

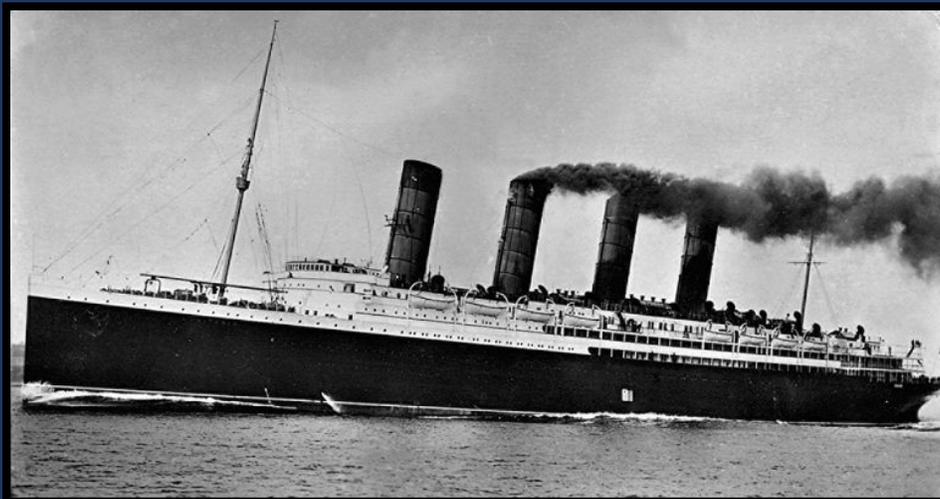
A brief Overview of some Ships that have Entered the Annals of Maritime History

Reviewed By

Geoff Walker

Reflecting on my own sea-going career, there are several maritime incidents that remain foremost in my memory. Most were tragic, in one way or the other, either from a loss of life or environmental aspect. I well remember when I was at Nautical College, reading about, and thinking to myself, how could these kinds of events occur, but sadly I did not receive the answers or understand the circumstances until years later, after I had embarked upon my own career at sea as a deck apprentice in 1961.

Of course, there are many, many accounts of ships that could be recognized for inclusion in the annals of maritime history, but these are but only a few. Several of these incidents occurred well before my time or, I had any notion to go to Sea myself. This narrative is not intended to be a technically detailed assessment of the events, but rather a recap, and overview of some of the marine casualties that have stood out for me personally over many years.



The “**RMS Lusitania**” 31,550 GRT, was a UK-registered ocean liner owned by the Cunard Line, of Liverpool, and was first launched in 1906. Built for the transatlantic passenger trade, it was luxurious and noted for its speed. “**Lusitania**” held the Blue Riband appellation for the fastest Atlantic crossing and was briefly the world's largest passenger ship until the completion of the “**Mauretania**”. The elegant liner of its day, was sunk by a German submarine (U-20), using only a single torpedo, which caused a secondary internal explosion on board. The sinking occurred on 7th May 1915, about 11 miles off the **Old Head of Kinsale**, Ireland (51° 25' 0" N, 8° 33' 0" W) and was responsible for the deaths of 1,195 people including 128 American citizens. Of the 1,960 people aboard, there were only 761 survivors. The tragic incident set off a chain of events that led to the U.S. entering World War I.

The attack took place in the declared maritime warzone waters around the UK, shortly after unrestricted submarine warfare against the ships of the United Kingdom had been declared by Germany following the Allied powers' implementation of a naval blockade against it. Prior to the vessel's departure from America, the passengers had been warned of the danger of voyaging into the area in a British ship. "**Lusitania**" was sunk on her 202nd trans-Atlantic crossing, and her demise took only 18 minutes. Of the 159 Americans on board the ship, only 31 survived. Several children who were on board died as well.

The British Government accused the Germans of violating the "Cruiser Rules" of the sea (Cruiser Rules govern when it is permissible to open fire on an unarmed ship and the treatment of the crews of captured vessels, the essence of which is that an unarmed vessel should not be attacked without prior warning). The Germans claimed that sinking the "**Lusitania**" was justified and a legitimate act in a war zone, because its cargo included ammunition and other arms to be used in the allied war effort against it.

The killing of so many innocent people by the German U-boat caused a world outrage. Support for the Allies against Germany grew in many countries, who later joined the Allies in the war against Germany.

