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Ind-1
File MIN C-1338
27 August, 1945



MERCHANT MARINE
INSPECTION DIVISION

8-7
2-17
C-8

To: The Commandant (OMI)
Via: DCGO, 11ND
Subj: SS HELENA MODJESKA; oil spill

*Noted
JRS*

Forwarded, approved.

Lloyd B. Kennedy
LLOYD B. KENNEDY
Acting OIC, Marine Inspection

Ind-2
DCGO, 11ND (1)
12 September, 1945

To: The Commandant (OMI)

Forwarded, approved.

W. F. Tonle
W. F. TONLE

27 August, 1945

Addison & Elliot
ADDISON & ELLIOT
Lt. Comdr., USN
Senior Hearing Officer

UNITED STATES COAST GUARD

LONG BEACH 2, CALIF.



ADDRESS REPLY TO:
DISTRICT COAST GUARD OFFICER (omi)
ELEVENTH NAVAL DISTRICT
REFER TO FILE: MIN C-1338

27 August, 1945

To: The Commandant (OMI)

Via: 1. Acting OIC, Marine Inspection, 11ND
2. DCGO, 11ND

Subj: SS HELENA MODJESKA; oil spill

1. Pursuant to notification by the COTP that an oil spill had occurred on 18 August, 1945 from the SS HELENA MODJESKA at Berth 228E, Terminal Island, California, this Examining Officer boarded the vessel on the same date and place and made an investigation to determine the facts.

- PERSONS INTERVIEWED -

2. William H. Ball, First Mate, SS HELENA MODJESKA
E. O. Hall, Chief Engineer, SS HELENA MODJESKA
S. Sack, First Assistant Engineer, SS HELENA MODJESKA

- FINDINGS OF FACT -

3. The SS HELENA MODJESKA is a liberty freight vessel, Official No. 246904, 7176 gross tons. The vessel is operated by the Black Diamond Steamship Company for the War Shipping Administration.

4. On 18 August, 1945 the SS HELENA MODJESKA was at Berth #10, California Shipbuilding Corporation, Terminal Island, California, where minor repairs had been effected.

5. The vessel was ready to be shifted to berth 228E and was waiting for a pilot. The engine crew had been notified to get the machinery ready for shifting. At approximately 11:00 a.m. the chief engineer, E. O. Hall, and the first assistant engineer, S. Sack, were in the engine room warming up the main engine.

6. During the morning the port settling tank had been filled and oil was being pumped from No. 3 double bottom tank into the starboard settling tank. The chief engineer had lined up the valves and started the transfer fuel oil pump. Before starting to pump from No. 4 tank, the first assistant engineer gauged the starboard settling tank and found that there were 4,000 gallons of oil in the tank. He observed the pneumacator liquid level indicator and noted that that instrument also indicated a figure of 4,000 gallons of oil in the starboard settling tank. From time to time during

DCGO, LLND (omi)
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the next thirty minutes from 11:00 a.m. to 11:30 a.m., both the chief engineer and the first assistant engineer observed the pneumacator reading. The reading was changing slowly and indicated a reading of 6,000 gallons at 11:30. The first assistant engineer felt that the tank was filling too slowly and decided to sound the tank. He proceeded toward the port side of the boat deck for the purpose of sounding the tank, but before he reached the sounding pipe the tank overflowed on to the deck through an overboard discharge line. The first mate noticed the oil when it first began to overflow and called the engine room by means of the phone in the wheelhouse. However, the first assistant had shouted from the top of the engine room stairway and the pump was stopped. Before this could be done, however, approximately four or five barrels of oil were spilled on the dock and a portion of this oil went into the harbor waters. Every effort was made by the engine room crew to confine as much of the oil as possible to the dock.

- CONCLUSION -

7. The primary cause of the oil spill was due to a defective pneumacator liquid level indicator. The available evidence indicates that the officers in charge of pumping operations had observed reasonable precautions and had no way of knowing that the pneumacator was not functioning properly.

8. Both the chief and the first assistant engineers had been on the vessel only a few days and apparently were not familiar with the pumping capacity of the transfer fuel oil pump. There is a tendency on the part of engineers to place too much dependence on automatic liquid level indicators. In the present instance, however, the first assistant engineer had gauged the tank prior to starting pumping operations and was in the act of checking on the filling tank at the time it overflowed. Under the circumstances it was the decision of this Examining Officer not to take any action against either the chief or the first assistant engineers. Both men were advised to sound the tanks frequently in the future and not to depend entirely on the pneumacator liquid level indicator.

- RECOMMENDATION -

8. It is recommended that the case be closed.

J. C. Hunley

J. C. HUNLEY
Lt. Comdr., USCGR
Examining Officer

27 August, 1945
Approved:

Addison S. Elliot
ADDISON S. ELLIOT
Lt. Comdr., USCGR
Senior Hearing Officer