



THE MERCHANT SHIPPING ACT, 1894

REPORT OF COURT

(No. 8034)

m.v. "TRENTBANK" O.N. 304137

and s.s. "FOGO" Portuguese

In the matter of a Formal Investigation held at the Sheriff Court, Glasgow, on 26th April, 1965 before Maurice Gordon Gillies, Esquire, Q.C., Sheriff-Substitute, assisted by Captain G. Ayre and Captain R. G. Freeman, into the circumstances in which on the 18th September, 1964, the motor vessel *Trentbank* was in collision with the Portuguese vessel *Fogo* in the Mediterranean Sea in approximate position 32° 25' N. 29° 14' E. and subsequently sank off Port Said.

The Court having carefully considered the circumstances attending the above-mentioned casualty finds for the reasons stated in the Annex hereto that the collision was caused by the negligence of the Chief Officer Thomas McIntosh Blaikie in that he, while officer of the watch at the material time, failed to keep a proper look-out, and the Court orders that in respect thereof the said Thomas McIntosh Blaikie be severely censured.

Dated this Twenty-eighth day of April, 1965.

M. G. GILLIES, *Judge.*

We concur in the above Report.

R. G. FREEMAN }
G. AYRE } *Assessors.*

ANNEX TO THE REPORT

At this Inquiry Mr. D. M. McNiven, Solicitor, appeared for the Minister of Transport. Mr. J. D. Urie, Solicitor, Glasgow, for the owners of Bank Line Limited, 21 Bury Street, London, E.C.3 and Mr. I. G. Inglis, Solicitor, Glasgow, for the Chief Officer, Thomas McIntosh Blaikie. There were no other parties to the Inquiry.

The *Trentbank* was a shelter deck, single screw diesel driven dry cargo vessel of steel construction built by William Doxford and Sons Limited, Sunderland in 1962. She had an open fore-castle, raked

stem and cruiser stern She had nine watertight bulkheads and five cargo holds. Her machinery was situated amidships.

The vessel's registered dimensions and tonnages were as follows:—

- Length—466.70 feet
- Breadth—62.25 feet
- Depth—38.6 feet
- Gross tonnage—6309.64 tons
- Net tonnage—3541.94 tons
- Underdeck tonnage—5462.53 tons

The *Trentbank* was owned by the Bank Line Limited of 21 Bury Street, London, E.C.3.

The main propelling machinery was a Doxford 4-cylinder, opposed piston, vertical internal combustion engine of 6640 B.H.P. installed by William Doxford and Sons (Engineers) Limited, of Sunderland. The vessel had two auxiliary boilers each of 120 lbs. per square inch loaded pressure.

The steering gear, situated on the main deck aft was a 4-ram electro hydraulic type of John Hastie and Company Limited, operated either by telemotor or automatic helmsman from the wheelhouse. There was also a hand wheel on the docking bridge which could be worked to the engine in an emergency.

The vessel was classed by Lloyds in respect of hull and machinery and certificates of class were issued on 14th September, 1962 with characters assigned X100A1 and XLMC.

The following compasses were installed:—

- 1 Arma/Brown gyro compass Mk. 3 with repeaters
- 1 Kelvin Hughes liquid magnetic reflector compass
- 1 Kelvin Hughes liquid magnetic after steering compass. The magnetic compasses were last adjusted on 19th July 1962. Deviation cards were then issued

Electronic navigation aids were:—

- Marconi Radiolocator Mk. 4A radar
- Lodestone 4 direction finder
- Marconi "Fishgraph" echo sounder

The vessel was also supplied with a patent sounding machine complete with lead and tubes, a Walker's Commodore electric log complete, a Walker's mechanical log complete and one hand lead and line, and one deep sea lead and line.

The life saving appliances were as follows:—

- 2 29 ft. fibre-glass Class "B" motor lifeboats each for 70 persons
- 8 Circular lifebuoys
- 72 Lifejackets
- 1 Schermuly line-throwing apparatus
- 1 Set of bridge distress signals

The vessel was last surveyed in respect of all life saving appliances and other safety equipment on 22nd June, 1964 at Yokohama when a safety equipment certificate was issued.

