January 1979, the French registered 120,000 deadweight tanker Betelgeuse caught fire and exploded at the Gulf Terminal at Whiddy Island, Bantry Bay, Cork. All the crew of the tanker, the wife of one crew member, two visitors, the crew on the jetty and the ship's pilot — a total of 50 lost their lives.

The Irish Government set up a Tribunal of Inquiry which took the form of a public inquiry and a copy of the subsequent Report has been kindly made available to the UKPA by the Irish Maritime Pilots' Association.

As distinct from many scanty reports of accidents, the Tribunal has gone into considerable detail in endeavouring to ascertain the facts surrounding the tragedy and are to be congratulated on the clear and detailed way the Report is presented. It occupies some 487 pages.

This Technical Committee summary and comment cannot possibly do full justice to such a lengthy document but will give an indication of the history of events and the subsequent findings of the Tribunal. For those who wish to study its contents in detail one would advise purchasing the full Report.*

The Betelgeuse, owned by Total, had discharged a part cargo of crude oil at Whiddy Island Terminal and, at 0030 hrs on 8th January, was in the process of ballasting. As exhaustively established by the Tribunal, at that time the ship's structure suffered a collapse in the region of the permanent ballast tanks resulting in a series of explosions and a fire near amidships. Whilst the phrase "relatively small" could be applied to these this would have to be taken in context with the subsequent happenings. The breaking of the ship's back resulted in the escape of oil from the adjacent tanks into the sea alongside and, with the midships part of the ship settling in the water, ignited at approximately 0040hrs. At first seemingly containable, by 0055hrs (approx.) this had developed into a major conflagration with flames rising to 200ft and, at between 0106hrs and 0108hrs, a massive explosion took place in No 5 Centre tank and all three of No 6 tanks. The ship broke into three pieces.

Various theories were advanced as to the cause of the disaster and each was thoroughly investigated by the Tribunal. As evidence was advanced it became apparent where the various areas of responsibility lay. It was established that the Betelgeuse had a seriously weakened hull as a result of a series of deliberate decisions by Total — a Special Survey in 1977 had revealed serious wastage (40%) in the permanent ballast tanks and the need to renew certain longtitudinals. The ship's cathodic protection also needed renewing yet no action was taken by Total as it was their intention to sell the ship in the near future. In the words of the Tribunal, the vessel was 'in a seriously corroded and wasted condition'. The Master and Chief Officer, whilst not being aware of the condition of the hull, had, by their manner of ballasting, imposed some very large stresses on the centre of the ship. No "loadicator" had been supplied to the ship which would have revealed the error (although one remarks that stresses can be calculated by other means). As a result of the above findings, the Tribunal states that Total must take a major share of responsibility for the disaster.

As far as Gulf are concerned, the area of responsibility lies in several directions. Firstly, the absence of the Terminal Controller (Dispatcher) from his Control Office when the fire commenced — a point disputed by the Controller with the resultant controversy evidencing suppression of the truth and possible collusion by some Gulf employees in an attempt to cover up. The vital firefighting facilities on the jetty had to be initiated from the Control Office and it is stated that had the Controller been in his Office and thereby witnessed that start of the fire 'it is probable that the lives of both the jetty crew and those on board would have been saved'. The reasoning behind this was not only the potential quick provision of firefighting facilities on the jetty and thus perhaps limiting the conflagration but also the immediate calling up of the stand-by tug which had firefighting equipment and also the line-boats to effect an evacuation. Criticism was also levelled as to the firefighting facilities, maintenance and emergency procedures which, whilst adequate when the terminal was commissioned had been subsequently modified and, in effect, downgraded. As regards the stand-by tug, the original Gulf plan had the tug in the immediate vicinity of the berth but this too had been downgraded so that by current practice the tug was out of sight of the jetty some 2.8 miles distant. Finally, there was criticism of Gulf for not providing suitable escape craft from the jetty (the jetty was not linked to the shore) and of there being no access to the sea from the up-wind dolphin.

