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Case of missing 3rd Officer from an Oil tanker

1. What happened?

On 27th May 2011 at 0800hrs, a 3rd officer, 30 years of age, was reported to be missing when he did not turn up for his bridge watch. Vessel was coasting the west coast of Australia, en-route from Kwinana, Australia to Singapore. At this time, the weather conditions were reported to be slight seas, low swell and wind ESE, Wind force 4.

2. How it happened?

2.1 Vessel had sailed from Kwinana, Australia on 25th May 2011, destined for Singapore. The 3rd Officer was reported to have had his dinner at 1800 hrs, on the evening of 26th May 2011. He was on bridge watch from 2000-2400 hrs. During this watch, he was generally reported to be quiet, was seen to be working on the computer, sitting in the pilot chair or engaged in routine bridge watch duties, as per the duty A.B. 3rd officer and the A.B had briefly conversed about the weather as both of them had experienced bad weather in the same location, earlier. The 3rd Officer had commented as to how difficult it would be to rescue someone in bad weather and also talked about a bad experience, he had when launching the lifeboat in bad weather when he had sustained an

injury. The 3rd Officer also commented that he considered this to be his second life.

2.2 On 27th May, the 3rd Officer was relieved by the 2nd Officer at 0010 hrs. As the 2nd Officer was late for his watch, the 0000-0400 duty A.B was with the 3rd Officer for some time and got a chance to speak to him. The 3rd Officer asked him about the case of beer, which he had gifted to the crew, for which, the A.B thanked him. After handing over the watch to the 2nd Officer, the 3rd Officer went down and later came up to the bridge, at 0045 hrs, to pick up a can of Coke from the refrigerator. At this time, the 3rd officer and 2nd Officer had a casual conversation and the 3rd Officer had told him that he was watching a movie, 'No one killed Jessica'. He left the bridge after taking the can of Coke. This was the last time that the 3rd officer was seen on board.

2.3 The next morning on 27th May, when the 3rd Officer did not report for watch at 0800hrs, the First officer telephoned his cabin but did not receive a response. The 3rd Officer's cabin and, subsequently, the entire ship was searched till 0830 hrs but the 3rd Officer was not found.

2.4 At 0845 hrs, vessel was turned to her reciprocal course for search in water. The search was carried out with the assistance of another merchant vessel and Australian SAR craft. The search was temporarily suspended at 1900 hrs and later resumed at 0800 hrs, the next day. The merchant vessel was released at 2100 hrs on 27th May whereas SAR aircrafts continued the search till the MRCC discontinued search at 1815 hrs on 28th May 2011 due to darkness and also since by this time, the chances of survival were very low. The Vessel continued with the search operations till 0025hrs on 29th May 2011.

2.5 The vessel's messman informed that the 3rd Officer did not eat his breakfast on the morning of 27th. He also reported that the 3rd Officer's bed appeared unused when he had gone to clean his cabin.

2.6 The 3rd Officer was reported to be hard working, co-operative, sober and had cordial relations with everyone on board. Nothing unusual was reported about his behavior the previous day, until the time he was last seen. A fortnight before the incident, the 3rd officer was heard shouting over the satellite phone, as if quarrelling with someone.

2.7 During the investigation, it was reported that one of the alleyway entrances door was found unlatched, on the morning of the incident. The

investigation did not reveal any foul play, neither did the search of the vessel and the belongings of the 3rd Officer, reveal any information/evidence which can conclude that the 3rd officer may have jumped overboard. The 3rd Officer was not known to be involved in any job during the period he was last seen, till he was reported missing.

3 Why it happened?

3.1 The information obtained from the vessel is inconclusive with regards to the reason for disappearance of the 3rd officer. The reasons for disappearance of the 3rd officer can only be speculated to be a) that the 3rd Officer went out on deck and inadvertently fell overboard due to an accidental slip while standing near the ship side or b) that the 3rd Officer may have taken the most unfortunate step of committing suicide by jumping overboard due to the emotional stress due to certain inter personal issues with family/friends ashore.

4 Lessons learnt.

4.1 Hazards of moving carelessly on open decks should be highlighted to crew members on board, at regular intervals, even in the case of experienced ship staff. Complacency and overconfidence in case of experienced ship staff can also lead to accidents.

4.2 Staff on board should be aware that personal relationship issues can be highly distressing and given the large geographical separation, involved in the marine profession, it may not always be possible to immediately resolve issues in case of complications. The marine profession requires a high degree of discipline and a high level of personal integrity, is paramount in order to be able to perform in a professional manner.

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.



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