

SYNOPSIS

Baltiyskiy-107 was on passage from Riga, Latvia, to Poole UK with a cargo of sawn timber and bundles of pallet timber. At 1230 on Sunday 10 September 2000, when about 70 miles north-north-west of the Hook of Holland, a seaman who was working in the forecastle, went aft, supposedly to the toilet. About 15 to 20 minutes later, the bosun who was also working in the forecastle, went aft to see how the rest of the deck crew were getting on with their work. When he passed No 2 hold on the port side, he noticed the cargo cover lashings were undone. On closer inspection he found the hatch cover to No 2 hold access shaft wedged open, and saw the seaman's body at the bottom of the shaft. He called for assistance, and with the help of other crew members, mounted a rescue operation while wearing self-contained breathing apparatus (SCBA).

Despite resuscitation attempts, the seaman could not be revived. His body was then stripped, packed in ice, laid on the main deck outside the accommodation and covered up. Both the Russian and UK authorities were informed and *Baltiyskiy-107* continued on her passage to Poole where she was met by Dorset Police (Poole CID). They notified the Marine Accident Investigation Branch (MAIB) that day. The vessel was scheduled to arrive alongside in Poole at 1400 but, due to port congestion, had to anchor off. While anchored, the police boarded to examine the scene and to carry out a preliminary investigation, which they completed at about 2045. They then left the vessel, taking the deceased with them.

At 1000 on Tuesday 12 September, *Baltiyskiy-107* moored alongside the tanker berth in Poole Harbour with the MAIB inspector in attendance. Before unloading, atmospheric tests were taken on the access shaft to No 2 hold and showed very low levels of oxygen, together with high levels of carbon monoxide. With police, fire brigade, and HM customs in attendance, the deck cargo was removed and the holds slowly opened. Apart from a distinctive smell, there was no evidence of fire or any chemical reaction either in the access shaft or among the timber in No 2 hold.

The Poole timber was discharged and the vessel proceeded to Goole for the final discharge. A surveyor was present throughout the final discharge but again, apart from the distinctive smell in No 2 hold, nothing significant was found. On completion of discharge, the vessel sailed for St Petersburg, Russia, her home port.

Further tests carried out on a timber sample taken from the affected area showed no evidence of any unusual preservatives or chemicals.

There were no technical or ship operational reasons why the seaman chose to enter the shaft, and the evidence indicates that he had received no instructions from the bosun, or any officer on board, to do so. It seems, therefore, that it was purely a personal decision for an unknown reason.

Cause of death was most probably due to the low oxygen and high carbon monoxide levels present in the access shaft to No 2 hold at the time the victim entered the shaft.