

Preliminary Investigation into the circumstances of
the collision between the M.V. Flinders Range and the F.V.
Han Gil No.105 on 12 January 1984.

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AUTHORITY TO CONDUCT INVESTIGATION

On 16 January 1984 Captain D.R. Martin, Marine Surveyor, Department of Transport, Western Australia Regional Office, was appointed under Sub-section 377A(1) of the Navigation Act 1912 to make a Preliminary Investigation into the circumstances of the collision between the Australian bulk carrier Flinders Range and the Korean fishing vessel Han Gil No. 105 in the vicinity of Latitude 35° 48' North, Longitude 129° 56' East on 12 January 1984.

This report is based on interviews conducted by Captain Martin and documentary material, including entries in the Deck Log Book and Official Log Book of the Flinders Range and a report from the skipper of the Han Gil.

INTERVIEWS

On 7 February 1984 Captain Martin boarded the Flinders Range at Bunbury WA and interviewed the following persons:

Brian Middleton BACON	Master
Geoffrey Raymond RICHTER	2nd Officer
John McCULLOCH	Able Seaman

Mr Richter was re-interviewed at Kwinana on 14 February 1984. Subsequently, on 9 March 1984, the Department of Transport received a written report from Kim Sun-Myung, skipper of the Han Gil.

VESSEL DATAM.V. FLINDERS RANGE

OFFICIAL NUMBER: 374584

PORT OF REGISTRY: Melbourne

OWNERS: Australian Shipping Commission
65-79 Riverside Avenue
South Melbourne

DIMENSIONS: Length O.A. 171.3m
Breadth 24.84m
Depth 14.02m

PROPULSION: Single Screw

TYPE: Motor, Bulk Carrier

BUILT: 1976 by Newcastle State Dockyard
Newcastle NSW

GROSS TONNAGE: 17704.51

NET TONNAGE: 9821.84

CLASSED: Lloyds Register of Shipping

Certificates

INTERNATIONAL LOAD LINE: Issued on 31 January 1980 by
Lloyds on behalf of Government
of Australia and valid to
22 July 1984

CARGO SHIP SAFETY
CONSTRUCTION: Issued on 21 July 1980 by
Lloyds on behalf of Government
of Australia and valid to
31 July 1984

CARGO SHIP SAFETY
EQUIPMENT: Issued on 5 August 1983 by
Commonwealth of Australia and valid
to 1 August 1984

CARGO SHIP SAFETY
RADIOTELEGRAPHY: Issued on 4 August 1983 by
Commonwealth of Australia and valid
to 1 August 1984

HAN GIL NO 105

CONSTRUCTION:	Steel
TONNAGE:	212
TYPE:	Motor, fishing vessel
DIMENSIONS:	Length O.A. 40.3m Breadth 6.9m Depth 3.4m
BUILT:	1965 by Miho Zosensho, Shimizu Japan

SEQUENCE OF EVENTS

The Flinders Range sailed from Buk Pyong, South Korea in ballast on 11 January 1984 on a voyage to Nauru to load phosphates for discharge at Bunbury and Kwinana in Western Australia. Draught on sailing was 5.76m forward, 7.68m aft, giving a trim of 1.92m by the stern.

The passage from time of departure till the time of the incident was uneventful. Traffic was light and the weather was good: clear skies, smooth to calm seas with light airs, barometer steady and air temperature just above freezing.

During the evening of 11 January the Master, Captain Bacon, wrote his night orders for the watchkeeping officers. The orders included the instruction to "Keep a good lookout for fishing vessels. Do not get into any close quarter situations."

At midnight the 2nd Officer, Mr Richter, took over the bridge watch from the 3rd Officer, the course being steered was 180°T and the speed over the ground about 15.5 knots. The 2nd Officer plotted the ship's position on the chart at 0030 0100 and 0130 using radar bearings and distances. These positions confirmed the Flinders Range to be making good its intended course but slightly to the east of the track drawn on the chart.

The 2nd Officer stated that he first observed the other vessel on the radar, followed immediately by a visual sighting of a single red light, well clear, and above a row of small accommodation lights. In the 2nd Officer's opinion, this was not a port side light and no sidelights were visible at the time of the initial sighting. No time was recorded for this first sighting but Mr Richter recalled that it was bearing between 169° and 170.5°T at a distance of 4-5 miles. On this basis and the fact that the collision occurred at about 0138, and that the vessels were on almost parallel and opposite courses with a combined closing speed in excess of 23 knots, the first sighting would appear to have been at between 0125 and 0128. There was however some disparity between the recollections of the 2nd Officer and the lookout as to the estimated interval of time between the first sighting and the collision.

Mr Richter stated that he did not consider it necessary to plot the other vessel on the radar but instead observed it visually from the centre of the wheelhouse, and assessed the bearing to be opening. He left that position only to plot a radar fix of the Flinders Range on the chart at 0130. Immediately after this, at about 0131, the seaman lookout, Mr McCulloch, who was stationed on the deck above the bridge, came down and reported he had sighted

the red light of the other vessel previously sighted by the 2nd Officer. Mr Richter stated that he continued to watch the vessel and that a few minutes later noticed it was turning to port and that a green side light had come into view. At this point the lookout again came down and reported the change of course.

Mr Richter stated that he assumed the other vessel was intending to cross astern of the Flinders Range but had overshot its turn and would steady up. However, within a minute or so he realised that the vessel intended to pass ahead and that a collision was imminent. He then immediately put the helm hard over to starboard, stopped the main engine, changed over steering from automatic to hand and directed Mr McCulloch to take the wheel.