With the responsibilities of the public authorities the Tribunal similarly do not mince words. 'The failure to establish a Harbour Authority with jurisdiction over Whiddy Island meant that Gulf itself was responsible for drafting byelaws under the Petroleum Act 1881, which would have to be approved by the Minister. This was a highly anomalous situation and contributed to the fact that no byelaws were ever made under the Act of 1881. After a decision was announced in 1972 that safety regulations would be made under the Dangerous Substances Act 1972, considerable delays occurred and no Regulations had been made under that Act before the disaster in January 1979'. This leads to the statement further on: 'The statutory obligations placed on Gulf in relation to the maintenance of proper safety measures and standards and the provision of effective firefighting systems (particularly in relation to the position of the duty tug) were wholly inadequate. There was a correspondingly inadequate requirement on the public authorities, both at Government and local level, to supervise and inspect the safety measures and firefighting system at the terminal'. The Report goes on to highlight particular areas where this lack of regulation and supervision allowed a downgrading of safety at the terminal. In other words by the permissive nature of the actions (or lack of actions) by the public authorities they created a situation over which they had little control or, seemingly, knowledge.

The Report concludes with some 45 recommendations which not only cover the above points but include many that are aimed at international agreements on ship construction, lifesaving appliances, and safety, thus involving IMCO Conventions and the Classification Societies. As far as the particular local recommendations apply elsewhere, they should be compulsory reading for all terminal operators.

Comment

The first comment one generally receives from pilots is the cynical one that oil companies should not be allowed to become virtual port authorities. Certainly the anomalous situation at Bantry Bay over pilotage was brought to the notice of EMPA some years ago by the Irish delegate. However, on the broader scene one could say that here is the classic situation whereby deliberate action or inaction at authority or management level leads to such a downgrading or safety that the stage for tragedy is set. It then needs only relatively minor human error on the part of an individual or individuals to initiate the terrible consequences. In this case, 50 valuable lives were lost and it is difficult to see what lessons can be learned other than how not to run a shipping company, a terminal, or a port. Little wonder then that the EEC, by Tanker Check Lists, Port State Enforcement and other such Directives, find it necessary to take action. Whilst much is said in high places about 'flags of convenience' and 'shoe-string operators' it can scarcely be said that these epithets can be applied to Total, Gulf and the Irish Government. The Betelgeuse was up for sale and it is interesting to note that two surveyors visited her at Whiddy Island for prospective purchasers and whilst neither was able to inspect the tanks one, representing a Greek owner, was able to say "I was very impressed with the ship. Everything seemed clean and well run and she seemed a happy ship. I would have recommended purchase of the ship by my Company."

(continued foot of next page)

BRISTOL

The formation of UKPA owes much to Admiral Pim, Commander Cawley and the Port of Bristol

We are indebted to Harry Hignet (Liverpool), John Rich (Bristol) and to Mike Griffiths (Editor of Porfolio, published by the Port of Bristol Authority) for this account

In Memoriam

It all began last summer. John Rich became involved in researching locally for his Manchester Ship Canal Pilot colleague Harry Hignet's history of the United Kingdom Pilot's Association.

Harry discovered that in the very early days of UKPA, one Admiral Bedford Capperton Trevelyan Pim, a lawyer, had greatly helped the pilots in getting the Association properly constituted and legally recognised. After a colourful naval and legal career Admiral Pim died in 1886. At a national conference meeting of pilots in 1888 at the Athenaeum Hall, Corn Street (later to become the Bristol Club), it was decided to commemorate his work by placing a stained glass window to his memory in the west end of the City's Seamen's Institute Church together with a brass tablet.

In late July Harry suggested that the church may still exist in Bristol. With the help of the chaplain of the Seamen's Mission at Avonmouth, John located the Prince Street building, which was about to be demolished and converted to a block of offices!

Pim's Memorial

Permission was obtained from the developer to gain access to the church and John's persistence was subsequently rewarded when he confronted a huge brass tablet. It was four feet long, three feet high and looked to be more than a quarter of an inch thick. It was jet black except for the colouring on the two flags of the Royal Navy and the United States which were merely dirty. But beneath the grime were the words "To the glory of God and in loving remembrance of his servant Bedford Clapperton Trevelyan Pim..." — John's labours were over; or were they!

