

## SYNOPSIS

### Narrative:

All times are ships time (UTC +1)

At 2342 on 10 October 2005, the British registered general cargo vessel *Lerrix* ran aground off the Darss peninsular in the Baltic Sea. The single hold vessel was carrying a cargo of second hand vehicles destined for Klaipeda in Lithuania. Twenty five minutes later the master re-floated the vessel using astern propulsion, narrowly avoiding a second grounding as he did so.

It was the master's first full command with the company. Earlier the same day, the vessel had transited the Kiel Canal, and the master reported that his rest period between midnight and 0600 had been disturbed by nervous tension brought on by the vessel's approach to, and navigation down the River Elbe. During the afternoon, the master suffered a second disturbed rest period while transiting the canal, making several visits to the bridge to check progress and, finally, to pilot the vessel outbound from the canal lock to sea.

At about 2230, the lookout requested and was granted permission to proceed below to complete cleaning the galley. A short while later, the master fell asleep in the bridge chair. As a result, the vessel missed a planned alteration of course at 2242 within the TSS and continued on a 090 heading at 10.5 knots until grounding at 2342. The vessel's movements were monitored by Warnemunde VTS and, when it became apparent that the vessel was not following the prescribed route, the VTS operators made several attempts to contact *Lerrix* by VHF, but received no response.

When the mate arrived on the bridge at midnight the master, who had woken seconds before, was seen at the engine control lever with maximum astern power set. The general alarm was sounded, soundings were taken and at about 0007 the vessel floated free and proceeded to anchor close by. The master was breathalysed for alcohol consumption – the test proved negative.

### Analysis:

Although the individual voyages onboard *Lerrix* were about 3 to 4 days long, and the time in port between voyages 1 and 3 days, fatigue was a contributory factor in the accident. Working a 6-on/6-off routine, the master was unable to fully carry out his command obligations without disruption to his 6 hours of rest time. Furthermore, the poor quality of rest achieved in the master's two previous designated rest periods directly contributed to this particular grounding.

Although a lookout had been present on the bridge earlier in the evening, it was standard practice onboard *Lerrix* for the OOW to determine at the commencement of a lookout's watch whether his presence was required. Had the lookout remained on the bridge in accordance with STCW instructions, interaction between the two would have made it unlikely that the master would have fallen asleep, and ultimately the grounding could have been avoided.

A watch alarm, fitted to comply with a previous flag administration's requirements, was found to be inoperative. Had the watch alarm been available to the OOW, and set by him when the lookout departed from the bridge, this accident could probably have been avoided.

During the investigation, it emerged that the master was using a portable GPS connected to a personal laptop computer, running a pirated navigation package as his primary source of navigation information. The pirated programme, obtained from the internet in 1999, had not been updated and the alarm functions were inoperative.

#### Conclusions:

*Lerrix* grounded because the master, who was alone on the bridge, had fallen asleep and missed an alteration of course.

It is likely that the master was fatigued at the time of the grounding. He was one of two watchkeeping officers working 6-on/6-off, and his rest periods prior to the accident had been disturbed.

His decision to allow the lookout to leave the bridge, removed the single most important barrier to prevent the accident occurring. However, having made the decision, the grounding could still have been avoided if the watch alarm had been fully functional and utilised.

#### Recommendations (abridged):

The Chamber of Shipping is recommended to:

- Impress upon ship owners, operators and managers the importance of addressing fatigue; and, to reiterate that masters have command obligations beyond watchkeeping that can significantly erode their scheduled rest.

Rix Shipping Limited is recommended to:

- Establish a policy to guard against the inappropriate use of personal navigational aids carried by crew members.