

# M2114

*Posted on 11.07.2023 by Adam Parnell*

**Category:** [General Maritime](#)

**Report Title** Collision with a Yacht in a busy traffic lane

## Initial Report

A yacht left their island port for a 4-day passage in constrained but busy waters. Strong winds were forecast but the yacht's wind instruments were broken.

During the 4-hour night watches (2200-0200 and 0200-0600) the crew divided into pairs. One would take the helm for 2 hours while the other slept in the cockpit, and they would swap over halfway through the watch. The sea and wind were moderate with occasional rain showers.

The reporter said, "At 0415 on the third day our reporter was at the helm while their colleague slept in the cockpit. The yacht was motoring in a traffic channel and AIS showed no vessels in the vicinity. Suddenly a huge shadow appeared on the starboard side, and a loud noise enveloped the yacht.

The mainmast plunged towards the stern and broke, only held out of the water by the rigging. The mizzenmast remained upright, but a large part of the starboard side was badly damaged and torn away, along with the bowsprit, but there appeared to be no damage below the water line.

The ship that collided with us showed no sign of slowing down and dragged us for about 2 miles even though the rest of the crew fired distress rockets to attract attention. Nine were fired before someone from the ship noticed us, and the ship slowed down to stop dropping its port anchor. At the same time, I also decided to activate the EPIRB because this would be the only way for someone to hear us.

Unfortunately, the DSC alert from the VHF was useless because the antennas were damaged, and the portable radios had limited range. I sent out a MAYDAY call on the portable VHF handsets hoping anyone on the container vessel's bridge would hear us.

Within minutes of activating the EPIRB, we were contacted by the COSPAR SARSAT system, to which we passed all the information. They told us they had also alerted the local coast guard. However, nobody showed up or made contact.

Over an hour after the event, five crew from the container ship descended onto the yacht from a ladder and, with some difficulty, managed to free the rigging and sails from their ship's starboard anchor."

At around 07.00, we tied up everything we could and slowly motored the last 30 miles to enter our port of destination and safely moor."

## **Comment**

This is a dramatic account of a serious incident, and although we lack the perspective of the container vessel, it underscores several crucial safety lessons.

Neither vessel saw the other, despite both showing navigation lights. However, the range of yacht lights can reduce significantly when heeled over, and the high bow of container vessels can create a lengthy 'dead zone' ahead of the ship for its lights and radar. Furthermore, radar clutter caused by moderate sea states and rain showers can impair the detection of yachts and smaller vessels. Many yachts carry only an AIS receiver, not a transmitter.

Letting one person sleep while on the watch does not make sense: their sleep will be disturbed – leading to eventual fatigue – and the helmsman is deprived of a valuable lookout while navigating in congested waters.

Fortunately, distress rockets were fired, and the EPIRB was activated, eventually attracting the container ship's attention. It's essential to have emergency equipment and procedures in place in case of such incidents. Unfortunately, the DSC alert from the VHF was useless due to the damaged antennas and limited range of portable radios. This highlights the importance of regularly checking and maintaining all communication equipment. Consideration should be given to placing the VHF antenna in a safer location.

It's concerning that the local coast guard did not show up or make contact after being alerted by the COSPAR SARSAT system. This may be something to bring to the relevant authorities' attention to ensure proper protocols are followed in emergencies.

Overall, it's essential to prioritise safety and preparedness when embarking on a lengthy voyage, especially in busy and congested waters.

## **Key Issues**

**Teamwork** – Additional lookouts to assist the helm are vital when operating in busy and congested waters, at night and in poor weather conditions. Watch schedules should be adjusted for navigating these high-risk areas.

**Pressure** – The decision to undertake a non-stop passage with defective wind indicators, in forecast poor weather, and a busy waterway suggests that the crew were under an inappropriate external or self-imposed time pressure. Be aware of, and challenge, such pressures.

**Distractions** – Distractions reduce situational awareness. It is possible that workload distractions prevented the detection of the approaching vessel, given that there was only one lookout on duty.

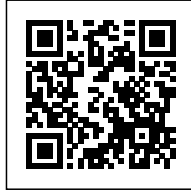
Fatigue – It is possible that an element of fatigue contributed to the lack of an adequate lookout. A key characteristic of fatigue is poor risk acceptance. The watches should have been doubled to provide increased situational awareness.

**fatigue**Fatigue

**pressure**Pressure

**distraction**Distraction

**teamwork**Teamwork



## Comments

**Winston Singh** – 2023-08-06 02:55:57

FAILURE TO COMPLY WITH THE COLREGS: There is an obligation on all seafarers to maintain a good lookout, assess the risk of a collision and to take appropriate actions to avoid a collision. Neither vessel fulfilled these obligations and therefore were in breach of Colregs Rule 5. FAILURE TO RENDER IMMEDIATE ASSISTANCE (HIT AND RUN): "The ship that collided with us showed no sign of slowing down and dragged us for about 2 miles even though the rest of the crew fired distress rockets to attract attention. Nine were fired before someone from the ship noticed us..." This tells me that the crew on the container vessel failed to establish there had been a collision. The Master is duty bound under Solas and Unclos to render assistance to a vessel in distress including following a collision. This is disappointing and against the moral traditions of the sea.