For, to the left of Pim's plaque was another in the same condition, slightly smaller, no less important as it was dedicated to the founder President of the UKPA, Commander George Cawley, and above the two main

Where pilots come into this is hard to say but whilst the shipowners would no doubt say "not at all", the introduction of an independent professional at some level of operation can only be in the greater interests of safety. This is gradually becoming recognised in some circles by the interest that is being taken in pilots' reports of sub-standard ships, whether locally, nationally or via the EMPA and IMPA 'blacklists'. Whilst the pilot's sphere of operations may be limited, from the moment he puts his foot on a broken, dirty or badly rigged pilot ladder, he is aware that it is probably indicative of a badly run or badly maintained ship and that on-board problems that he is then likely to encounter will reveal standards that would not bear subsequent inspection. At the present time both shipowners and ports are under great financial pressure whilst at the same time the public is becoming more conscious of the need to safeguard lives and the environment. The unique professional independence of the pilot is therefore one which must be jealously maintained at all times.

*Catalogue No 717, obtainable from the Government Publications Sales Office, GPO Arcade, Dublin 1. Price £IR11.00, Postage 80p.

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pieces were a whole row of brasses commemorating Bristol seamen of all ranks, dating from 1881 to 1940 variously. Around the room were several others, in all, a total of sixteen.

What would become of them? The developers thought they would be scrapped or sold, a fact which set John's mind racing to the course of preservation. After all these were consecrated memorials to a great seafaring city and part of its Port's history.

By the end of August John had made contact with one of the Trustees of the building and the future of the brasses was discussed.

After John had made more visits to the building, and made a further discovery of a large carved oak lectern, the date had moved on to September 4th.

That evening contact was once again established with the Trustees of the church to talk of retrieval and preservation. A week went by as legal lines, as well as the decision, had to be cleared. The gentle voice of Trustees representative Harry E Cooper informed John on September 11th that the plaques were to be saved and that he was charged with their keeping until a permanent home could be found for them.

Before the emphasis of this tale moves from the Seamen's Institute Church it would be appropriate to say something of it.

(Left) The former Seamen's Institute Church at Prince Street, Bristol from where the impressive collection of plaques were rescued at the eleventh hour, and (right) their new resting place, the St. Nicholas Church Museum in Baldwin Street, near the waterfront.

Photo: Colin Momber

Photo. Mike Griffiths





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Port Channel Pilot John Rich displays the beautiful ornate brass tablet dedicated to Admiral Pim who did so much to establish the UKPA.

Photo: Colin Momber

First Institute

Princes Hall as it is currently called was the first Seamen's Institute Church of its kind in the Kingdom. It was founded by "a sincere and earnest Christian" namely William Frederick Lavington in 1880.

He was deeply concerned that the many sailors from vessels lying in the Port of Bristol were easy prey for the unscrupulous people whose only interest was to take all their money by providing wine, women and song in the numerous public houses that lay near the quays. His conscience prompted his courage to provide £4,500 to erect the original building and on February 10th 1880 the chapel was opened by the then Bishop of Bristol and Gloucester, the Right Reverend C J Ellicott.

The building was erected in Venetian style and the chapel was said to have been capable of seating 300 persons, while the lower floors constituted reading and rest rooms. On the ground floor was a concert room and platform, and around its walls were shelves for books and in the west end a space for offices. Attendance figures at the new Institute justified its existence creditably during its first years.

A number of organisations including the Bristol Shiplovers Society used the building regularly — until December 2nd 1940 when German bombs destroyed the whole of the west end of the Church including the stained glass window to Bedford Pim and no doubt some nearby brasses.

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Second Term

The building's second term of service began in 1954 when the property was purchased by a group of Trustees who set about having it repaired with a view to creating a centre in Bristol for the use of all evangelical Christians under the control of an interdenominational Board of Trustees and management to be called the Bristol Evangelistic Centre Trustees.

The chapel portion of the building was kept as a place of worship and great care was taken to preserve many features associated with the former Seamen's Mission Church, including the memorial plaques which graced the walls and for years after people still came to see.

But to continue the preservation bid.

The weighty artifacts were duly removed to Pill with some difficulty on September 17th and 18th.

