

# MAIB

MARINE ACCIDENT INVESTIGATION BRANCH

## FLYER TO THE SHIPPING INDUSTRY

### *SICHEM MELBOURNE*

#### CONTACT WITH OIL REFINERY MOORING STRUCTURES

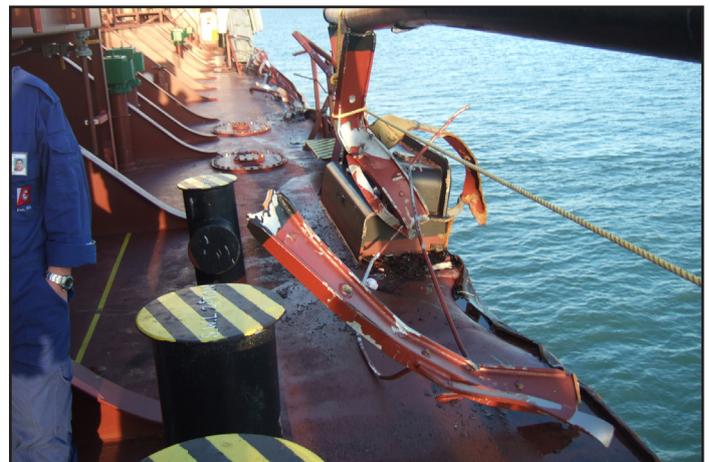
25 FEBRUARY 2008

On the evening of 25 February 2008 the product carrier, *Sichem Melbourne*, sustained damage, and caused damage to the mooring structures as she departed her berth at Coryton Oil Refinery on the River Thames estuary. Fortunately, the broadside contact with a mooring dolphin prevented the vessel from striking a tanker which was discharging cargo on a neighbouring jetty.

At departure, *Sichem Melbourne* was lying port side to the jetty, heading downstream, stern towards the last of the ebb tide. A light wind was blowing onto her starboard quarter. Before departure, a brief exchange of information between the vessel's master and the pilot took place, but this did not include an explanation, by the pilot, of the manoeuvre he intended to take the vessel clear of the jetty. He felt that such an explanation, to an experienced mariner, was unnecessary. The pilot assumed that the master would recognise that the only way to take the vessel off the mooring was by coming astern into the last of the ebb tide, until clear of the berth. The master, however, was of the opinion that if the vessel needed to come off the berth astern, then a tug would have been employed to assist, and none had been ordered. He thought that the vessel would be taken off ahead, using the bow thruster to help lift the ship transversely into the river, but did not share his thoughts with the pilot.



Damage to *Sichem Melbourne*'s  
sheer strake and deck edge



Deck edge damage

On commencement of departure, the pilot gave instructions to come ahead on the forward springs with hard port rudder, intending to create a wedge of water between the ship and the jetty, before coming astern. When a small angle had developed between the ship's stern and the jetty the master applied bow thrust to starboard to prevent the vessel leaning against the jetty; this caused the pilot to request the engine to be stopped to take the strain off the forward springs. It was the master's understanding, at this point, that the pilot was now ready for the bow springs to be let go and so instructed, in Russian, the springs to be cast off, allowing the ship to move forward before the current. Combined effects of increased starboard bow thrust and wind on the starboard quarter caused the ship's port quarter to fall back and scour the jetty, before she cleared the structure. Once clear of the jetty, the pilot attempted to retrieve his original plan of getting the stern outwards by applying port wheel and more ahead power. The master, however, was under the impression that the pilot was trying to lift the vessel bodily into the river, and applied more starboard thrust to assist. The following tidal stream prevented transverse lifting of the ship and she was carried down onto other mooring structures, causing considerable damage as she did so.

During attempts to recover the situation, numerous, rapid, ahead/astern movements were placed on the main engine, causing the engine's management system to shut down the engine. Fortunately, it was quickly restarted, allowing the vessel to narrowly clear a tanker on an adjoining jetty.

The MAIB has investigated and highlighted numerous accidents resulting from poor communications; this accident again highlights dangers created by lack of appropriate interaction between the bridge team and a pilot.



Damage to mooring structure

#### **Safety Issues:**

- There was an inadequate pre-departure exchange of information between master and pilot before commencing unmooring operations, with both making an assumption about the other's intentions. **Nothing should be left to chance; what is glaringly obvious to one person may not be readily apparent to others. Simple diagrams or sketches can often clarify ambiguity.**
- Communications between members of the bridge team were made in Russian, thus isolating the pilot from the bridge team. **Full integration of the pilot and bridge team can only be achieved by communicating in a shared language.**

Further details on the accident and the subsequent investigation can be found in the MAIB's investigation report, which is posted on its website:

[www.maib.gov.uk](http://www.maib.gov.uk)

Alternatively, a copy of the report will be sent on request, free of charge.

Marine Accident Investigation Branch  
Carlton House  
Carlton Place  
Southampton, SO15 2DZ

Telephone 023 8039 5500

Email: [maib@dft.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:maib@dft.gsi.gov.uk)

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