It is alleged, the captain of the "**Lusitania**", had instructed the chief engineer to shut down one of the ship's main boilers to save running costs. This reduced the speed of the ship and may have made it more vulnerable to torpedo attack.

The slogan "**Remember the Lusitania**" was used by the Allies on posters and adverts to recruit new personnel to the army.



Later investigations revealed that the "**Lusitania**" was indeed carrying about 173 tons of war munitions for Britain, which the Germans cited as further justification for the attack. The United States eventually protested the action, and Germany apologized and pledged to end unrestricted submarine warfare and observe the "**Cruiser Rules**". However, in November of that same year another U-boat sunk an Italian passenger liner without warning, killing more than 270 people, including more than 25 Americans, hence public opinion in the United States

began to turn irrevocably against Germany.

On 31st January 1917, Germany, in its efforts to win its war of attrition against the Allies, announced that it would resume unrestricted warfare in war-zone waters. Three days later, the United States broke diplomatic relations with Germany, and just hours after that the American liner "**Housatonic**" was sunk by a German U-boat. On 22nd February, Congress passed an arms appropriations bill intended to make the United States ready for war. In late March, Germany sank four more U.S. merchant ships, and on 2nd April President Wilson appeared before Congress and called for a declaration of war against Germany. On 4th April, the Senate voted to declare war against Germany, and two days later the House of Representatives endorsed the declaration. This signaled the entry of America into World War I.



“SS Flying Enterprise” of Isbrandtsen Lines – New York

A true account of the ship’s Master staying with his ship until the very last moment.

“SS **Flying Enterprise**” was a 6,711 GRT Type C1-B ship which sank in 1952. She was built in 1944 as “SS **Cape Kumukaki**” for the United States Maritime Commission for service in World War II. At the conclusion of hostilities, the ship was sold in 1947, and then operated in scheduled service under its new name “**Flying Enterprise**”, by **Isbrandtsen Lines**, mainly on the North Atlantic service. Isbrandtsen Lines, New York, was the leading US-flag shipping company at that time, operating between the U.S. east coast and the Mediterranean, from 1919 to 1977, offering both freighter and passenger ship services, until it became insolvent and declared bankruptcy, when it was acquired by Farrell Lines of New York, in 1977.

In December 1951, the ship left England for New York with a cargo of motor vehicles, pig iron, grass seed, other high revenue cargoes, and an undisclosed amount of cash. During rough seas on 25th December the stow of pig iron in the cargo holds, shifted, and collapsed, causing the ship to list heavily to port. At some point the motor vehicles also broke loose causing the ship to increase its list even more. The ship’s hull and deck plating cracked just aft of the superstructure. This was a known problem with ships of this design during this era, hence the crew could do little and attempted to continue their voyage. The lifeboats on the “Flying Enterprise” were either lost or inoperable, due to the heavy list and rough seas.

The next morning, the ship started to list seriously, and the decision was made by the Master to abandon ship. A distress call was issued, and the **USNS General A. W. Greely** responded. The crew and passengers were evacuated, with the loss of 1 life. The procedure was to send a lifeboat close but not so close that it would be smashed against the listing ship. For the first rescue the crew of the lifeboat threw a rope to the ship, but later jumpers had to jump in pairs and swim to the lifeboat without a rope. Sometimes passengers were swept back onto the Flying Enterprise. However, the ship's Master, Captain Henrik Kurt Carlsen, chose to remain aboard, along with the Chief Mate of the salvage tug **Turmoil**, a Mr. Kenneth Dancy.

Captain Carlsen refused to abandon ship until it either sank or was towed to a safe harbor. Towing efforts were attempted and were successful in towing the ship until it was only 40 miles from Falmouth, in the United Kingdom. At that point in time, the tow line parted. Attempts were made to reconnect the tow and continue, but the ship listed more heavily, and Captain Carlsen finally abandoned ship along

with Mr. Dancy, choosing to leave via the funnel as the ship listed further. The salvage attempts were criticized as the ship might have been saved by heading for the nearest safe harbor of, Cork, rather than attempting to maintain the tow all the way to Falmouth. She sank on January 10, 1952.



The “**Flying Enterprise**” listing heavily due to the shifting of deadweight cargo

Immediately after the sinking, there was much speculation into why the ship sank as well as to why the Master remained on board. The most common theory is that the “Pig Iron” in the forward holds had been poorly stowed and therefore shifted to the side during the heavy rolling and pounding of the ship in the seaway and swells. The shifting of such heavy cargo would account for the 60-degree list, to Port.

