



National Transportation Safety Board

Marine Accident Brief

Allision of Offshore Supply Vessel *Tristan Janice* with Natural Gas Platform

Accident no.	DCA14LM007
Vessel name	<i>Tristan Janice</i>
Accident type	Allision
Location	Ship Shoal 119 W natural gas platform, Gulf of Mexico 28°49.4' N, 90°55.3' W
Date	February 18, 2014
Time	0712 central standard time (coordinated universal time – 6 hours)
Injuries	None
Damage	Platform: \$410,000 Vessel: \$135,000
Environmental damage	Release of more than 22,000 cubic ft of natural gas
Weather	Light wind, calm seas, restricted visibility due to fog. Temperatures at allision site unknown; air temperatures in Houma, Louisiana (54 miles* to the north-northeast) in the upper 60s.
Waterway information	Open waters of the Gulf of Mexico, about 54 miles south-southwest of Houma and about 85 miles southwest of New Orleans, Louisiana

About 0712 local time on February 18, 2014, the US-registered offshore supply vessel *Tristan Janice* allided with a natural gas production platform in the northern Gulf of Mexico, about 54 miles south-southwest of Houma, Louisiana. No one was injured and no water pollution resulted from the allision. However, the vessel and the platform sustained about \$545,000 in total damage, and a substantial amount of natural gas escaped into the atmosphere from a ruptured supply pipe.



Offshore supply vessel *Tristan Janice*. (Photo by cdag, www.marinetraffic.com)

* Unless otherwise noted, all miles in this report are nautical miles (1.15 statute miles).



Satellite image of south Louisiana and the northern Gulf of Mexico. The accident site is overlaid by a red triangle. (Background by Google Earth)

About 2230 on the evening before the accident, February 17, the *Tristan Janice* was shifted (moved) between berths near Golden Meadow, Louisiana. Four crewmembers were on board—a captain and a mate (both credentialed masters) and two deckhands. During the berth shifting, the captain had the conn, or navigational control, of the vessel.

According to crew statements, shortly after shifting berths, a brief watch turnover was held. During this turnover, the captain mentioned that the starboard engine throttle had a small air leak but that he did not think it was a serious problem. After the turnover, the mate took the conn, and at 2324, the *Tristan Janice* left Golden Meadow with company orders to proceed to Port Fourchon, Louisiana. On arriving at Port Fourchon, the vessel was to remain in the vicinity of the port overnight and then continue to sea at 0600 on February 18. However, the mate continued the transit and passed Port Fourchon, entering the open waters of the Gulf of Mexico at 0236 on February 18. The captain told investigators he did not know that the transit continued, as he was off duty and asleep at this time.

Although it could not be confirmed by data or crew statements, investigators believe that the steering on board the *Tristan Janice* was placed in autopilot mode about the time the vessel entered the open waters of the Gulf of Mexico.

The *Tristan Janice* was powered by twin diesel engines, each driving a propeller. Shortly after entering the Gulf of Mexico, the mate believed that the starboard engine was not maintaining full speed. He directed the on-duty deckhand to use a line to tie off the starboard engine throttle in the machinery space so that it would remain in the full-ahead speed position. This engine room alteration effectively removed control of the starboard engine throttle from the wheelhouse. Two crewmembers told the Coast Guard that the vessel owner, TRTB Inc., had tried

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to remedy the throttle problem a few days earlier but did not have the correct part. Investigators found no log book entry about the throttle problem, even though entries about faulty or unsafe equipment were required by TRTB's safety management system.

According to automatic identification system (AIS) data, between 0242 and 0623, the *Tristan Janice* followed a southwest course of about 233 degrees. The vessel speed was full ahead, between 8.6 and 9.7 knots. The on-duty deckhand told investigators that, at 0615, the mate directed him to wake the other two crewmembers so that they could assume the watch. At 0623, according to AIS data, the vessel altered course to 260 degrees, or about west-southwest.

The captain told investigators he entered the wheelhouse at 0635 and found no one there. He said visibility was poor at the time—about 0.125 miles—due to heavy fog. He then spotted the mate, who was on the after deck, and walked aft to talk to him. The mate told the captain he was checking on an engine vibration he had detected; however, he did not inform the captain about the starboard engine throttle he had directed the deckhand to tie off in the engine room.

Shortly after the discussion about the engine vibration, the captain and the mate entered the wheelhouse, where, until 0700, they discussed log book entries, why the vessel did not stop at Port Fourchon as originally directed, and operating in fog. They did not discuss whether to post a lookout in the fog. The captain told investigators he then walked to the port side of the wheelhouse to smoke, and when he turned back to face the mate, the mate had exited the wheelhouse without a formal watch turnover. The captain then assumed control of the vessel and adjusted the radar and AIS.

According to AIS data, between 0653 and 0711, the vessel's course was 280 degrees, or about west-northwest, and its speed was 9.5 knots. Visibility remained poor, but no lookout was posted. Sometime between 0700 and 0711, the mate returned to the wheelhouse where he and the captain discussed vessel traffic in the vicinity. No mention was made about oil or gas production platforms along the route. The captain told investigators he reduced the vessel speed; however, AIS data showed that the vessel maintained its speed.