As the other craft crossed the Flinders Range's bow Mr Richter observed the craft lurch to port and he assumed that a collision had taken place. Mr Richter left the helm hard over so as to stay within close range of the other vessel and called the Master.

Captain Bacon appeared on the bridge shortly afterwards and took over control. In the meantime the engineer officers, who had been awakened by the sounds of the engine manoeuvre, had gone below and one of them, Mr Cook the 3rd Engineer, then came to the wheelhouse to find out what was happening. (It should be noted that at the time of the collision the Flinders Range was operating in the unmanned machinery space mode and the engine was controlled directly from the wheelhouse.) The engine had by this time been switched over to engine room control, on the Master's orders, with the 2nd Officer operating the engine telegraph. The 3rd Engineer took over the engine telegraph from the 2nd Officer and the Master then directed Mr Richter to call the boatswain and go forward with him to inspect for damage to the ship. Mr Richter returned with the report that there was no apparent damage.

In the meantime the Master manoeuvred the Flinders Range close to the other vessel to ascertain if assistance was required and to establish its identity. The vessel, which by now was well illuminated by working lights, was identified as a fishing vessel and the name Han Gil No. 105 observed. No damage to the hull or fittings of the Han Gil was visible to those on the Flinders Range, and it was established by a combination of oral exchanges and hand gesticulations that no assistance was required from the Flinders Range. Accordingly, at about 0225 the Flinders Range departed from the scene of the incident and resumed its voyage. The 2nd Officer then made an inspection of the fore peak pneumercator gauge in the ballast control room and on his return to the bridge took over the watch again from the Master.

At 0800, as recorded in the official log book and deck log book, the Chief Officer made an inspection of the tank gauge which revealed that the fore peak sounding was only 8.15 metres, representing a loss of 646 tonnes of water from the full tank condition. Between 0900 and 1400 the fore peak tank was again filled but continued to lose water and at 1700 the Master, having already reduced speed from 120 engine revolutions per minute to 95 at 1525, made a deviation from the track and headed for a sheltered anchorage off the west coast of Kyushu, Japan. The Flinders Range anchored at 2053 in position 31°56.8'N, 130°09.0'E.

At 2140, after the fore peak tank had been pumped out, the Chief Engineer and Chief Officer made an inspection which revealed the shell plating had been punctured in way of the starboard side of the bulbous bow at the 4 metre draught level.

Repairs were effected by the engineers who completed this task at 0720 on the following morning, 13 January. The anchor was then weighed at 0809 and the voyage to Nauru resumed.

Permanent repairs were carried out at Kwinana W.A. on 15-16 February under the supervision of a Lloyds' Surveyor.

In the Han Gil skipper's written report he stated that he had been fishing in the vicinity of Daema-do, Japan, and at about 1700 hours on 11 January completed netting in the area and then headed for his home port, Mukho, on a course of 350° at a speed of 8 knots. At 2330 he left the wheelhouse having been relieved by a deckman Kim Yeong-il. The skipper spent the ensuing period in the communications room until around 0140 when he heard a sudden noise which caused him to rush back to the wheelhouse. He immediately stopped the engine and called all hands on deck over the loudspeaker system. He noticed a large merchant ship about 50 metres astern. On examination of his vessel he found an indented crack 20cm long by 20cm wide and 10cm deep in the hull plating about 5 metres from the stern on the starboard side. The name of the ship was identified as Flinders Rang (sic). Having ascertained by gesticulation that the other vessel was not in trouble and continued the voyage to Mukho where repairs were carried out.

CONCLUSIONS

On the basis of the evidence available it is concluded that the primary cause of the collision was the failure of the 'Han Gil' to take appropriate action to avoid collision as required by the International Regulations for Preventing Collision at Sea, 1972 (COLREGS). The action of the 'Han Gil' in crossing the bow of the 'Flinders Range' was highly dangerous and in contravention of Rule 15 of the COLREGS.

However, the failure of the 2nd Officer of the 'Flinders Range' to avoid a close quarter situation as required by the Master's night orders, also contributed to the collision. Furthermore, had the 2nd Officer made full use of the available navigation equipment to determine if a risk of collision existed, as required by Rule 7 of the COLREGS, he may have been in a better position to take avoiding action in accordance with Rule 17.

The available evidence shows that the Han Gil was not exhibiting the appropriate navigation lights as required by the COLREGS, in that she was initially observed to be exhibiting only a single red light, well clear and above a row of small accommodation lights, although a green sidelight was seen later, prior to the collision. When the vessels were stopped close by each other after the collision, the red light was observed to be an all-round light and was still burning brightly at the masthead, much brighter than the green sidelight.

As the Han Gil was not engaged in fishing at the time, she should have been exhibiting the lights for a power-driven vessel of her length under way, as prescribed in Rules 22, 23 and 26(e). The first navigation light visible should therefore have been a white masthead light, or lights, visible for at least 5 nautical miles.

The single all-round red masthead light actually seen is not a recognised navigation light under the COLREGS, but may have been part of the red over white lights configuration required to be shown by a vessel engaged in fishing, other than trawling, in accordance with Rule 26(c).

Given that the 'Han Gil' was not exhibiting the appropriate lights, this should have alerted the 2nd officer of the 'Flinders Range' to the existence of an uncertain situation. It is therefore considered that at the latest the 2nd Officer should have taken avoiding action at the time that he noticed the 'Han Gil' turning to port, and not a 'minute or so later' as he has stated.