The *Trentbank* sailed from Port Said at 0428 hours on 18th September, 1964, bound for Liverpool. Prior to reaching Aden on her homeward voyage, she had experienced trouble with her gyro-compass due to a short circuit. This defect was rectified by the manufacturer's representative at Aden. After leaving Aden when the automatic steering system was tested it was found to be faulty in that when automatic steering was engaged, the ship immediately swung to starboard, under starboard helm. The fault was eventually found to be caused by a disconnected wire in the after unit, and when this was replaced, the system appeared to work satisfactorily.

After passing Damietta at about 0625 hours on 18th September, the ship was steered on automatic steering, apart from occasional changes of course, until the collision with *Fogo*.

Immediately prior to the collision, it appears that a further fault developed in the automatic steering system as a result of which *Trentbank* swung to starboard and across the course of the *Fogo*. This swing was undetected by the officer of the watch, until immediately before impact.

The reason for his failure to notice the swing was that he was engaged in the wheelhouse writing up his log. There was no other person on the bridge at the time. There was no automatic "off-course" alarm fitted to the system installed in the *Trentbank*.

In the collision between the vessels *Fogo* struck *Trentbank* amidships with her stern, in the way of the engine room, which flooded immediately, the engineer on watch losing his life.

The Court is of the opinion that after the collision everything was done to ensure the safety of passengers and crew, and to save the damaged *Trentbank*. Her final loss was due to the deterioration in the weather conditions and lack of suitable assistance from the shore to berth the damaged vessel.

The tanker *Harold H. Helm* is to be praised for her efforts in towing *Trentbank* some 200 miles back to Port Said.

In our opinion the primary cause of the collision was the failure of the Chief Officer of the *Trentbank* to keep a proper look-out. Had he been keeping a proper look-out he would have become aware of the

failure of the steering gear and the consequent dangerous approach of *Fogo* in time to take suitable avoiding action and so avert the collision. We are reinforced in this view by the fact that he was or should have been aware of two very recent previous failures in the automatic steering equipment. We have also in mind that a quartermaster was available within call of the bridge. If the Chief Officer proposed to divert his attention from his principal duty for a short period, we consider that he should have summoned the quartermaster to the bridge in order that he could have the benefit of an additional pair of eyes.

While we are of opinion that Mr. Blaikie is an officer of good character and efficiency, in our view he committed a grave error of judgment prior to the collision, and we feel that we must put this view on record by severely censuring him.

In conclusion, the Court feels that it cannot over-emphasise the importance of a proper look-out being kept at all times, and the dangers of placing too much confidence in electrical and mechanical devices which from their nature are liable to failure, sometimes without warning.

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

The Court's answers to the questions submitted by the Ministry of Transport are as follows:—

- Q. 1. By whom was the *Trentbank* owned at the time of the collision with the *Fogo*?
- A. Bank Line Limited, 21 Bury Street, London, E.C.3.
- Q. 2. By whom was the *Fogo* owned at the time of the collision with the *Trentbank*?
- A. Sociedade Portuguesa de Navios Tanques, LDA., Rue do Acucar, 86, Lisboa, 6.
- Q. 3. Where, when and by whom was the *Trentbank* built?
- A. Sunderland, 1962 William Doxford and Sons, Limited.
- Q. 4. (a) With what compasses was the *Trentbank* fitted?
(b) When were they last adjusted previous to the collision?
- A. (a) One Arma Brown gyro-compass Mk. III with repeaters; one Kelvin Hughes liquid magnetic reflector compass; one Kelvin Hughes liquid magnetic reflector compass aft.
(b) 19th July, 1962.
- Q. 5. (a) What navigational aids were provided on board the *Trentbank*?
(b) Were they adequate and in good working order previous to the collision?
- A. (a) Marconi radiolocator Mk. 4 radar; Lodestone No. 4 direction finder; Marconi Fishgraph echo sounder; patent sounding machine complete with lead and tubes; Walker's Commodore electric log complete; Walker's mechanical log complete; one hand lead and line; one deep sea lead and line.
(b) Yes.