Falklands Connection

John turned his attention to the wooden lectern carved in the shape of an eagle. On cleaning the orb on which it stood there appeared some writing: "Made from the wood of HMS Daedalus Bristol 1861 to 1911". A picture of this historic vessel berthed at Hotwells in the City around 1910 is included. She was the Bristol Royal Naval Volunteer Reserve vessel before HMS Flying Fox and was broken up in 1911. Furthermore, two brass strips on the lectern were engraved "Presented by the Chaplain Norman S de Jersey MA 21st July 1912". The Chaplain went on to become the Bishop of the Falkland Islands!

A Channel Pilot colleage of John's namely Herbert Watkins, duly repaired the eagle's damaged beak after which John's wife Henrietta fell in love with the eagle and spent many hours restoring him to his true magnificence. John meanwhile concentrated on rejuvenating the brass work.

By now it ws the end of October and negotiations for displaying the memorials on a permanent basis were underway. The favourite resting place in most people's minds was the St. Nicholas Church Museum. Not only was St. Nicholas the Patron Saint of Sailors but the church is the closest to water in the City.

By November 14th, after several discussions amongst the many people involved and by kind permission of the Curator of St. Nicholas Church Museum the plaques and eagle were deposited in the care of the museum.

John's rewarding task had finished. He pays tribute to all the very kind people who worked with him in the preservation of a memorial to some of the Port of Bristol's fine seafarers — may they rest in peace.

From the Ditty Box

15th November, 1956

NOTICE TO PILOTS Watch Dog at O.M.E. Wharf

I have been in communication with the Owners of the Middlesbrough Estate regarding the watch dog at O.M.E. Wharf which has apparenty caused some embarrassment and apprehension to Pilots using this Yard.

The dog is kept there for purposes of security against trespassers and fire. The dog is not dangerous and is kept to give alarm, and will probably answer to the name of "Kim".

Secretary & Pilot Supt.

MARINE CASUALTY A report by Captain G P Byth (1940)

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, and the apprentice had returned from changing the 'G' flag for the 'H', and being his first trip 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 the 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 that 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 operator's 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 ship's towing 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 propellor was answering my double ring Full Astern. The prompt action of the Second Officer in securing the inboard end of the towing spring delayed the sinking of the tug by some minutes thereby allowing the safe abandoning of that 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 realized that there is no need to fly pilot flags after dark, none of this would have happened.

I am Sir Yours faithfully, MASTER

The above is reprinted with grateful acknowledgement to "The Old Worcester's Magazine".

Letter to the Editor

From Mr P J H Tebay, FNI, Heswall.

6th September, 1982

Dear Sir,

Seeing the letter from Peter Yates in the last issue of *The Pilot* puts me in mind of a factual incident that happened to me a few years ago.

Early one spring morning I was on turn at our Lynes (Anglesey) station and was called from my bed with short notice to be boarded on a tanker bound to Queen Elizabeth dock, Eastham. The vessel had arrived unheralded and by her part-loaded draught could, with good speed and no delays, make the morning tide. I therefore quickly dressed and hastened off to the boarding boat, leaving a trail of spilt coffee in my wake. First sight in the dawn was of a rusty 1800 tonner of dubious origin with an even more dubious looking pilot ladder the rungs of which would have had Joe Brown reaching for his crampons. The bottom rung lay lopsidedly about two feet above my head and I gesticulated con brio to the seedy looking stand-by person on deck to lower this Bertram Mills apparatus to a more accommodating height. Whilst he fiddled laboriously with a salt-swollen bunch of knots I impatiently watched the valuable minutes tick away. To my dismay as the bottom rung came lower so did the top rung down the ships side. At some point that I considered to be within my personal best I told the person to make fast and I took a standing leap for the bottom rung. I missed. That is my hands took hold but my legs were left scrabbling on the rusty plates. I dropped back onto the boat (not easy!) and tried again. This time the ladder having no stretchers twisted and I had to drop off again lest I found myself trying to climb up the inside which, whilst it might have provided the launch crew with a little light relief would eventually prove a little futile. At the third attempt I made it by scrabbling even more frantically until I got a knee on the bottom rung. By the time I arrived on the bridge my normal kindly disposition had somewhat deserted me and after slamming the telegraph full ahead and shouting a course to the helmsman (the radio operator I think) I addressed myself to the stubbly figure I assumed was masquarading as a Captain.

