

UNITED STATES COAST GUARD

ADDRESS REPLY TO  
COMMANDANT  
U. S. COAST GUARD  
HEADQUARTERS  
WASHINGTON 25, D. C.



MVI

MAR 1955  
(SANTA MARIA - USN  
LST 306 - a-13 Bd)

Commandant's Action  
on

Marine Board of Investigation; collision involving F/V SANTA MARIA and USN LST 306 on 10 March 1955, Puget Sound, Washington, with loss of life

1. Pursuant to the provisions of Title 46 C.F.R. Part 136, the record of the Marine Board of Investigation convened to investigate subject casualty, together with its Findings of Fact, Conclusions, and Recommendations, has been reviewed.
2. During early evening on 9 March 1955 the motor fishing vessel SANTA MARIA, of 64 g.t., built of wood in 1928, with a cargo of approximately 25,000 pounds of fish on board, was inbound from Neah Bay to Seattle with the F/V KRISTINE following close astern. At 0305 when off Point No Point the KRISTINE changed course toward Everett and the SANTA MARIA continued toward Seattle. At this time the SANTA MARIA's speed was reduced to three-quarters and approximately one-half hour later the speed was further reduced to one-half, four to four and one-half knots. This speed reduction was due to head winds from the southeast of 20 to 40 mph and head seas. The visibility was fair. The master was on the bridge in charge of navigation and the required navigation lights were burning brightly. At approximately 0420 the port bow of the U. S. Navy LST 306 struck the port side of the SANTA MARIA in a position about 3000 yards off Point Wells Light. The SANTA MARIA sank immediately and of the four crew members aboard, three were apparently entrapped in the wreckage and perished. The SANTA MARIA made no course or speed alterations prior to the collision and no whistle signals were exchanged between the colliding vessels.
3. The report of the Board is filed without action being taken inasmuch as the investigation was not completed because of the unavailability of Government witnesses.

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After full and mature deliberation the Board finds as follows:

FINDINGS OF FACT

1. At approximately 0420, PST, on 10 March 1955, the Fishing Vessel SANTA MARIA and the U. S. Navy LST 306 collided in Puget Sound, approximately 3,000 yards abeam of Point Wells Light, Washington, with subsequent loss of the SANTA MARIA and loss of life of several crewmembers aboard the same.
2. The vessels involved are:
  - a. F/V SANTA MARIA, Official No. 237680, an American uninspected fishing vessel, 84 gross tons, 57 net tons, 70.0' x 19.4' x 8.7', built of wood in 1928, powered by 180 horsepower diesel, home port Tacoma, Washington. The vessel was owned and operated at the time of the casualty by John A. DePolo, Jr., 2717 North Starr Street, Tacoma, Washington and Obren Kokish, 2110 North Steele Street, Tacoma, Washington.
  - b. USS LST 306, a public vessel of the United States, approximately 328' x 50.0' x 14.3', approximate displacement 4,050 tons when fully loaded, operated by the United States Navy.
3. The weather conditions prevailing at the time were: overcast, occasional light rain; wind southeast, 20 to 40 miles per hour; choppy sea and fair visibility.
4. On 9 March 1955, the SANTA MARIA, loaded with a cargo of approximately twenty five thousand pounds of fish, while inbound through the Strait of Juan de Fuca from the vicinity of Neah Bay, toward Seattle, Washington, passed close aboard the F/V KRISTINE at Slip Point at about 1740, PST. The KRISTINE assumed a position about one to two miles astern of the SANTA MARIA

And commenced following her in through the Strait. At 0305, PST, on 10 March 1955, the KRISTINE was abeam of Point No Point and parted company, proceeding toward Everett. The SANTA MARIA continued toward Seattle, Washington. Prior to passing Point No Point the SANTA MARIA was proceeding at normal full speed, approximately 8.75 knots; at Point No Point speed was reduced to  $3/4$ , approximately 6 to 7.5 knots; approximately one-half hour later speed was reduced to  $1/2$ , approximately 4.0 to 4.5 knots. Speeds were reduced because the vessel was heading into the wind and seas. The required running lights, 20 point white masthead light, 32 point white range light, 10 point red and green side lights, were displayed on the SANTA MARIA prior to and at the time of the collision.

