

# Report from the Division for Investigation of Maritime Accidents

## **VINLAND SAGA – Fall overboard 5 September 2005**

During a repair work on the flagpole astern, while proceeding in the Yellow Sea (between China and Korea), the master fell overboard and disappeared.

VINLAND SAGA (OZAC2), IMO No. 8126549, homeport Bogense, Denmark, is a 972 GT shelter deck dry cargo ship built in 1982.

### **Sequence of events**

*The Investigation Division bases the following description of the sequence of events upon written statements by the ship's mate and the two ABs and upon an oral statement by the chief engineer on 25 October at Fredericia Shipyard.*

VINLAND SAGA was en route from Surabaya, Java, to Xingang, China, loaded with approx. 23.5 tons general cargo. The vessel departed Surabaya around the 15<sup>th</sup> August.

The crew on board was the master and the chief engineer, who were Danish citizens, and the mate, 2 AB's and a cook, who were Philippine citizens. The master and the chief engineer were signed on 27 May in Panama, the mate, one of the AB's (AB 1) and the cook were signed on 7 July in Korea, and the second AB (AB 2) had been on board since 11 October 2004.

The master and the mate kept a 6 on 6 off bridge watch with the master on the 06-12 and 18-24 watches. The rest of the crew kept normal working hours from 07 to 17, with ½ hour morning break, 1-hour lunch break and ½ hour noon break.

According to the chief engineer's statement the social relationship on board was good and the master was much liked among the Philippine crew members. Use of alcohol on board was very restricted and only occasional.

A few days before the accident, the ship ran into a typhoon and was hooved to behind three small islands for about 24 hours. During the typhoon the block in top of the flagpole broke loose from it's fitting and was lost overboard.

The flagpole was a normal iron pipe, which at the level of the railing was inserted in a slightly wider pipe with flaps, which could be pressed together. Two bolts kept the two pipes together. The pole was painted white and looked new painted. At the top of the pole there was a piece of flat iron with a hole in which the block was shackled. The block that should replace the lost one was a little bigger, and therefore the hole should be widened using a drill.

At a drawing of the ship the Investigation Division has measured the flagpole to approx. 2.8 meters and the top of the pole to be approx. 8 meters above the water level in the actual loading condition.



*Picture of a sister ship of VINLAND SAGA*

In the evening before the day of the accident, the master had asked the chief engineer to repair the flagpole, but the chief engineer had told the master, that it should not be done while the ship was at sea and that it could wait until the ship was in port. The master had responded, that they would be fined if the national flag was not shown on entering port. The chief engineer had responded that they could show the flag otherwise.

In the morning on the 5<sup>th</sup> September the master, as usual, instructed the AB's about the work of the day. They were asked to assist him in repairing the flagpole by making ready the tools, ladder, safety line etc. and also to do some washing down and painting work in magazines. The tools were prepared before breakfast. After breakfast, at 0915 the two ABs went to the bridge deck, where the master was ready to repair the pole and had placed the aluminium ladder in position. The master started the work assisted by the ABs. He used the safety line as he stood on the ladder and drilled the hole in the flat iron on the top of the pole.

It was clear and calm weather and calm sea. The ship was doing approx. 10 knots.

When the master was nearly finished with the work, he instructed AB 1 to go forward and start the paintwork and AB 2 to go and check for fishing boats or other vessels ahead.

A short moment after the ABs had turned their back to the master, they heard that the flagpole broke and hammered at the hull. The flagpole fell into the sea together with the ladder and the master and disappeared. The ABs immediately threw a life buoy in the water and called the mate and the chief engineer.

At the time of the accident, at 0935 hours, the ship was in the position 36°53' N - 122°55' E. The water depth was approximately 1000 meters

At the time of the accident the chief engineer was in the engine room and he was alerted by AB 1, who came down and shouted that the captain had fallen overboard. He hurried to the bridge, where also the mate had arrived. The cook appeared at the monkey island. He most likely had been in the pantry, when the accident happened.

The chief engineer observed a life buoy in the water. The yellow smoke flare, however, had not been released.

The mate turned the ship around, and the chief engineer ordered the MOB boat lowered to the water. He and AB 2 manned the MOB boat and started searching for the master.

The mate also alerted the search and rescue authorities ashore and they did send a SAR vessel to the position.

The MOB boat searched the area for about 3 hours without finding the master. In the beginning of the search they thought several times that they saw the red colour of his boiler suit. At a time they observed a big vessel, which stopped in the vicinity and also a couple of Chinese fishing vessels. The vessels did not take part in the search. During the search the mate kept the ship moving in a circle at 6 knots.

At about 1350 hours the wind had freshened and seawater was spraying into the MOB boat. The chief engineer and the AB 2 were taken on board. The MOB boat was hauled up astern as they could not get the davit hoist to work.

The chief engineer now informed the owner's office in Denmark about the accident and the office advised them to anchor in the area and await the arrival of the SAR vessel.

The SAR vessel BEI HAI JIU 197 arrived in the area at 1550 hours and started the search for the master.

The weather forecast predicted a new typhoon and the chief engineer contacted the office in Denmark and suggested that the vessel continued its voyage. The office agreed and at 1830 hours VINLAND SAGA weighed anchor and continued towards Xingang. The vessel arrived on 7 September at 0515 hours.

According to the chief engineer the flagpole was broken just above where the pole was inserted in the lower pipe and there were clear signs of corrosion and flakes of rust in the remaining part of the pole.

## **Search and rescue**

According to the SAR report by the Admiral Danish Fleet (SOK), the owner informed SOK of the accident at 0445 (UTC). SOK contacted the Chinese Marine Rescue Coordination Centre (MRCC) and requested assistance. MRCC China confirmed that they would initiate a search. The MRCC China searched for the master until late on 7 September.

## **Cause**

The weight of the master standing on the ladder has exerted a considerable pressure upon the top of the flagpole.

The flagpole was weak due to corrosion (according to the statement of the chief engineer), and it broke at the most vulnerable part – the connection between the two pipes.

31 October 2005

The Division for Investigation of Maritime Accidents