



INVESTIGATION REPORTS - DETAIL

NELLA DAN

Report No 20

Date: 03-Dec-87
Released: Pre MIU
Location: MACQUARIE ISLAND
Type: GROUNDING

Summary

The Danish Antarctic supply vessel NELLA DAN grounded in Buckles Bay at the northern end of Macquarie Island on the evening of 3 December 1987 in approximate position, latitude 54 degrees 29.2 minutes South, longitude 158 degrees 58.1 minutes East.

On board at the time of the incident were 33 crew & 17 expeditioners, all were disembarked safely by Australian Army light amphibious resupply craft (LARC). Some crew, expeditioners & LARC drivers sustained minor eye irritation from diesel oil spray & a certain amount of pollution was caused by the spillage of light diesel oil. The Master, four officers & the boatswain remained on board.

Conclusions

The Investigating Officers find that;

1. The NELLA DAN grounded at approximately 1846 3 December 1987 when the port anchor dragged in gale force south to south easterly winds.
2. The investigating officers are satisfied that there is no evidence to suggest that any person was unfit through the use of alcohol or drugs.
3. It is not possible to determine the precise time at which the anchor failed to hold or the time that elapsed before the ship touched bottom. It is therefore not possible to assess whether the Second Officer, was at fault for not realising the ship was dragging before the Master arrived on the bridge, whether there was time to let go the starboard anchor so that it would have been effective or whether other action could have been taken to prevent the casualty. The actions of the Master in leaving the dining saloon at approximately 1830 without alerting the Chief Engineer to possible emergency was an error of judgement. Captain Soerensen's subsequent decision to send the Assistant Engineer, to instruct the First Engineer to start the engine rather than use the telephone or telegraph was a serious error of judgement. The Master should have used the telephone and/or telegraph and to cover any uncertainty as to the whereabouts of the First Engineer he could also have used a messenger. Valuable time was wasted in starting the engines.
4. The Master's decision to continue the transfer of oil after dry cargo operations had been suspended and to continue the operation into the afternoon was an error of judgement.
5. The Master having taken the decision to continue and complete the oil transfer and also having expressed concern for the ship's position to the Voyage Leader failed to take precautions that would have been prudent given the wind and sea conditions at the time and the proximity of shallow water

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- he did not pay out extra cable to increase the theoretical holding power of the port anchor
- he did not let go the starboard anchor. (His concern that the cables might cross had the ship swung to another direction was not well founded given the persistent nature of the wind that day and the fact that, by use of engines and helm, fouling of the cable could have been avoided.)
- even though the steering motors and all necessary ancilliary equipment were running, he did not start the engines and leave them running at zero pitch so that his ship was immediately manoeuvrable
- he did not warn the duty engineer of the weather being experienced or alert the engineering staff to the potential risks of remaining at anchor.

6. The First Officer was significantly at fault in that he failed to advise the Master that in his opinion the ship was dragging anchor, nor did he bring this fact to the Master's attention at 1700. While there is no guarantee as to the Master's reaction to this information, the First Officer had a clear duty to inform the Master of the occurrence.

7. Given the southerly wind that developed on 2 December and subsequently increased in intensity on 3 December the anchorage position was too close to the lee shore and shoal water. Considerations of the LARC operation and the oil transfer were secondary to the safety of the ship.

8. The bridge management was deficient in that the Master did not ensure that his officers had read and understood the "Master's Standing Orders" and were fully conversant with and carried out the Owner's requirements as detailed in the "Master's Letters" in respect of keeping a safe navigational watch.

9. The First and Second Officers did not properly plot the ship's position whilst at anchor and apparently the Master did not require them to do so.

10. After the ship grounded the actions and decisions taken by the Master were in all respects correct. His decision to seek LARC assistance rather than use ship's survival craft minimised the potential for serious personal injury.

11. Most of the pollution caused was as a direct result of the grounding and occurred on 3 and 4 December. The Chief Engineer acted with great presence of mind in capping the oil hose before releasing it from the ship. Approximately 120 cu metres of diesel bunker oil and 5 cubic metres of lubricating oil were unaccounted for. The investigating officers concluded that after the grounding nothing could have been done to prevent the pollution that occurred from the NELLA DAN.

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Investigation completed prior to formation of MIIU

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