

## SYNOPSIS

At 0402 (UTC) on 7 November 1999, *Dole America*, a Liberian-registered refrigerated cargo vessel, collided with the Nab Tower in the eastern approaches to The Solent. The accident was reported to the MAIB, and an investigation was started the following day.

The vessel left her berth at Portsmouth at 0250, and proceeded under pilotage to the vicinity of the New Grounds buoy, about 2 miles to the north of the Nab Tower, where the pilot disembarked. Having dropped the pilot, the master began to increase speed, and ordered port helm to set a course to pass about 2 cables to the east of the Nab. As the vessel approached the tower, the master saw what he thought was a red light of another vessel at close range on the starboard bow and presenting a risk of collision. He ordered starboard helm before going to the front of the bridge to confirm what he thought he had seen. The second officer, who was the only other person on the bridge apart from the helmsman, joined him and confirmed the presence of a red light and said he saw a second to starboard of the first. The master then ordered hard to starboard helm.

When no further lights were seen ahead, he ordered hard to port helm, still with the intention of passing to the east of the Nab Tower. From his position by the window at the front of the bridge, the master was unaware of the vessel's heading and her exact position in relation to the tower. He failed to take full account of the advance and transfer of his intended actions, given that the helm was hard to starboard and *Dole America* was swinging to starboard at the time of his order.

Shortly afterwards, *Dole America* collided with the tower's foundation, bounced off, and then made contact a second time. She was damaged forward on the starboard side by Nos 2 and 3 holds and aft below the main deck but above the waterline. She started to take water and developed a 12° starboard list. The pilot subsequently re-boarded and, with the agreement of the master, ran the vessel aground on Horse Tail bank, approximately 2 cables to the north of the Dean Tail buoy.

The immediate cause of the collision was the master's inappropriate and unquestioned helm order to port. Contributory causes included his perceived need to alter course to starboard for what he took to be a crossing vessel, his plan to pass to the east of the tower, his lack of situational awareness, and the probability that fatigue and stress might have adversely affected his perception and decision-making abilities.

Recommendations are addressed to Reefership Marine Services (Dole Fresh Fruit International Ltd) with respect to pilotage passage planning, bridge manning and bridge teamwork.