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**Casualty Circular No. 13/2013**

**Case of missing Cadet from a bulk carrier**

**1. What happened?**

On 06<sup>th</sup> May 2012 at 0815 hrs, a Deck Cadet, 21 years of age, was reported missing from a bulk carrier while the vessel was in the Coral Sea, en- route from Gladstone, Australia to Sakaide, Japan.

**2. How it happened?**

**2.1** The vessel had sailed out from Gladstone on 4<sup>th</sup> May 2012 at 0636 hrs. On 5<sup>th</sup> May 2012, the Cadet was on the bridge watch from 1800 to 2000 hrs, with the chief officer. After the watch, the Cadet was asked to obtain signatures of all the crew on the overtime papers. He obtained signatures of all the crew and returned the papers to the 3<sup>rd</sup> officer. Nothing abnormal was reported about the Cadet's behavior or activity at the time.

**2.2** On the morning of 6<sup>th</sup>, the missing cadet along with the other cadet, was supposed to carry out general cleaning of the ship's office and upper deck alleyway for the accommodation inspection. At 0815 hrs, on 06<sup>th</sup> May 2012 he was reported to be missing when the other cadet could not locate him for duties assigned inside the accommodation. The ship was searched from 0820hrs to 1025hrs but the cadet could not be found.

**2.3** At 1030hrs, a distress alert was transmitted. At 1151 hrs, RCC Australia informed that a search and rescue had been initiated with three fixed wing aircrafts and instructed the vessel to follow reciprocal course for surface search. RCC Australia also

diverted six vessels in the vicinity, for the search and rescue. At 1155 hrs, the vessel was turned to her reciprocal course. The search was called off by RCC Australia on 07<sup>th</sup> May 2012, in the evening, in consultation with doctors who assessed that there were no further chances of survival.

**2.3** The Cadet had joined the ship on 17<sup>th</sup> April 2012 and had been on board for 19 days, at the time of the incident. During the investigation, nothing abnormal was reported about the cadet's behavior, the previous evening. He was described as a quiet and reserved person by other members of crew and reportedly had very limited interaction with his ship mates. During the search and inventory of the cadet's cabin, his mobile phone was checked and noted to have several sentimental incoming messages from friends. One particular message received on his mobile phone, indicated towards a personal relationship problem. None of the other crew members were aware of any personal issues affecting the Cadet.

**2.4** The investigation did not reveal any foul play. Neither did the search of the vessel and the belongings of the missing cadet, reveal any suicide note. The missing cadet was not given any job during the period he was last seen, till the time, he was reported missing.

### **3 Why it happened?**

**3.1** Although the results of the investigation are largely inconclusive, one of the messages received on his mobile phone indicated to a personal relationship problem. Seen along-with other messages on his phone, it would appear that the cadet may have been depressed due to personal relationship issues and this may have triggered him to take the most unfortunate step of jumping overboard.

**3.2** It is also possible that the Cadet had gone out on deck and slipped or stumbled on an obstruction while walking on deck near the ship side and fallen overboard, inadvertently. Several other causes can also be speculated because of which crew members can fall overboard, such as fishing while alongside or at anchor, checking for over side discharges, slips/trips on decks etc.

### **4 Lessons learnt.**

**4.1** The missing Cadet was reported to be a quiet and reserved person with limited interaction with his co-workers. Senior officers on board should take interest in the activities of junior staff, particularly trainees who choose not to interact with their co-workers and endeavor to improve their interaction with others on board. Social activities and interaction amongst staff on board should be encouraged to avoid such incidents.

**4.2** Ship owners/managers/operators should implement procedures to ensure that crew members do not go out on open decks during hours of darkness or outside work hours. Procedures should exist to ensure that the crew mandatorily inform a responsible officer or the Bridge, before venturing out on deck at these times.

**4.3** Ship owners/managers/operators should carry out risk assessments and identify potential hazards that exist on board due to which crew members are likely to fall overboard. Appropriate control measures should be implemented to mitigate the consequences of identified hazards by way of procedures, physical barriers, highlighting of obstructions or design changes as appropriate.



(Capt. Harish Khatri)

**Dy. Director General of Shipping [Tech]**