- Q. 6. Who was in command of the *Trentbank* on 18th September, 1964, and what crew, passengers and others did she then carry?
- A. Captain Bertram Holland; 56 hands including the master, 5 passengers and three supernumeraries.
- Q. 7. From what port did the *Trentbank* sail on 18th September, 1964, and where was she bound?
- A. Port Said bound to Liverpool.
- Q. 8. Was the *Trentbank* in a good and seaworthy condition on the commencement of her voyage on 18th September, 1964?
- A. Yes.
- Q. 9. (a) Who came on watch on board the *Trentbank* at 1600 hours local time on 18th September, 1964?
- (b) At this time what was the state of the weather, wind, sea and visibility?
- (c) At this time what vessel, or vessels, were visible forward of the *Trentbank's* beam, and what was the position of such vessel, or vessels, relative to the *Trentbank*?
- A. (a) The Chief Officer, Thomas McIntosh Blaikie.
- (b) Weather fine, wind N.W. by W. Force 2-3. Slight sea and swell, visibility good.
- (c) The *Fogo*, 2-3° on the starboard bow of *Trentbank* and 2½-3 miles distant.
- Q. 10. (a) What action did the Officer of the Watch of the *Trentbank* take relative to the vessel, or vessels, referred to in Question 9(c), and when was such action taken?
- (b) What was the result of the action referred to in Question 10(a).
- A. (a) At 1630 hours he altered course 2° to port, and a few minutes later he altered course a further 2° to port.
- (b) *Trentbank* passed to port of *Fogo* one mile distant when vessels were abeam.
- Q. 11. (a) What was the position of the *Trentbank* relative to the vessel, or vessels, referred to in Question 9(c) at about 1700 hours local time on 18th September, 1964?
- (b) What action relative to such vessel, or vessels, did the Officer of the Watch of the *Trentbank* take after about 1700 hours, and when did he take such action?
- A. 11. (a) One mile distant from *Fogo*, on *Fogo's* port beam.
- (b) About 1705 hours he altered course 2° to starboard with *Fogo* two points abaft *Trentbank's* starboard beam.
- Q. 12. (a) After taking the action referred to in Question 11(b) what did the Officer of the Watch of the *Trentbank* do?
- (b) What happened a short time thereafter?
- A. 12. (a) He went into the wheel-house to write up his log-book.
- (b) Chief Officer looked up on hearing steps on starboard ladder of the bridge and saw *Fogo* heading for *Trentbank*, the latter having swung 69° to starboard.
- Q. 13. (a) At approximately what time did the *Trentbank* collide with the *Fogo*?
- (b) In approximately what position did the collision occur?
- (c) What action, or actions, did the Officer of the Watch of the *Trentbank* take immediately before the collision?
- (d) What was the approximate angle of impact between the two vessels?
- (e) What part of the *Trentbank* first made contact with the *Fogo*?
- A. (a) 1716 hours 18th September, 1964.
- (b) 32° 25' N. 29° 14' E.
- (c) He disengaged automatic steering and put the wheel hard to port. He told the Seacunny, who had then arrived on the bridge, to hold the wheel hard to port. He then pressed the whistle lever, but there was no response.
- (d) 90°-100°.
- (e) Amidships, starboard side abreast of the funnel.
- Q. 14. Was any alteration of course observed, or any sound signal heard from the *Fogo* before the collision?
- A. None observed.
- Q. 15. What action did the Master of the *Trentbank* take, and what orders did he give, immediately after the collision?
- A. He took charge after the impact. He ordered the port lifeboat to be swung out and ordered the passengers and supernumeraries to be embarked in it. The bilges were sounded. He instructed a search for the Fourth Engineer, who was missing in flooded engine rom. He instructed the wireless operator to send out a general distress call, asking for assistance.
- Q. 16. What steps were taken to save, or salvage, the *Trentbank* after the collision, and with what result?
- A. General call was answered by the Liberian tanker *Harold H. Helm*, which arrived in the vicinity of the *Trentbank* at about 1900 hours and took on board the passengers and part of the crew of *Trentbank*. The *Harold H. Helm* towed the *Trentbank* some 200 miles back to Port Said, but she sank there in a position 31° 18' N, 32° 32' E before she could be beached.
- Q. 17. Was a proper look-out being kept on the *Trentbank* shortly before the collision?

A. No. See Annex.

Q. 18. Were proper steps taken on board the *Trentbank* to avoid a collision with the *Fogo*?

A. Yes, in the time available by putting helm hard a port.

Q. 19. What was the cause of the collision between the *Trentbank* and the *Fogo*?

A. The undetected swing to starboard by *Trentbank* of some 69°—and see Annex.

Q. 20. Was the collision caused or contributed to by the wrongful act or default of

(a) the Chief Officer of the *Trentbank*, Thomas McIntosh Blaikie?

(b) any other person or persons?

A. (a) Yes.

(b) No.

M. G. GILLIES, *Judge*.

R. G. FREEMAN }
G. AYRE } *Assessors*.

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