

# *TerranearPMC Safety Share*

## **Week of January 23, 2012- Actions and their Consequences**

Everything looked safe. He had done this before and therefore, he and his crew had no reservations about their anticipated maneuver. Yet, in a pre-planned stunt advertised on Facebook, the captain of the cruise ship, Costa Concordia, Francesco Schettino, sailed perilously close to the coast of Giglio so that the ship's head waiter could salute his family on land.

Minutes before the cruise ship hit the rocks, the waiter's sister Patrizia Tievoli had posted on Facebook that: 'In a short period of time the Concordia ship will pass very close. A big greeting to my brother who finally get to have a holiday on landing in Savona.'

According to Italy's Corriere della Sera newspaper, as the cruise liner approached the island's coastline Captain Francesco Schettino, 52, said to the head waiter Antonello Tievoli: "Come and see, Antonello, we're right in front of Giglio".

However, he misjudged the stunt, as the ship contacted rocks, tearing a huge gash in its hull and forcing the night-time evacuation of its more than 4,000 passengers and crew (3200 passengers and 1000 crew). As of last Thursday (January 19, 2012), eleven lives were lost while 21 people were still unaccounted. At this point the emergency service is no longer one of rescue, but rather, recovery.

It was one hundred years ago, in April, 1912, that the world witnessed what is now considered the worst passenger ship disaster: the sinking of the Titanic. One would think after such a publicized tragedy, another similar type incident would be far-fetched. True, through the disaster of the Titanic, we have learned many things that have helped us improve the safety of transoceanic transportation and cruise liners. Technology has made tremendous advances while communications and protocol within the maritime community have been continuously studied and revised. Certainly a disaster that would rival the unfortunate event of 1912 could not occur. And while the fatal event of the Costa Concordia cannot be compared to the magnitude of the Titanic episode, we must acknowledge that this latest incident happened near shore and that emergency rescue operations were able to respond almost immediately. One can only speculate as to how bad this incident would have been if it occurred under similar circumstances as the Titanic's; that is, in the middle of the North Atlantic and without having the appropriate number of lifeboats.

The Costa Concordia was scheduled for a seven-day cruise, starting from the port of Rome (Civitavecchia) at 4:00 pm. While international maritime laws call for a mandatory life boat drill within 24 hours of departing its initial port, its drill was scheduled for the following morning at 10:00 am; hours after the unfortunate event, which happened at approximately 9:30 p.m.

According to maritime experts, ships that carry thousands of people have become too large for a safe evacuation of everyone on board. While the ship's black box has been recovered, it is still being examined so that proper authorities can determine the actual events. Nevertheless, latest

information is suggesting that human error is the cause for this tragic event as Italian prosecutors claim that the captain had approached the island's coastline in a "carelessly clumsy manner" in the moments before a catastrophic collision with an underwater rock formation that caused the ship to list violently and eventually capsize.

At this time, it is difficult to guess what the economic impact this tragedy will have on Carnival Corporation (owner of the Costa Concordia) as well as the entire cruise industry. In addition, there are deep-seated concerns about the environmental impact to the area. But one thing appears to be true; this was an incident that could have been avoided. So far there is no information to suggest that there was any equipment malfunction, nor was there any miscommunication between the captain and the crew or between the ship and local maritime authorities. It appears that a decision was made without taking the necessary precautions to ensure the maneuver was safe. This may result in the captain to be charged with a criminal offence that can carry a sentence of up to 12 years in jail.

As this story continues to unfold, we are hearing that this maneuver was performed by the same ship (and captain) on previous occasions. Because there was never a negative occurrence from these past displays of coming close to shore, it seemed that an (obvious) erroneous assumption was that this type of practice presented no risk. One of the statements in which the captain was quoted as having said was that the charts indicated that the waters in the area showed no signs of rocks or a shallow bottom. This sounds reminiscent of when an excavator that hits an underground utility line (such as a water main or an electrical line) during a soil remediation or excavation operation and relies solely on origin blue print designs (aka "as-builts") and does not have an underground utility clearance check performed.

According to maritime authorities, a ship should never rely solely on charts or gadgets to navigate around an island. The best tool for spotting rocks and other hazards close to shore is surprisingly low-tech: the eyes of the officers on the bridge. There should be at least five or six people on the bridge when you're that close to shore. Any alarm system is inherently redundant because a commanding officer's eyes should be trained on the water when the ship is so close to shore.

If it turns out that the captain was ignoring established safety protocol and was taking short cuts to do something that was not even a necessary function, then indeed he was playing a game of Russian roulette with his ship and the lives of the passengers whose safety and well-being is his responsibility. This is one very real incident that we must understand and apply its lessons while at work or at home. Our actions, and inactions, such as ignoring safety rules and procedures, can have serious consequences. We must understand that our actions have consequences and that potential hazards should never go unchecked. It is so much better to take the time to ensure everyone's safety rather than take short cuts and have regrets.

**"It isn't the mountains ahead to climb that wear you out; it's the pebble in your shoe."**

Muhammad Ali (who turned 70 last week)