

## Suez Canal grounding with pilot onboard

The oil tanker was transiting the Suez Canal and had loaded crude oil in North Africa, and was on its way to India. On the bridge were the pilot, master, helmsman and chief officer. It was morning and a second set of pilots had just boarded the vessel. The pilots did a handover on the bridge speaking Egyptian.



After the handover the new pilot ordered the vessel to increase to full speed ahead. The master asked the pilot if full speed was really necessary as the vessel was fully loaded and had a draught of 14.5 meters. The pilot replied that there were strong currents ahead and that full speed was required.

About one hour later the vessel passed the KM 93 mark and it had to change course from 171 to 154 degrees. The pilot ordered port 20 to the helmsman and the vessel started to alter at a rate of turn of 15 degrees per minute and was rapidly closing the distance to the eastern canal bank at full speed. To counteract this the pilot ordered hard to starboard. This caused the vessel to swing to starboard at a 25 degree rate of turn and the vessel listed heavily.

The master asked the pilot if the western branch of the channel was safe. The pilot stated that it was not. At this point the master took over and relieved the pilot as he realized the pilot had lost control of the vessel.

The master ordered hard to port and the vessel just missed the buoys by the centre embankment of the Deversoir bypass near kilometer mark KM 95. The vessel was again heading for the west bank and the master

initially reduced the engine speed to slow ahead but realized that he needed to turn more quickly so he ordered full speed ahead to increase the rate of turn.

Unfortunately the master could not avoid the bank and made contact a couple of times before ending up in the middle of the canal where the vessel finally stopped.

About an hour later the vessel anchored in the Bitter Lakes and informed the Suez Canal Authorities about the incident. There was no pollution and divers inspected the vessel and found a number of dents on the hull.

### Consequences

The vessel had to dry dock and repair the dents to the hull. The cost was more than USD 500,000 and the vessel was out of service for more than a month. ■

# Discussion

Go to the "File" menu and select "Save as..." to save the pdf-file on your computer. You can place the marker below each question to write the answer directly into the file.



1. What were the immediate causes of this accident?

2. Is there a risk that this kind of accident could happen on our vessel?

3. How could this accident have been prevented?

4. What sections of our SMS would have been breached, if any?

5. Is our SMS sufficient to prevent this kind of accident?

6. Are there procedures in our SMS that address how to interact with the pilot?

7. If procedures were breached why do you think this was the case?

8. Do we have a risk assessment onboard that addresses these risks?

9. Do our bridge team members have assigned roles and duties when navigating?

10. Is closed loop communication used on the bridge?

11. Do we practice MRM within our bridge team?

12. Is the pilot considered a member of the bridge team?

13. What do you think was the root cause of this accident?

## Issues to be considered

- The pilots spoke Egyptian during the handover, which neither the master nor any other member of the team could understand. If this is the case the master needs to seek clarification from the pilots about any updates to the passage plan and if anything has changed from the original plan.
- If a new pilot takes the conn, a new pilot brief should be conducted with the bridge team.
- It is imperative to know that the master is always in command of the vessel and the pilot is an advisor. To ensure a safe operation it is important to discuss all aspects of the passage plan within the bridge team (including the pilot) and if any changes are made these need to be clarified within the bridge team.
- If large rudder commands are given while maintaining full speed, this will create a rapid rate of turn that can cause the vessel to list heavily. This can cause both personal injuries and cargo damage.
- While navigating it is important to have assigned roles for the conn, monitor and navigation. For more detailed information see our Bridge Instructions booklet.