The captain told investigators he then looked up from the radar and saw a gas platform about 200 yards ahead. He said he tried to slow the vessel but stated the speed “was entirely too fast for [the] clutch.” He said he tried to avoid the allision by turning the vessel while “throwing it into reverse,” but his turn was initially unsuccessful because the vessel was in autopilot and he had trouble disengaging it. Within 15–30 seconds, he managed to take the vessel out of autopilot. He placed it in manual steering and altered course, but his actions were too late to avoid the platform. About 0712, the *Tristan Janice* allided with the platform—Ship Shoal 119 W, which was unmanned at the time—at a speed of 9.3 knots, according to AIS data.

Shortly after the allision, with the starboard engine still engaged in the full-ahead position, the two deckhands entered the engine room and removed the line tied to the starboard engine throttle. About 0714, 2 minutes after the allision, the *Tristan Janice*'s course and speed were east-northeast at 74.9 degrees and 1.3 knots, according to AIS data. About 0730, without reporting the allision to the authorities, the crew navigated the vessel west-northwest toward Freshwater City, Louisiana, at 9 knots.

The platform sustained structural damage and its gas service line ruptured. The rupture caused a release of more than 22,000 cubic feet of natural gas into the atmosphere and a 20-day cessation of operations at Ship Shoal 119 W and neighboring platforms.

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Displaced rails, catwalk, and risers on natural gas production platform Ship Shoal 119 W. (Photo provided by the Coast Guard)

The *Tristan Janice* sustained fractures and indentations to the bow area, broken welds to the port engine exhaust, and a damaged port engine forward main seal.



Damaged bow of the *Tristan Janice*. (Photo provided by the Coast Guard)

Crew statements were unclear as to whether the captain or the mate was the designated captain of the vessel. The person described as “captain” in this report was, according to a TRTB representative, the company-designated captain. However, the company-designated captain told investigators he did not believe he held the position of captain. TRTB’s safety management system did not provide guidance as to how captains were designated and assigned.

In addition to the confusion about who was captain, no records indicate that the vessel’s position was being plotted during the voyage, and no lookout was posted even though the vessel was transiting in restricted visibility. Also, wheelhouse control of the starboard engine’s speed was intentionally defeated by its throttle being tied off in the engine room. Hence, *Tristan Janice* proceeded at full speed in restricted visibility without the following: a proper lookout, a clearly identified person in charge, engines ready to maneuver, and regular monitoring of the vessel’s progress.

Probable Cause

The National Transportation Safety Board determines that the probable cause of the allision of offshore supply vessel *Tristan Janice* with a natural gas production platform was the poor watchkeeping and operational practices of the captain and the mate to ensure that the vessel was safely navigated, and the vessel owner’s inadequate procedures and oversight of the vessel’s safety management system.

Voyage Planning

It is prudent for vessel crews to establish a voyage plan before getting under way. Voyage plans should identify hazards to navigation along the intended route, considering factors such as (but not limited to):

- Restricted waters
- Weather conditions
- Ice
- Restricted visibility
- Traffic separation schemes, and
- Areas of extensive tidal effects*

Voyage plans should be made from dock to dock, outlining courses, expected times of course changes, speeds, available aids to navigation for fixing positions, and alternative routes or areas of refuge.

* For additional information, see Standards of Training, Certification and Watchkeeping for Seafarers (STCW) Annex 1, Part A, Section A-VIII/2, and Coast Guard Navigation and Vessel Inspection Circular (NVIC) 3-98.

Vessel Particulars

Vessel	<i>Tristan Janice</i>
Owner/operator	TRTB Inc.
Port of registry	Cut Off, Louisiana
Flag	United States
Type	Offshore supply vessel
Builder, date	Halter Marine Inc., 1978
US official number	598246
Construction	Steel
Length	100.5 ft (30.6 m)
Maximum Draft	8.6 ft (2.6 m)
Beam/width	26 ft (7.9 m)
Tonnage	93 gross tons
Engine power, manufacturer	2 Detroit Diesel main engines, total 1,200 hp (895 kW)
Persons on board	4

NTSB investigators worked closely with our counterparts from Coast Guard Marine Safety Unit Morgan City throughout this investigation.

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For more details about this accident, visit www.nts.gov and search for NTSB accident ID DCA14LM007.

Adopted: August 25, 2015

The NTSB has authority to investigate and establish the probable cause of any major marine casualty or any marine casualty involving both public and nonpublic vessels under 49 *United States Code* 1131. This report is based on factual information either gathered by NTSB investigators or provided by the Coast Guard from its informal investigation of the accident.

The NTSB does not assign fault or blame for a marine casualty; rather, as specified by NTSB regulation, “[NTSB] investigations are fact-finding proceedings with no formal issues and no adverse parties . . . and are not conducted for the purpose of determining the rights or liabilities of any person.” 49 *Code of Federal Regulations*, Section 831.4.

Assignment of fault or legal liability is not relevant to the NTSB’s statutory mission to improve transportation safety by conducting investigations and issuing safety recommendations. In addition, statutory language prohibits the admission into evidence or use of any part of an NTSB report related to an accident in a civil action for damages resulting from a matter mentioned in the report. 49 *United States Code*, Section 1154(b).