Captain Carlsen may have remained aboard in order to protect the cargo and owners’ interests. On board was a shipment of \$600,000 being sent from Europe to America. There was another shipment of cash totaling over \$200,000 in the mail room. Under International Salvage Laws, if the captain had abandoned the ship with no intention of return, then any salvage company could have made claim under the “Laws of Salvage”. By remaining on board, Captain Carlsen prevented that from occurring.

In 1960, an Italian salvage company conducted Salvage operations, recovering over \$210,000 in cash. But because of a Confidentially Agreement, they have been unable to disclose who paid for the salvage and the exact description of the cargo recovered. Most investigations suggest it was a consortium of Swiss Bankers who financed the salvage operations. There was also considerable speculation about a shipment of Zirconium, intended for use in the first nuclear submarine **USS Nautilus**, but declared as “Pig Iron” on the ship’s cargo manifests. We truth will likely never be revealed.



The “**SS Andrea Doria**”, was an ocean liner of the Italian Line, registered in Genoa, Italy. The ship became famous for involvement in a serious collision with the Swedish Liner “**Stockholm**” in 1956, which caused her sinking. Of the 1,706 passengers and crew on board, 1,660 were rescued, while 46 lost their lives. At the time the “**Andrea Doria**” was an icon of Italian national maritime pride.

The Italian liner had departed from Genoa, followed by a short call at Cannes before heading for New York. On 25 July 1956, while the "**Andrea Doria**", was approaching the coast of Massachusetts, United States, the eastbound "**Stockholm**" of the Swedish American Line collided with her in one of history's most infamous maritime disasters of all time.

On Wednesday, 25 July, just before noon, "Stockholm", departed New York Harbor on her 103rd eastbound crossing across the Atlantic to her home port of Gothenburg, Sweden. "**Stockholm**" was the smallest passenger liner on the North Atlantic run during the 1950s. Completed in 1948, Stockholm was originally built to accommodate only 395 passengers in two classes and was designed more for comfort than for the luxury and opulence found aboard "**Andrea Doria**", because the Swedish-American Line was aware that the age of transatlantic passenger travel was coming to an end with the rapid expansion of air travel. However, they did not envision the massive surge in tourism that arose during the 1950s. As a result, the Swedish-American Line withdrew "**Stockholm**" from service in 1953 for a refit that included an extension of her superstructure to provide accommodation for an additional 153 passengers, increasing her maximum passenger capacity to 548. This proved to be a successful move, as by 1956, "**Stockholm**" had gained a high reputation and was highly popular on the North Atlantic service.

As "**Stockholm**" and "**Andrea Doria**" were approaching each other head-on, in the heavily used shipping corridor, the westbound "**Andrea Doria**" had been engulfed in heavy fog for hours. The captain had reduced speed slightly, activated the ship's fog-warning signals on the ship's siren, and had closed the watertight doors, all customary precautions while sailing in such conditions. However, the eastbound "**Stockholm**" had yet to enter what was apparently the edge of the fog bank and was seemingly unaware of the movement of the other ship engulfed within the fog bank. The waters of the North Atlantic south of Nantucket Island are frequently the site of intermittent fogs and fog banks, due to the cold Labrador Current encountering the Gulf Stream.

As the two ships approached each other at a combined speed of 40 knots, as sunset approached, each became aware of the presence of another ship, but guided only by radar, they apparently miscalculated each other's course. No radio communication was made between the two ships at first.

The original inquiry established that in the critical minutes before the collision, "**Andrea Doria**" gradually altered course to port, attempting a starboard-to-starboard transit, while "**Stockholm**" turned about 20° to starboard, an action intended to widen the passing distance of a port-to-port passing. In fact, they were actually steering toward each other, narrowing, rather than widening, the passing distance. As a result of the extremely thick fog that enveloped "**Andrea Doria**" as the ships approached each other, the ships were quite close by the time visual contact was established. By then, the crews realized that they were on a collision course, but despite last-minute emergency maneuvers, they could not avoid the collision taking place. At approximately 11:10 pm, the two ships collided, "**Stockholm**" striking the starboard side of "**Andrea Doria**".

Initial radio distress calls were transmitted by each ship, and in doing so, they learned each other's identities. Soon afterward, the messages were received by numerous radio and Coast Guard stations along the New England coast, and the world became aware that two large ocean liners had been in collision.