I told him what I felt about his ladder and his ship and him for letting it all be so. In reply and in very broken English he apologised profusely with much occulting of gold teeth in rays of the now rising sun. He assured me that it was the fault of (a) the Mate, (b) the Second Mate, (c) (having run out of officers) the bosun, (d) the stand by person, or (e) the pilot boat at Abu Dhabi—it was definitely not his fault, he wouldn't have dreamt of insulting me with such an awful ladder. Mysteriously he found that this did not mollify me as I continued on, quoting him SOLAS, the Department of Trade, and threatening him with an IMPA and EMPA blacklist. As a final coup de grace I assured him that should he ever again appear in Liverpool Bay with a ladder like that he would go round to the crack of doom before he got a pilot. By his head shaking and nodding in the appropriate places I gathered that I had got my message through and thus having delivered myself of my immediate feelings, I stalked off imperiouosly to the other bridge wing to let him cogitate his fate as an Ancient Mariner doomed to wandering the oceans of the world with a duff pilot ladder round his neck.

After a while I had calmed down enough to let all my "Human Factors" bits resume their normal working relationships and I felt that on reflection I had made this Johnny fully aware of his potential future. I then became conscious that the gentleman in question was calling me from the chartroom. Wondering what part of the ship or its stores he was going to offer me as an olive branch I found him studying what appeared to be a grubby edition of the Boys Own Western Hemisphere (which later turned out to be his Chart of the Week). With a nail-blackened forefinger obscuring most of the Anglesey coast he asked "Please Meester Pilot, vere is dis Crack of Doom I get ze pilot next time"?

The question remains in mind as to whether IMCO International Vocabulary would have helped?

Yours faithfully, P H Tebay, Liverpool Pilot

Coastlines

Keith Grant Retires

Southampton Pilot Station held a retirement party on 14th May which was well attended, including many retired Isle if Wight District Pilots. It was all in honour of Keith Grant who retired from the Service on 31st January. A man of capable versatility who had served his colleagues for 13 years on the UKPA Executive Committee, his friends marked the occasion with their respect and presented him with a Micro Hi-Fi system.

After fifteen years at sea in various capacities, with Houlder Bros, Blue Star, and finally Union Castle for the duration of the



war as an Executive Officer and Master, he joined the Inward Service of the Isle of Wight District in 1948, transferring ten years later to the Outward Service. He was Select Pilot for the Arosa, Holland-America and Shaw Savill lines. He served for twenty eight of the enjoyable years on his station as Catering Officer, Treasurer, Public Relations Officer and on various committees (including that for amalgamation of the Inward and Outward Services).

For the UKPA, he was involved in the original meetings with the Marine Pilotage Branch of the TGWU on the formation of one body to represent all pilots. For the last four or five years he was concerned in the organisation of the Annual Conferences and their Receptions.

Retirement seems unlikely to pose problems of "what to do": Keith is already a man of many outdoor activities — wildlife conservation, shooting, fishing and gardening — and we hear that he is attending a number of courses on practical subjects. All who have met him at Conference and elsewhere will want to wish him and his wife a happy and fruitful retirement.

New TH Flagship

At a ceremony in London on 1st June the Countess Mountbatten of Burma named the New Trinity House Flagship *Patricia*. HRH The Prince Philip, Master of Trinity House, was present with members of the Board of Trinity House.

Trinity House maintains a fleet of purpose built vessels to support and maintain its aids to navigation. The new flagship becomes part of the fleet of five lighthouse tenders based at depots around the coast of England and Wales and replaces one of the same name which served the Corporation for over 40 years from 1938.

In addition to providing such services the new vessel will carry the Elder Brethren of Trinity House on their Annual Visiting Cruise of Inspection when they view and inspect each aid from seaward to ensure that it is correctly positioned and that stations and equipment are in good condition and staff have an opportunity to meet them.

... and more to come!

In May, a ceremony at Harwich saw another 53ft Halmatic hull, based on the RNLI's Arun lifeboats, launched as the Pilot Launch Patrol. She was named by the wife of Captain J A N Bezant of Trinity House and blessed by the Reverend R Moseley of the local parish.

Fitted with twin MAN 600 HP diesels, and a service speed of 22½ knots, she should be well able to meet the demands of the Harwich Station.

Local Secretaries

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