



Bahamas Maritime Authority

**Report of the investigation into
the Grounding of the
Cement Carrier
“CEMCON
at Crabbs Channel, Antigua
on
23 October 1999**

The Bahamas Maritime Authority investigates incidents at sea for the sole purpose of discovering any lessons which may be learned with a view to preventing any repetition. It is not the purpose of the investigation to establish liability or to apportion blame, except in so far as emerges as part of the process of investigating that incident.

It should be noted that the Bahamas Merchant Shipping Act, Para 170 (2) requires officers of a ship involved in an accident to answer an Inspector's questions fully and truly. If the contents of a report were subsequently submitted as evidence in court proceedings relating to an accident this could offend the principle that a person cannot be required to give evidence against himself. The Bahamas Maritime Authority makes this report available to any interested parties on the strict understanding that it will not be used as evidence in any court proceedings anywhere in the world.

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SUMMARY

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- 1.1 CEMCON approached the port of Crabbs, Antigua during the late afternoon of 23 October 1999. On arrival outside the approach channel, the Pilot advised the Master that the transit of the channel could be made before the onset of darkness.
- 1.2 The approach channel to the berth was marked by two buoys that did not conform to any accepted buoyage system. A transit was commenced at dead slow ahead and followed a track, on the Pilot's advice, that passed outside the channel apparently marked by the two buoys. As the vessel passed the first buoy ran aground at 1812.
- 1.3 This report concludes that the prime cause of the grounding was a sequence of misguided advice given to the Master by the Pilot in addition to the channel not being marked by a recognisable system of buoyage and the buoys that were in place were not marked on any chart that was available to the Master
- 1.4 The vessel remained around for 6½ days after which it was re-floated with no major damage, no pollution and no injuries to any person.

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PARTICULARS OF VESSEL

- 2.1 CEMCON is a cement carrier registered at Nassau, Bahamas, of welded steel construction having a raised forecastle and poop. The accommodation and machinery spaces were situated aft. She had the following principal particulars:
- Official Number - 729595
 - IMO Number - 7914262
 - Length overall - 106.81 metres
 - Length BP - 97.66 metres
 - Breadth - 15.80 metres
 - Depth - 8.72 metres
 - Gross Tonnage - 3,875 tons
 - Net Tonnage - 1,866 tons
 - Deadweight - 6,174 tonnes
 - Call Sign - C6OP7
- 2.2 She is powered by Deutz type RBV12M350 main engine that develops 3,236 kW (4,400 bhp) and which drives a single fixed bladed propeller. She has four main generators that developed a total of 1,504 kW and is fitted with forward mounted transverse thruster.
- 2.3 The cargo is carried in eight holds that are arranged in four pairs, port and starboard, each side of the centre line.
- 2.4 The vessel was built in 1981 at Ast. Construcciones SA, Factoria de Rios, Vigo, Spain and was formerly named “Galizano.” At the time of the incident she was owned by Norship AS, Norway and managed by Kristian Gerhard Jebsen Skipsrederi AS, Norway.
- 2.5 The vessel was first registered in the Bahamas in 1997 and was entered with Lloyd’s Register Classification Society. At the time she complied with the all statutory and international requirements and certification.
- 2.6 “CEMCON” was last subjected to a Bahamas Maritime Authority Annual Inspection at Barbados on 11 May 1999. There were no deficiencies noted.

NARRATIVE OF EVENTS

All times noted in this narrative are given in the style of the standard 24 hour clock without additional annotation and as local time in Antigua, which was utc minus 4 hours. Other timing is noted in brackets.