On "**Andrea Doria**", the decision to abandon ship was made within 30 minutes of collision impact. Enough lifeboats for all of the passengers and crew were positioned on each side of the Boat Deck. Lifeboat embarkation procedures called for lowering the lifeboats to be secured alongside the glass-enclosed Promenade Deck (one deck below), where evacuees could step out of windows directly into the boats, which would then be lowered down to sea level. However, those lifeboats on the port side, were unlaunchable due to the severe starboard list. To make matters worse, the list also complicated normal lifeboat procedures on the starboard side. Instead of loading lifeboats at the side of the Promenade Deck and then lowering them into the water, it became necessary to lower the boats empty, and somehow get evacuees down the exterior of the ship's hull to water level, so they could board. This was eventually accomplished through ropes and Jacob's ladders. In fear of causing a panic and stampeding of the starboard lifeboats, Captain Calamai decided against giving the order to abandon ship until help arrived. In the meantime, the Second Officer made announcements over the loudspeaker system instructing passengers to put on their lifebelts and proceed to their designated muster station.

Meantime, many other ships in the area had received the SOS signals transmitted by both passenger ships and were proceeding at maximum speed towards the stricken ships. While the other ships nearby were en route, Captain Nordenson of "**Stockholm**", having determined that his ship was not in any imminent danger of sinking, and after being assured of the safety of his passengers, sent some of his lifeboats to supplement the starboard lifeboats from "**Andrea Doria**". In the first hours, many survivors transported by lifeboats from the "**Andrea Doria**" were safely ferried to "**Stockholm**".

In all, 1,663 passengers and crew had been rescued from "**Andrea Doria**". The badly damaged "**Stockholm**", through the use of both her own lifeboats and those from the stricken "**Andrea Doria**", took on a total of 545 survivors, of whom 234 were crew members from "**Andrea Doria**". Of the other vessels that responded to the SOS, 129 survivors had been rescued by **Cape Ann**, 159 by **Pvt. William H. Thomas**, 77 by **Edward H. Allen**, including Captain Calamai and his officers. The French transatlantic liner **Île de France**, which had also diverted and arrived at the scene, undoubtedly played the largest role in the rescue, having taken on a total of 753 survivors. It was recorded that "**Andrea Doria**" finally sank bow first 10 hours after the collision, at 10:09 am on 26 July 1956.

While heavy fog was given as the primary cause of the collision, and it is not disputed that intermittent and heavy fog are both frequent and challenging conditions for mariners in that part of the ocean, these additional and contributing factors have been concluded:

"**Andrea Doria's**" officers had not followed proper radar procedures or used the plotting equipment available in the chartroom adjacent to the bridge of their ship to plot and then calculate the course, position, and speed of the other (approaching) ship. Thus, they failed to realize "**Stockholm's**" speed and course.

"**Andrea Doria**" had not followed the long-established rule that vessels approaching head-to-head both alter course to starboard. As "**Stockholm**" turned to starboard, "**Andrea Doria**" turned to port, closing the circle instead of opening it. Beyond a certain point, collision therefore became inevitable and imminent.

Captain Calamai of "**Andrea Doria**" was intentionally steaming at too greater speed in heavy fog and restricted visibility, an admittedly common practice on passenger liners. The navigation and anti-collision rules required speed to be reduced during periods of restricted visibility to a stopping distance within

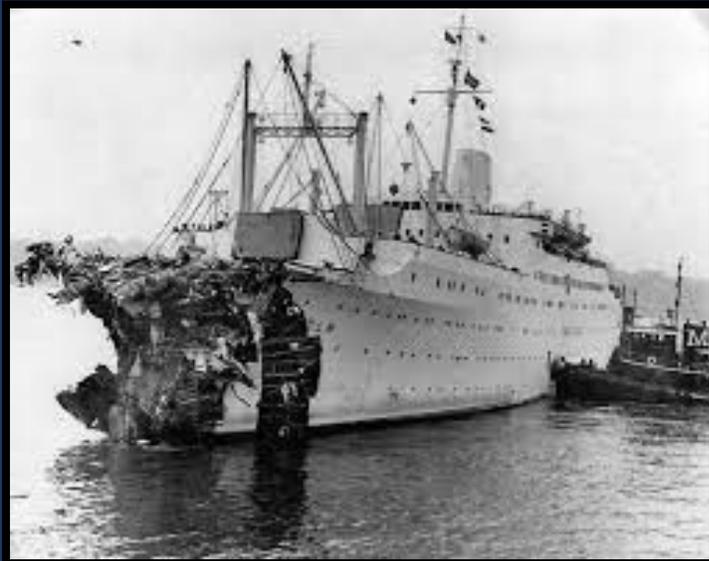
half the distance of visibility. However, in practice, this would have meant reducing the speed of the ship to virtually zero in the dense fog.

