

Men of The 'Santa Maria' Tell Their Stories of Collision

Quietly They Left Their Burning Ship In Harbor

By MARY O TOTTEN
Daily News Staff Writer

To look at them, as they struggled to the dock with their ship burning red against an angry black sky, you would never know that each of them had a short time before looked death square in the face — and somehow survived.

BUT THEY HAD.

They came into the stevedore's waiting room at the Port of Anchorage dock, looking pale, but surprisingly calm for men who had stood their ground against a raging fire that threatened momentarily to explode them and over a hundred thousand barrels of gas and oil into extinction.

They were a quiet bunch — no one said much. What they did say was short and to the point.

JACK PRICE, a graying 48-year-old chief steward from Long Beach, Calif., had this to say:

"I was in the afterhouse when the ships collided. It hit just forward of my room — it must have been about 4 p.m.; anyway, we were just getting ready to serve dinner when all of a sudden this ship's bow struck us starboard.

"Almost instantly flames broke out — they were everywhere. We ran forward to try and fight the fire.

"**THE FIRE** hoses were broken out, we had them going, but it was no use. The flames came too fast.

"The captain gave orders to abandon ship — we attempted to lower a lifeboat but just didn't have time.

"We ran to this boat alongside. It was a harbor boat of some kind skippered by a man, I think, called Anderson.

"We owe a lot to that guy. It took guts, and that's the only way to put it, for him to hold that boat alongside. The fender on his bow was burning and we could have gone at any moment. Believe me, personally, I'd say we owe him our lives."

George Sklivis, 41, an able seaman from Oakland, Calif., was standing at the helm when the ships collided.

"We were dead in the water when I heard the captain give the whistle for a full port turn. The other ship (The Sirrah) was dragging its anchor. The next thing I knew we collided. I stayed at the wheel until the order was given to abandon ship, then I headed out."

ASKED IF he was frightened, Sklivis said: "With that big thing full of the trim with fuel, you can bet your life I was."

Dave Rodrigues, a 36-year-old able seaman from Pacifica, Calif., was aft of the midship house when, he said, "they started tootin' the horn.

"I saw this tanker coming up on the starboard side.

"It was coming right into us. She hit us in the No. 9 starboard tank.

"**THERE WAS** no way it could have been avoided — the guy was kicking the stern but his anchor was dragging. He had too much weight and he came right into us.

"We were lucky. If he had hit closer midships, it would have got the gas tanks — that would have been it.

Arthur Apiki, 54, an oiler, of Stockton, Calif., didn't see the ships collide. He was in a bathroom painting when he heard a whistle sound.

"**ALL OF A** sudden," he said, "I was smashed up against the bulkhead.

"When I got outside everything was in flames. I ran up to help fight the fire until the order was given to abandon ship. When the order was given, believe me, I got out of there fast," he said.

Myron Rosser, 35, an able seaman, from Compton, Calif., said that he was standing "right in the spot" where the Sirrah hit.

"**I LOOKED** up, saw she was coming into us and took around the other side of the afterhouse to get away from the flames.

"I think all the boys got off — if they had time, I think they made it.

"The flames enveloped the afterhouse almost immediately on the starboard side.

"**WHEN THE** motor launch came alongside, it was a welcome sight. It must have took her two or three minutes to get us off."

The crew was taken to the Anchorage-Westward Hotel where they will lodge until other arrangements can be made for them.

They came into the hotel's lobby still clinging to their orange-colored lifejackets but the atmosphere among them had changed perceptibly — a smile flickered here and there — and at a reception for Clinton P. Anderson, Democratic Senator from New Mexico, the words began to flow more easily.

GEORGE C. MARSTON, boatswain's mate, from San Francisco, and a sailor of some 20 years, gave this account of the afternoon's events.

"A crew of men and I were on the well deck dragging out the hoses, making our preparations for docking. I heard the alarm signaling for a left turn — I looked over the side and saw this other ship about to hit us.

"After he hit, I started aft on the run but couldn't get back because of the flames. The general alarm rang, I got three men and began preparing a lifeboat for launching.

"**WE HELD** her alongside until the captain came aboard. All of us, I think, thought she'd blow any minute."

Dale E. Wyman, 40-year-old third mate from San Pedro, Calif., said he was in his room a few minutes before four when he heard the danger signal and a few seconds later felt the ships collide.

"I was just getting dressed to go to supper before relieving the other mate at 8, I ran out onto the deck and saw the ship aflame near the afterhouse.

"**I RAN BACK** to my room, got my life jacket and began to help fight the fire.

Of his captain, Austin Tomter, 63, of Long Beach, Calif., he said: "I don't see how this could be the old man's fault. He's too good a sailor.

"He's a member of the old school and demands the best performance of — you might call him a stickler, even super critical where the ship's safety is involved.

"**I'VE SAILED** a long time and found few better shiphandlers.

"If this turns out to be the captain's fault, I'll be very much surprised."

