

SYNOPSIS

This accident was notified to the Marine Accident Investigation Branch (MAIB) by the Maritime Rescue Sub-Centre Solent at 0430 on Thursday 18 March 1999. The investigation started later the same day and was undertaken by Mr A Rushton.

Pride of Le Havre is a 33,336 gross tonnage passenger/ro-ro cargo vessel operating a regular ferry service between Portsmouth and Le Havre. She is registered in Portsmouth, UK and is managed by P&O European Ferries (Portsmouth) Limited.

The vessel is fitted with bow and stern doors and is capable of carrying 590 cars and 1600 passengers. Propulsion is by four diesel engines driving through two controllable pitch propellers. Two transverse thrust units are fitted forward.

The vessel had sailed from A&P's King George V dry dock, Southampton just after midnight on Thursday 18 March, for engine trials off the south coast of the Isle of Wight. The intention was that after these trials, *Pride of Le Havre* would berth at Portsmouth, and re-enter service later that day.

Shortly after passing the Nab Tower, the bridge fire alarm activated at 0425, indicating a fire in the machinery spaces. At about the same time, a motorman reported to the engineer watchkeeper that a fire had broken out on the starboard thermal oil pump. While initial attempts were being made to put the fire out using portable extinguishers, the chief engineer was called and the bridge informed of the situation. On confirming that the initial attempt had failed, the chief engineer advised the bridge that he proposed to use the Halon total flooding extinguishing system. The general alarm was sounded and the main engines stopped. The engine room was evacuated and sealed, with Halon being released at 0437. The coastguard and owners were told of the situation with a message being broadcast to local shipping. The coastguard activated "SOLFIRE" as a precautionary measure. The crew were mustered, fire fighting procedures and routines carried out, with engine room temperatures being regularly monitored. Brittany ferry *Duc de Normandie* stood by but was later relieved by the Bembridge lifeboat.

An IOW fire brigade team boarded at 0641 with re-entry to machinery space at 0958. Funnel vents were re-opened at 1030 with a fire extinguishing foam blanket laid down in the main machinery space. Ventilation of the engine room started at 1210 with full electrical power available by 1330. Under the direction of the chief engineer, the engine room crew started systematically checking and preparing machinery until, at 1750, No 4 main engine was started followed shortly afterwards by No 1 main engine.

Pride of Le Havre sailed under her own power back to Southampton where she re-entered the dry dock berth to undergo examination and repair. She was all fast

alongside at 0033 on Friday 19 March 1999.