“Stockholm” and **“Andrea Doria”** were experiencing different weather conditions immediately prior to the collision. The collision occurred in an area of the northern Atlantic Ocean off the coast of Massachusetts, where heavy and intermittent fog is common. Although **“Andrea Doria”** had been engulfed in the fog for several hours, **“Stockholm”** had only recently entered the fog bank and was still acclimating to atmospheric conditions. The officer in charge of **“Stockholm”** incorrectly assumed that his inability to see the other vessel was due to conditions other than fog, such as the other ship being a very small fishing vessel or an unlit warship on maneuvers. He testified that he had no idea it was another passenger liner navigating through fog.

“Andrea Doria's” fuel tanks were half empty and not pumped with seawater ballast to trim and stabilize the ship, in accordance with the Italian Line's procedures. This contributed to the pronounced list following the collision, the inability of the crew to pump water into the port fuel tanks to right the ship, and the inability to use the port lifeboats for the disembarkation of passengers.

Also, a watertight door may have been "missing" between bulkheads near the engine room, which was thought to have contributed to **“Andrea Doria's”** demise.

“Stockholm's” navigating officer misread his radar thinking he was on a 15-nautical-mile range setting when in reality the radar was set for 5 nautical miles. Thus, he thought he was farther from the **“Andrea Doria”**, than he actually was. He also failed to inform the captain, as he was required to do by regulation. So ended one of the most tragic and unavoidable maritime disasters of all time.



The **“Stockholm's”** crushed bow section as seen upon her arrival back at New York



The **Seven Stones Lightship**, marking the reef which has been a navigational hazard to shipping for centuries with seventy-one named wrecks, and an estimated two hundred shipwrecks overall, the most infamous being the supertanker "**Torrey Canyon**" on 18th March 1967.



The "**Torrey Canyon**" was a first generation, Cape Size supertanker. It was also the first loaded supertanker to spill its entire cargo due to grounding. Built in 1959 by Newport News Ship Building and Dry Dock Company for the Barracuda Tanker Corporation, a subsidiary of the Union Oil Company of California, and registered in Liberia. At the time of the disaster, she was on charter to British Petroleum. She was on a voyage from Kuwait to Milford Haven with a cargo of about 120,000 tons of crude oil. At the time of the incident, she was the largest ship to be wrecked, and started to break up several days later. Captain Pastrengo Rugiati was in command of the vessel at the time.

On the day before the grounding, Captain Rugiati had calculated that, because of her laden draft, Torrey Canyon had to enter Milford Haven harbor on the high tide before 23:00 on 18th March or wait about another week until the tide would again be high enough for her to enter. Before retiring for the night, the Master had set a course that would have taken "**Torrey Canyon**" clear of the Scilly Isles. He left her on autopilot, but strong currents overnight pushed the ship to the northeast. When Captain Rugiati awoke he saw that the Scilly Isles were unexpectedly off his port, not starboard bow, as he had anticipated.

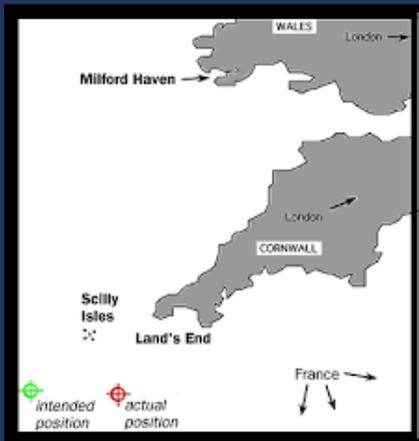
The Master immediately ordered a change of course but that took the ship, as he was aware, towards the Seven Stones reef that would be submerged by the tide. He planned, and tried, to make adjustments to his course by swinging hard to port but, at the critical moment, the ship failed to respond, presumably because the autopilot had not been disengaged, by which time it was too late, and the ship grounded heavily on the Seven Stones Reef.