- 3.1 The cement carrier CEMCON had departed from Roseau, Dominica at 0500 23 October 1999 bound for Crabbs, Antigua. She approached the arrival port after 1700 that same evening boarding a Pilot at 1715. The weather at the time of the incident was fine and clear with calm seas although the incident occurred at the fast fading evening twilight.
- 3.2 The Master asked the Pilot if there was sufficient time to reach the berth before darkness to which a positive reply was given. During the approach to berth at Crabbs, Antigua the bridge of CEMCON was manned by the Master, Pilot, Chief Engineer and an Able Seaman / helmsman. It was reported that there were two buoys that marked the approach channel. They were, however, uncharted, poorly painted and improperly marked (not in accordance with either IALA system.) It was also noted that once the final approach in the channel was started it was impossible to turn around and return to the entrance.
- 3.3 The Pilot advised the Master, when at the mouth of the channel, that he thought that the two buoys were misplaced and that he was having difficulty identifying the original positions of the buoys in the fading evening twilight. The Master observed that it was also difficult to see the shallows that he was told were normally visible from the bridge of incoming ships. The approach was being directed by the Pilot, who had advised the Master and instructed the course, to take the vessel about 20 or 30 metres outside of the buoys in the channel. The main engine running at dead slow ahead. After passing the first of the two buoys, at 1812, 23 October 1999, the vessel ran aground.
- 3.4 The Master reported that the vessel's track had been in accordance with the Pilot's advice.
- 3.5 Plans and operations to lighten the vessel commenced immediately which resulted in the successful refloating, 6½ days later, at 0815, 30 October 1999.
- 3.6 There were no reported injuries to any person or pollution into the seas. The vessel was examined by the Classification Society on 30 and 31 October 1999 and a Provisional, Interim Certificate of Class was issued containing a "Condition of Class" that the vessel be examined at the forthcoming dry dock. The vessel discharged her cargo and continued her voyage.

ANALYSIS

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- 4.1 The approach to Crabbs, Antigua, is not marked by a recognised system of buoyage. There were two irregular navigational buoys that were not charted and, therefore, without detailed local knowledge, could not have their position verified by the Master of the vessel's crew.
- 4.2 It is understood that this berth should only be approached in clear daylight. There are shallows that show through the water's surface to an observer on the incoming ship that would not be visible at any other time. It was also stated that the Pilot reported to the Master that at twilight there was insufficient clarity to ascertain the precise relative position of the two navigational buoys, if indeed their position had been accurately known beforehand.
- 4.3 In both of the above respects, the engagement of a local Pilot by the Master of a visiting ship is essential. Having made such an engagement the advice given by that Pilot has to be relied upon, as there is in effect no other detailed information to take reference upon.
- 4.4 In this incident the Master followed the advice of his Pilot and, in manoeuvring the vessel outside the apparent channel, as indicated the buoy, that he was advised had been misplaced, the vessel ran aground at minimum speed.
- 4.5 When a vessel visits a remote port with inadequate navigational infrastructure the only source of information available to a Master is that from the locally engaged Pilot. In this case that advice was flawed and inaccurate. The failure was in four particular areas:
 - The channel was not marked by a recognisable system of buoyage.
 - The two buoys that were in the channel were not marked on any chart that was available to the Master.
 - The advice given to the Master by the Pilot that the approach to the berth could be made before the onset of darkness was flawed in that the loss of ambient light at twilight that evening was sufficient to mask other natural features.
 - The track taken by the vessel, as requested by the Pilot, led directly to the vessel running aground.

CONCLUSIONS

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- 5.1 CEMCON approached the port of Crabbs, Antigua during the late afternoon of 23 October 1999. On arrival outside the approach channel, a Pilot who boarded at 1715, advised the Master that the transit of the channel could be made before the onset of darkness.
- 5.2 The approach channel to the berth was marked by two buoys that did not conform to any accepted buoyage system.
- 5.3 Approach to the berth through the entry channel was made at dead slow ahead and followed a track, on the Pilot's advice, that passed outside the channel apparently marked by the two buoys. Passing the first buoy the vessel ran aground at 1812.
- 5.4 The main cause of the grounding was misguided advice given to the Master by the Pilot. Other accumulative and specific causes were:
- The channel was not marked by a recognisable system of buoyage.
 - The two buoys that were in the channel were not marked on any chart that was available to the Master.
 - The Pilot's advice that the approach to the berth could be made before the onset of darkness was flawed in that the loss of ambient light at twilight that evening was sufficient to mask other natural features.
 - The track taken by the vessel, as requested by the Pilot, led directly to the vessel running aground.
- 5.5 The vessel remained around for 6½ days after which it was re-floated with no major damage, no pollution and no injuries to any person.

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RECOMMENDATIONS

- 6.1 It is understood that after communication between the Managers of the vessel and the local port authorities the marking of the channel was to be improved by the provision and installation of six, IALA standard navigation buoys.
- 6.2 The contents of this report are to be made known to the Maritime Authorities of Antigua.