

1. SUMMARY

At 0535 hrs (UTC+2) on 3 June 1993 the Bermuda registered tanker BRITISH TRENT, 25,174 deadweight tonnes, loaded with a full cargo of gasoline, disembarked her pilot at the Pilot Station at the beginning of her voyage from Antwerp to Fiumicino in Italy. At the same time the Panama registered bulk carrier WESTERN WINNER, 30,396 deadweight tonnes, part loaded with copper dross, was approaching the Wandelaar Pilot Station inbound on a voyage from London to Vlissingen (Flushing).

The weather at the time was a north westerly wind force 3 with the visibility reduced by fog to between 50 and 200 metres. WESTERN WINNER was proceeding at a speed of 11.5 knots. BRITISH TRENT's speed increased after disembarking the pilot until it was 4 knots at 0542 hrs.

Both vessels were in the vicinity of the SW Akkaert Buoy which marks the south west end of Akkaert Bank. BRITISH TRENT was deemed to be of such a draught that she was not able to cross the bank and had to pass to the south of the buoy in order to proceed to the westbound traffic lane. WESTERN WINNER was proceeding along the eastbound traffic lane and also had to pass to the south of the buoy.

At 0543 hrs the vessels were in collision in a position 1.22 miles east of the SW Akkaert Buoy. Both vessels' hulls were opened up at their port fore-ends and the cargo which spilled from BRITISH TRENT immediately caught fire.

The result of the fire was that BRITISH TRENT had to be abandoned. Seven of the crew were taken off by pilot launches and the remainder of the crew expected to leave the vessel using the starboard lifeboat. This was frustrated when that side of the vessel became enveloped in smoke and flame forcing the crew to jump into the sea amongst patches of burning cargo. Twenty crew were rescued from the sea by the pilot launches but nine died as a result of smoke inhalation.

The fire on BRITISH TRENT was extinguished after she had lost about 3,600 tonnes of cargo, though there was no oil pollution. The remainder of the cargo was salvaged but the vessel was declared a constructive total loss and scrapped.

The crew of WESTERN WINNER suffered no fatalities or injuries.

The immediate cause of the collision was the failure of both vessels to comply with the International Regulations for the Prevention of Collisions at Sea in conditions of restricted visibility. Also the Master of WESTERN WINNER was unfamiliar with the area. A number of recommendations are made which, if implemented, should help to prevent recurrence of such an accident in the future.