The "**Torrey Canyon**" sustained serious damage to her keel, extending over more than half her length. Almost immediately, about 30,000 tons of crude oil gushed from her ruptured hull into the sea. However, that was just the beginning of the disaster. No oil spill of that size had ever previously occurred and by nightfall on 18th March 1967, an oil slick 8 miles long had spread from the ship's pierced cargo tanks. The next day the slick extended over 20 miles long, and by Easter Monday, the ship had broken in two, and almost all the 120,000 tonnes of the crude oil had leaked into the ocean, drifting with wind and tides towards the East and Southeast, clipping the Cornish Coast and finally towards Guernsey (Channel Islands) and the French coast of Brittany, which were seriously polluted with the thick black crude oil



The Suezmax Tanker "**Torrey Canyon**", hard aground on Pollard's Rock on the Seven Stones Reef, between the Cornish coast and the Isles of Scilly.

In an attempt to reduce the size of the oil spill, the British government decided to set the wreck on fire, by means of air strikes from the Royal Navy Fleet Air Arm and Royal Air Force. On 28 March 1967, Naval Blackburn Buccaneers from RNAS Lossiemouth dropped 1,000-pound bombs on the ship. This was followed shortly thereafter by Hawker Hunter jets from RAF Chivenor dropping cans of jet fuel, to fuel the blaze. However, the fire was extinguished by high winds and boisterous weather. Further strikes were needed to re-ignite the oil, by Naval de Havilland Sea Vixens from RNAS Yeovilton and Buccaneers from the RNAS Brawdy, as well as Hunters of No 1 Squadron from RAF West Raynham with napalm. Bombing continued into the next day, until the "**Torrey Canyon**" finally sank.



Spread of Oil slick

A Court of Inquiry, held in Liberia, where the ship was registered, found the ship's Master Pastrengo Rugiati was to blame, because he taken a shortcut to save time to get to Milford Haven. Additionally, a design flaw in the steering system meant that the helmsman was unaware that the steering selector switch had been accidentally left on autopilot, and hence was unable to carry out a timely manual turn to go through the shipping channel. The wreck lies at a depth of 30 meters and the "**Torrey Canyon**" incident became one of the worst ecological maritime disasters recorded until that time in history.

Having experienced it firsthand, I can assure you one of the worst and most feared things that can happen aboard a ship at sea is that of Fire. So it was, with the "**TSS Gothic**", a 15,911-ton British cargo liner built by Swan Hunter, Wallsend-on-Tyne, the fourth and final of the Corinthic-class liners ordered by the Shaw, Savill & Albion Line in 1946. Gothic was a passenger-cargo liner launched in December 1947, though not completed until a year later. She became the most famous of the quartet when she was designated a Royal Yacht from 1952 to 1954, becoming "**RTSS Gothic**".



During the night of 1st August 1968, a fire broke out on the vessel. The **“TSS Gothic”** had departed from Bluff, New Zealand, four days earlier and was bound for Liverpool. At the time of the fire, **“Gothic”** was encountering a gale, roughly mid-way across the South Pacific Ocean, 1802 miles east of Bluff, in approximately 44°24’S, 149°04’W. The devastating fire killed, four passengers and three crewmembers.

It was 2.30 in the morning when the automatic fire alarm sounded on the bridge, and a cadet was sent to investigate. He discovered a small fire in the officers’ smoke room but was unable to get the nearest firefighting cabinet open. He got a fire extinguisher from another deck, but it failed to operate properly. By this time the fire and smoke were spreading to other areas, the bridge, radio room and cabins where six of the seven victims were sleeping.



A fine portrait of the **“TSS Gothic”**, built in 1946 for the New Zealand service operated by the Shaw Savill & Albion Shipping Company. In 1952-3 she had undergone an extensive refit, intending her to be used as the Royal Yacht for the state visit to Australia and New Zealand by the Royals, but which was cancelled due to the death of King George VI. As

considerable work had already been completed, she returned in 1953 to complete the refit, which included a white-painted hull. In 1954 the **“Gothic”** was used for Queen Elizabeth 11’s coronation world tour, visit to Australia.