Anderson Family Honored

A heroic Anchorage family was lauded yesterday for its role in saving 38 crewmen of the tanker "Santa Maria" as it was swathed in flames after colliding with another tanker in the Anchorage harbor.

Mr. and Mrs. Jack C. Anderson Jr., and their son, Andy, were given "soldier of courage" certificates by Col. Daniel Rody, commander of the Salvation Army in Alaska. The presentation was made at yesterday's meeting of the Alaska Press Club.

Anderson and his wife were aboard their tugboat, the "West Wind" when the accident occurred.

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They were piloting another tug, the "Arctic Wind."

WHILE FLAMES swept the "Santa Maria," the West Wind moved next to it, permitting all crewmen able to do so to jump to safety on its deck.

Young Anderson moved his ship next to the second tanker, the "Sirrah" to provide assistance. When he saw it was not needed, he, too, moved close to the "Santa Maria" and the crewmen were transferred to his ship and brought to shore.

Col. Rody said it was the first time his organization had presented such awards in Alaska. He praised the family's courage

and Press Club members gave them a standing ovation.

FARRELL INGHAM of Greater Anchorage, Inc., also spoke at the meeting. She said that upon the request of the city, the Fur Rendezvous would be held at the Ninth Avenue Park Strip next year instead of downtown, its traditional location.

She said the dates will be Feb. 19-28.

Press Club members also heard addresses by Mrs. Lowell Thomas Jr., Jack White, who urged the election of Thomas to Congress, and Howard Pollock, Republican candidate for the state Senate.

Chris Von Imhof, station manager for SAS, told the group of his firm's plans to promote Alaska tourism through the newly-granted stopover privileges in Anchorage.

Possibility Of Fire Boat Considered

Flaming Ship Crash Causes Concern For Shore Installations

By JANET ARONBOLD
Times Staff Writer

Members of the Anchorage Port Commission, shaken by Monday's tanker fire off the municipal terminal, have called for a report on a fire boat for the port.

Two oil tankers collided in the channel off the port dock late Monday afternoon. Both were immediately swept by flame.

The crew of the Sirrah, a Shell Oil Co. tanker, was able to maneuver their vessel out of the turmoil of smoke and flame and put out their fire.

The Union Oil Co. tanker, the Santa Maria, continued to burn. Later Monday evening, the tanker broke free from her anchor and drifted, still burning, on the tide toward Fire Island.

Minutes after the collision, City of Anchorage, Port Richardson and Elmendorf Air Force Base fire fighting units reached the port dock municipal terminal where a Sea-Land cargo vessel was berthed.

Capt. Eugene Bennett of the Anchorage Fire Department said today firefighters were concerned that outgoing tides would swirl burning oil about the port terminal and the Sea-Land cargo vessel.

Bennett said the concentration of fire fighting equipment at the terminal would have used fire hoses to churn up the

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water and hold off the burning oil if this had occurred.

He said he felt there was no real danger of an explosion.

The port terminal itself is well protected with fire hydrants, Bennett said.

The port industrial area, now being developed, will have sufficient hydrant coverage, he said.

There are a number of tank farms in the industrial park area.

The protection available to the older section of the port, south of the industrial park, is not

as well developed as that in the newer areas, he said.

Bennett said fire underwriters recommend use of a fire boat if the developed area of a port is more than a mile long.

He said the Port of Anchorage is about one mile long.

Although the conventional fire boat is fairly large and might have difficulty operating along the shallow tidelands which lie seaward of the port development, Bennett said there are small, shallow draft fireboats available.

In addition, he said, there has been considerable development in the use of floating tanks, propelled by skin divers, which can be brought in close to a fire or under pier. Fast running tides, ice and cold water are important factors in considering this method of fire fighting as a possibility, he said.

The department has requested the inclusion of funds for a heavily manned engine company in next year's budget.

Bennett said the department is now "fairly well fixed" with equipment for fighting structural fires but is undermanned.

City Manager Robert Oldland today questioned the benefit which a fire boat could bring to the port area.

He said he was not sure that the cost involved could be justified.

Another consideration was raised by John Stout, port engineer.

The heavily silted waters of the Knik Arm would wear out fireboat pumps and equipment rapidly, he said.

Port commissioners, meeting Monday night, instructed port officials to prepare a report on a possible fire boat for the port.

In addition, the commission recommended efforts be made to bring a Coast Guard vessel into Anchorage.

The nearest Coast Guard cutter is stationed in Kodiak, a 24-hour run away. Wally Martens, commission chairman, told members.

He urged that an attempt be made to have a Coast Guard ship stationed permanently in Anchorage.

Tanker Collision Probe Will Begin Here Today

A board of investigation will meet in the Federal Building at 9 a.m. today to determine the circumstances surrounding the collision of the Dutch tanker "Sirrah" and the U.S. tanker "Santa Maria" in Cook Inlet Monday.

The inquiry, which was ordered by the commandant of the 17th Coast Guard District shortly after the collision occurred, will be held in Room 123 of the court building.

