

SYNOPSIS

The 15,145gt Bermuda registered container vessel *CP Valour*, grounded in a bay off the NW coast of the island of Faial, Azores, on 9 December 2005. The next day, in worsening weather conditions, the vessel's hull began to fracture, eventually causing substantial pollution to the coast of Faial, and to the islands of Pico and São Jorge. The subsequent salvage operation was unsuccessful and she was declared a constructive total loss about 3 weeks later.

The vessel had been on a liner voyage from Montreal, Canada, to Valencia, Spain, when one of her main engine cylinder units was found to be overheating due to a cooling water leak. The vessel continued on her planned track towards the central Azores at slow speed, while the master and chief engineer decided on the best course of action. They decided to head for a bay, which they assessed would be sheltered from a heavy SW'ly swell, in order to make the necessary repairs. A cylinder head needed to be lifted and calm water was essential. The master discussed the proposed action with the managers who then further discussed the proposal with the owners. Agreement was reached and the master was granted permission to proceed.

The bay contained a charted designated anchorage, but the largest scale British Admiralty chart of the island was of 1:175,000 scale. Such a chart is not normally considered suitable for close inshore navigation. There was only a single sounding of 36 metres in the bay.

The passage planning for the vessel's approach into the bay was rudimentary. The bridge and anchoring team had different views on how the approach and anchoring operation was to be carried out. In the event, the master did not use the bridge team to its full capability, took on too much himself and became overloaded.

The vessel grounded at a speed of 6 knots while the master was manoeuvring the vessel in the bay in search of calm water. The engine telegraph had been inadvertently left on half ahead for several minutes.

Following the grounding, the initial salvage attempts by a local harbour tug were unsuccessful. The vessel was driven further aground the next day as the wind veered to blow directly into the bay. The 1172 MT of heavy fuel oil and 118 MT of gas oil onboard began leaking in to the sea.

A powerful salvage tug was on scene about 24 hours after the initial grounding but her attempts to re-float the vessel were also unsuccessful.

CP Valour was abandoned on 25 December 2005, after all the IMO classified hazardous cargo had been safely removed, along with 450 cubic metres of oil and water from her bunker tanks. Operations to remove the vessel from the beach began in the summer of 2006.

CP Valour's master, and the OOW at the time of the grounding had both attended bridge team management training courses run by the ship's manager. That this training was not put to good use, in the practices adopted on board *CP Valour*, raises questions about the effectiveness of the ship owner's and ship manager's auditing processes.

A recommendation has been addressed to the ship managers, and the lessons to be learned from the accident will be widely circulated to ships, shipowners and managers.