The fire quickly took hold, spreading rapidly to the Bridge, Promenade and Boat decks. Realizing the imminent danger, Captain Brian Hilary Agnew turned the ship downwind using engine commands relayed by another crew member to the engine room (the ship’s steering and engine telegraph were disabled by the fire). The **“Gothic’s”** crew then fought the fire from behind, the wind blowing the flames away from them. The fire – on three decks – taking some three and a half hours to quell and extinguish.

Captain Agnew brought the **“Gothic”** safely back to New Zealand under her own power – even though the fire had gutted the bridge, radio room and parts of the accommodation, and the ship had to be steered from the stern using emergency steering, and a compass with unknown error. **“Gothic”** docked at Wellington and was repaired sufficiently for the return trip back to Britain, although she was sent for demolition soon afterwards in 1969, she was sold to China Steel Corp and arrived at Kaohsiung 13th August that year.



The fire damaged and charred accommodation and Bridge area of the “**TSS Gothic**”, which surely testifies to the ferocity of the inferno.

At an initial inquiry conducted in New Zealand, the precise causes of the fire were not fully ascertained, although an electrical fire in a refrigerator, located in the smoke room, or a dropped cigarette cannot be completely excluded as possible causes.



If ever there was a manmade disaster it must surely be that of the tanker “**Exxon Valdez**”. I recall seeing the ship in Singapore Roads under her new name, and thinking if all onlookers really knew what they were looking at? I must admit I didn’t, thinking it was just another of the many non-descript VLCC tankers at anchor, until informed otherwise by the marine Pilot that was taking my ship into Singapore at the time.



The “**Exxon Valdez**” captured with another tanker alongside during fuel transfer operations

The vessel was built in October 1986 by the National Steel and shipbuilding Company, San Diego, California, for the “**Exxon Group**” and was **209,836 DWT**. The “**Exxon Valdez**” will go down in infamy as the vessel responsible for causing major oil pollution in one of the world’s most pristine areas, Prince William Sound, Alaska, when she grounded on “**Bligh Reef**” on 24th March 1989, rupturing

her cargo tanks and spilling almost 37,000 tons of crude oil. It is considered to be, one of, if not the, worst oil spills worldwide, in terms of damage to the environment.

The “**Exxon Valdez**” had secured alongside the Alyeska Marine Terminal at 11:30 pm on 22nd March 1989. The loading of crude oil was completed late the following day, the ship departing from the Alyeska Pipeline Terminal at 9:12 pm 23rd March 1989, loaded with 1,264,155 barrels of crude oil. The vessel was under the command of Captain Joseph Jeffrey Hazelwood.

The captain retired to his cabin at 9.25 pm. The Marine Pilot and Third Mate were accompanied by a single tug for the passage through the Valdez narrows – a journey of about 7 miles. The Pilot left the bridge shortly after the vessel cleared the narrows, at 11.24 pm. At this point, the captain was called to the bridge. The Third Mate was assisting the Pilot to disembark from the vessel and was not on the bridge, leaving the captain, as the only officer on the bridge. At 11.25 pm “**Exxon Valdez**” reported that the Pilot had departed from the ship. Having returned to the bridge, the Third Mate advised traffic control and decided to deviate from the predetermined traffic lanes to avoid small icebergs which were a common occurrence in these waters. However, the “**Exxon Valdez**” significantly deviated from the set course and traffic lanes to avoid ice, contrary to regulations. The vessel was placed on a due south course and set on autopilot. At 11.47 pm the vessel left the traffic lanes eastern boundary.

The Third Mate had been on duty for 6 hours and was scheduled to be relieved by the Second Mate. However, due to the long hours that the Second Mate had worked, he was reluctant to wake the Second Mate, and remained on duty himself. The Third Mate was the only officer on the bridge for most of the night, in violation of company policy.

At around midnight the Third Mate began to maneuver the vessel into the traffic lanes. At the same time, the lookout reported that the **Bligh Reef light** appeared far off the starboard bow at about 45 degrees – this was problematic given that the light should have been off the port side. The Third Mate ordered a course change, as the ship was in danger. Captain Hazelwood was quickly called to the bridge, but before their conversation could finish, the ship grounded heavily on **Bligh Reef** at 12.04 am, 24th March.

