

1. SUMMARY

The pelagic trawler, ANTARES left her home port of Carradale on 19 November 1990 to fish in Bute Sound, northeast of the Isle of Arran, with a crew of four. At the same time the Trafalgar-class submarine, HMS TRENCHANT, was operating in the Clyde exercise area. She was acting as a training vessel for officers on the submarine command course and the complement included the Commanding Officer of the course and four student officers. The submarine was taking part in a series of exercises for the final sea phase of the course. The procedure for each exercise series was that conduct of TRENCHANT was passed by her Captain to the Course Commander who in turn gave charge of the submarine to the student to be assessed. The student, designated Duty Captain, then carried out all the functions of command while being observed by the Course Commander.

On 22 November shortly after 0200 hrs TRENCHANT was in Bute Sound, submerged at a depth of 60 metres and steering a course of northwest at about six knots. An exercise series had just been completed and the Duty Captain was preparing to hand over to the next student, who was with him in the control room. The Captain and Course Commander were in the wardroom, discussing the Duty Captain's performance. TRENCHANT was detecting surface vessels by means of her passive sonar.

At 0217 hrs TRENCHANT had a close sonar contact to starboard and turned to port to avoid it. Banging noises were then heard in the submarine and it was assumed by those in the control room that a fishing trawl had been snagged. On regaining periscope depth, two fishing vessels were seen, apparently engaged in normal fishing. TRENCHANT surfaced at about 0300 hrs and a trawl wire was discovered fouled on the submarine casing. Attempts by the submarine to contact the two fishing vessels by radio were unsuccessful. Since everything on the surface appeared normal, TRENCHANT reported the incident to Faslane base and continued with her exercises.

Later in the morning it was reported that ANTARES was missing and a full scale search operation, coordinated by Clyde Coastguard, was mounted. The wreck of ANTARES was located on the sea bed in the early afternoon, the position was where the collision with the trawl had occurred. The wreck was salvaged on 10 December. It was found that the starboard trawl warp had parted and the broken end matched the section of wire found on TRENCHANT's casing.

The bodies of the four crew of ANTARES have been recovered.

The main findings of the investigation are that the accident was caused by a partial breakdown in both the structure and the standards of watchkeeping on board TRENCHANT, following the completion of a command course exercise. Also the stowage position and securing arrangements of the inflatable liferaft on ANTARES were deficient, such that it failed to float free and inflate when the vessel sank.

Further, the delay of over eight hours prior to the mounting of a search operation was due to an incorrect report from TRENCHANT, which stated that although a trawl had been snagged, the fishing vessel involved was safe.