Board members are Capt. R. J. Fugina, Cmdr. Dan Rayacich and Cmdr. R. F. Hornbeck.

COMMANDER Hornbeck said yesterday that the board has its work cut out for it.

There have been "many conflicting ideas as to what really did occur," the Commander said.

"If both sides were to be believed—even reports from eyewitnesses to the collision—no accident occurred. It couldn't have happened.

"**BUT THESE** conflicting ideas have to be resolved and that's what we will begin at the hearing," he said.

He said the hearing could take "three or four days, possibly longer."

Queried as to what each ship was attempting to do when they collided, Commander Hornbeck said that the "Sirrah" was operating behind schedule but she was due to dock at 4:30 p.m.

THE "SANTA MARIA," on the other hand, had just come into port, he said, and was headed for "safe anchorage" in the inlet pending her docking Tuesday.

Sailor Says Other Ship 'Unwatched'

By MARY O TOTTEN
Daily News Staff Writer

The huge oil tanker "Sirrah" may have been a ship "unwatched" when she collided with a second tanker in Cook Inlet Monday, according to the testimony of the seaman at the wheel of the ill-starred "Santa Maria" when the two ships hit.

Seaman George J. Sklivis said that just before the collision, he heard the captain yell: "Why is there no one on that bridge?"

The 41-year-old seaman from Oakland, Calif., gave his testimony at the opening session of a Coast Guard hearing yesterday to fix responsibility for the crash that injured two crewmen from the "Santa Maria" and claimed the life of a third.

A RETIRED Navy man, with 21 years service, the black-haired seaman gave a cool precise account of those fateful moments before the fuel-loaded tankers collided, sending a mushroom cloud of smoke and fire spiraling into the sky over Cook Inlet late Monday afternoon.

He testified that he came on watch that afternoon at 3:55.

He said that up ahead, "starboard to starboard" he saw another ship. There were three men on the bridge in addition to himself at the time—the captain of the "Santa Maria," Capt. Austin Tomter, the pilot and the second mate.

HE SAID the anchor on the second ship was up and that the anchor line was out "tending aft at a heavy strain."

As his ship approached the second ship, the "Sirrah," which was heading South, he thought she was "tending to starboard."

"I thought she was going to cross our bow," he said.

When it became apparent that the "Sirrah" might do just that—cross the "Santa Maria's" bow—Sklivis said he heard the captain say "Oh, my God."

AND, THEN, he said, about 100 yards from the oncoming ship, and just before they struck, the captain snapped two orders—"left full rudder" and "ahead full." As it became immediately apparent that the ships would hit, he gave two more orders, "right full rudder" and "full astern," in an apparent effort to maneuver his ship so that the oncoming tanker would miss him on the stern.

Four other men from the "Santa Maria," including boatswain's mate George C. Marston, testified during the afternoon hearing.

Marston, a barrel-chested seaman with 18 years experience at sea and who was on the well deck laying hose, testified that when he first spotted the "Sirrah," she was "about a hundred feet" off and that the "Santa Maria" was sitting at "an oblique angle" to her.

"**IT LOOKED** to me," he said, "as if the other vessel was approaching us because he was getting closer all the time," he said.

He said also that he heard two short blasts on the whistle just before the ships hit and, then seconds later, a third blast.

He indicated that he couldn't be sure but that he didn't "associate any of the blasts" with the oncoming vessel.

MARSTON, VISITED his stricken ship, along with the captain and other members of the crew, Tuesday and was asked, during his testimony, if he had seen any evidence of the missing crewman, Eugene Hughes.

The boatswain said that he did not.

He said that "we searched everywhere" that could be searched and found no evidence of him.

"If he was in his quarters," he said, "he would have to be a goner."

DAVID RODRIGUES, an able seaman from Pacifica, Calif., also was laying hose on the "Santa Maria's" port side when he saw the "Sirrah" approaching.

In a colorful account of the collision, Rodrigues said he was on the winch when he looked across the deck and saw "this other ship making the scene."

He said he ran across the deck to observe the ship's approach and noticed the anchor out "with tremendous strain on it."

HE SAID that the ship "was kicking the stern" (that is, backpeddling) and, with gesticulations, the seaman demonstrated how the ship was "threshing the water" at its stern just before the collision.

After the ships hit, Rodrigues said, "The other vessel pulled away from us, we started burning and she started burning."

He said he joined in an attempt to fight the fire following the collision but "it was no use."

THE FLAMES started getting bigger, bigger, bigger and bigger—the captain gave the order to abandon ship.

The hearing, which is being held in Room 123 of the Federal Court Building, will resume today at 9 a.m.

Representing the interests of the Dutch-owned vessel "Sirrah" at the hearing are attorneys Thomas F. Paul and Robert J. Stowell, of Seattle.

Attorneys Gilbert Wheat and Donald Harris, of the San Francisco law firm Lillie, Geary, Wheat, Adams and Charles are representing "Santa Maria" interests along with attorney Ted M. Pease Jr. of Anchorage.