Carried by its own momentum, the ship ended up perched amidships on a pinnacle of rock. 8 out of 11 cargo holds were ruptured allowing 5.8 million gallons of oil to drain from the ship within 3 hours and 15 minutes. For more than 45 minutes after the grounding, the captain attempted to maneuver the ship free of the reef, despite being advised by the Chief Mate that the vessel may not be structurally sound without the reef supporting it. After numerous attempts to dislodge the ship under her own power, Captain Hazelwood radioed the Coast Guard informing them of the grounding

During the first few days of the spill, heavy sheens and scum of thick black oil covered large areas of the surface of Prince William Sound. Beginning three days after the vessel grounded, a storm pushed large quantities of fresh oil onto the rocky shores of many of the beaches in the Knight Island chain. The damage caused by the tar like oil caused significant pollution to the surrounding coastline, as far distant as 200 miles, loss of life to marine and wildlife not to mention loss of income to local industries, in particular the fishing sector, which continued for many years.

A court of inquiry found, Exxon Shipping Company had failed to supervise the Master and provide a rested and sufficient crew for “**Exxon Valdez**”. The National Transport Safety Board found this practice was widespread throughout the industry, prompting a safety recommendation to Exxon and to the wider shipping industry. They also concluded the Third Mate had failed to properly maneuver the vessel, possibly due to fatigue or excessive workload.

The NTSB also stated that the Exxon Shipping Company failed to properly maintain the Raytheon Collision Avoidance System (RAYCAS) radar, which, if functional, would have indicated to the duty bridge officer an impending collision with the Bligh Reef, by detecting the "radar reflector," placed on the rocks immediately adjacent to Bligh Reef, so positioned to assist ships with their navigation.

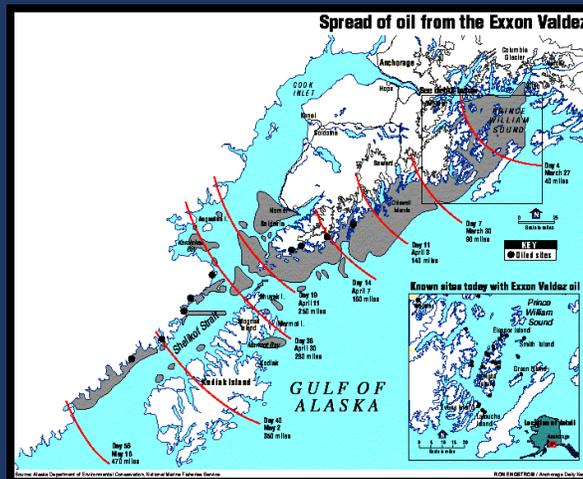
Captain Joseph Hazelwood, who was widely reported to have been drinking heavily that night, was not in charge on the bridge when the ship struck the reef. Exxon blamed Captain Hazelwood for the grounding of the tanker, but Hazelwood accused the corporation of making him a scapegoat. As the senior officer in command of the ship, he was accused of being intoxicated and thereby contributing to the disaster, but he was cleared of this charge at his 1990 trial after witnesses testified that he was sober around the time of the accident. Ultimately, Captain Hazelwood was convicted of a lesser charge, negligent discharge of oil (a misdemeanor), fined \$50,000, and sentenced to 1,000 hours of community service.

After repairs, “Exxon Valdez” was renamed “Exxon Mediterranean”, then “Sea River Mediterranean” in the early 1990s, when Exxon transferred its shipping interests to a new subsidiary company, River Maritime Inc. The name was later shortened to “S/R Mediterranean”, then to simply “Mediterranean” in 2005. The ship then served in European, Middle East and Asian regions. In 2005, it was reflagged to that of the Marshall Islands.



Since then, the European Union regulations have prevented tanker vessels of single-hull design such as the Valdez from entering European ports. In early 2008, Sea River Maritime, an ExxonMobil subsidiary, sold “Mediterranean” to the Hong Kong-based shipping company, Hong Kong Bloom Shipping Ltd., which renamed the ship, once again, as “Dong Fang Ocean”, under Panama registry. In 2008, she was refitted and converted from an oil tanker to an ore carrier. She finally went to Indian breakers in March 2012.

This disaster resulted in the International Maritime Organization (IMO) introducing comprehensive marine pollution prevention rules (MARPOL) through various conventions, which have since been ratified by the world’s maritime nations, and duly implemented. According to some reports, the oil, eventually covered 1,300 miles of coastline, and 11,000 square miles of ocean.



References: Numerous accounts of various corporate archives and summary of the events covered, wiki, various online data from which much information on the various captions have been sources.

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