5. Prior to and at the time of collision the SANTA MARIA was being conned by Mr. Ohren Kokich, assisted by Mr. Leigh P. Larson. Steering was being controlled by means of an automatic steering device known as the Metal Marine Pilot, manufactured by Wood Freeman, 342 Golden Gate Ave., Tacoma, Washington. In order for a change of course to be made it would have been necessary to disengage a clutch device, and such change would have been known to persons aboard because of the characteristic change of sound of the steering device. No change of course or speed was noticed nor were any whistle signals heard by Mr. John A. DePolo, Jr., engineer of the SANTA MARIA, during the fifteen minutes before the collision. The SANTA MARIA was struck on the port side by the LST 306. Immediately following the collision most of the hull and house of the SANTA MARIA sank. Crewmembers Ohren Kokich, Leigh P. Larson and Sigurd G. Hovland were trapped in the wreckage by the impact.

Mr. John A. DePolo, Jr., managed to extricate himself from the sinking cabin, put on a life preserver, lash himself to a life raft and was recovered from the sea by crewmembers of the LST 306 approximately twenty minutes later.

6. Mr. DePolo was hospitalized at Bremerton Naval Hospital as a result of injuries sustained and was unable to appear at the Marine Board of Investigation until 14 April 1955. The body of Mr. Sigurd G. Hovland was recovered by U. S. Coast Guard vessel. The bodies of Mr. Obren Kokich and Mr. Leigh P. Larson have not been recovered to date nor has any person reported having seen either man since the collision between the LST 306 and the SANTA MARIA, other than the few moments that John A. DePolo, Jr., saw Mr. Obren Kokich in the pilot house while the vessel was sinking.

7. Mr. Martin A. Thompson, 1st Officer of the tug MILWAUKEE, and Mr. Sverre Aure, Master of the F/V KRISTINE, who were called as witnesses, established an approximate position of the F/V SANTA MARIA shortly before the collision.

8. Information concerning the movements of the LST 306 and the actions of the person or persons in charge of the LST 306 prior to the collision with the SANTA MARIA was not available to the Board.

9. After the collision, the LST 306 and the USS SPHINX stood by and assisted in search and rescue operations.

10. The estimated loss of the SANTA MARIA is: to vessel, \$60,000.00; to cargo, in excess of \$5,000.00. The extent of damage, if any, to the LST 306 was not available to the Board.

#### CONCLUSIONS

11. Based upon the aforementioned facts it is concluded that:

a. On 10 March 1955, at about 0420, PST, the LST 306 and the Fishing Vessel SANTA MARIA were involved in a collision in Puget Sound, approximately 3,000 yards from Point Wells Light, which resulted in the sinking and complete loss of the SANTA MARIA.

b. Just prior to and at the time of the collision the SANTA MARIA was proceeding toward Seattle, Washington, at half speed, approximately four knots, being conned by Mr. Obren Kokich, the vessel's Master, steering being controlled by means of an automatic steering device (Metal Marine Pilot), required lights displayed and no whistle signals were sounded by the SANTA MARIA.

c. The movements of the LST 306 and any actions by the person in charge of the LST 306 cannot be determined because the testimony of Naval witnesses is not available to the Board.

d. The exact movements of the SANTA MARIA and any actions by the vessel's Master cannot be determined because the only surviving member of the crew was Mr. John A. DePolo, Jr., who was in the crew's quarters, below, prior to and at the time of the casualty.

e. The cause of the collision cannot be determined because there is not sufficient evidence available from which to make such a determination.

f. Mr. John A. DePolo, Jr., was hospitalized because of injuries sustained as a result of the collision.

g. The following named members of the crew, Obren Kokich, Leigh P. Larson and Sigurd G. Hovland, lost their lives as a result of the collision.

h. The estimated value of loss of the vessel SANTA MARIA is \$60,000.00, and the estimated value of loss of the cargo of fish is in excess of \$5,000.

i. The extent of damage, if any, to the LST 306 cannot be ascertained by the Board.

RECOMMENDATIONS

12. It is therefore recommended that:

a. The testimony of U.S. Naval witnesses be made available to the Marine Board of Investigation if a reasonable determination of the cause of the collision is to be made.

b. If recommendation (a), above, is not required, it is recommended that this case be closed and no further action be taken.

L. T. JONES  
Captain, U.S.C.G., Chairman

W. C. FOSTER  
Commander, U.S.C.G., Member

L. W. LEMOS  
Lieutenant, U.S.C.G., Member  
and Recorder

The Board then, at 10:15 a.m., 23 June 1955, adjourned to await the action of the convening authority.

L. T. JONES  
Captain, U.S.C.G., Chairman

L. W. LEMOS  
Lieutenant, U.S.C.G., Recorder