



NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD
OFFICE OF MARINE SAFETY
WASHINGTON, D.C.

ACCIDENT SUMMARY REPORT

NTSB Accident No.: **DCA15MM017**

On Monday, March 9, 2015, at 1231 local time (CDT), the Liberian-registered, 623-foot-long bulk carrier *Conti Peridot* and the 599-foot-long Danish-flagged chemical tanker *Carla Maersk* collided near buoys 89 and 90 in the Houston Ship Channel, Upper Galveston Bay, south of Morgan's Point, Texas.

After weighing anchor offshore of the entrance to the Houston Ship Channel and boarding a pilot, the *Conti Peridot* proceeded inbound at about 0930 up the channel to City Dock 24 to discharge its cargo of steel rolls. About the same time, the *Carla Maersk* departed Kinder Morgan Terminal in Galena Park, Texas, with a pilot on board and carrying 216,049 barrels (bbls) of methyl tertiary butyl ether (MTBE) outbound for Venezuela.

The *Conti Peridot* got under way from the anchorage in good visibility. About 40 miles to the north, the *Carla Maersk* departed in light rain with a low cloud ceiling. As both vessels proceeded with their transits, radio transmissions between various vessels in the channel reported developing fog in the Houston Ship Channel. At 1130, Houston Pilots suspended pilot boarding at the entrance channel (the bar) due to fog. Piloted vessels already under way continued their transits.

An hour later, with visibility estimated by the *Conti Peridot* pilot to be a ship's length, both vessels were at half-ahead traveling just over 8 knots as they approached each other south of Morgan's Point.

The pilot on the *Conti Peridot* had met and passed several outbound deep draft vessels on his inbound transit as the fog increased and visibility diminished. He stated that the *Conti Peridot* was difficult to handle and required more rudder input and time to return to the channel center. The pilot was having trouble returning to the channel center after meeting and passing the deep draft vessel immediately preceding the meeting with the *Carla Maersk* south of Morgan's Point.

The master and pilot aboard the *Carla Maersk* were aware that the visibility conditions in the open waters of Upper Galveston Bay to the south of Morgan's Point were severely reduced compared to what they were currently experiencing in the channel north of Morgan's Point. The pilot and master spoke of the inbound traffic and visibility along with possible options for stopping their vessel.

The pilot on the *Conti Peridot* initiated a 1 whistle, or port-to-port passing arrangement which was agreed upon by the pilot on the *Carla Maersk*. The pilot on the *Conti Peridot* after having

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1 previously met and passed another vessel was trying to maneuver his vessel back to the center to
2 set up an appropriate pass with the *Carla Maersk*. The *Conti Peridot* moved to the left side of
3 the channel and then back to the right. At this time, the *Conti Peridot* pilot ordered hard
4 starboard and full ahead in an effort to counter his vessel's anticipated movement to the left. The
5 pilot on the *Conti Peridot* warned the pilot on the *Carla Maersk* that he was coming back across
6 the centerline of the channel toward his vessel. When the pilot on the *Carla Maersk* saw the bow
7 of the *Conti Peridot* emerge from the fog, he ordered hard starboard and full ahead in an effort to
8 avoid what he perceived to be an imminent collision.

9 The *Conti Peridot*'s bow struck the port side of the *Carla Maersk*, penetrating the two
10 port wing ballast tanks and the no. 4 port cargo tank, which held about 15,495 bbls of MTBE.
11 After the impact, the *Carla Maersk* developed a port list, and the crew took action to move
12 ballast and cargo to correct the list. No injuries were reported onboard either vessel.

13 MTBE is a colorless, flammable liquid with a turpentine-like odor; its vapors are heavier
14 than air, and it is miscible in water. The Houston Port Authority initially responded to the
15 incident due to the release of hazardous materials, and a Unified Command was established soon
16 after the collision to manage the emergency response operations and planning. Three days after
17 the accident, the Unified Command estimated that 2,100 barrels of MTBE cargo remained
18 unaccounted for.

19 The US Coast Guard classified the accident as a major marine casualty. The National
20 Transportation Safety Board (NTSB), the lead federal investigative agency for the accident,
21 launched a team of investigators and a Board Member to the scene the following morning.

22 Parties to the investigation are the US Coast Guard, *Carla Maersk* owner, *Conti Peridot*
23 owner, flag administrations for Liberia and Denmark, Houston Pilot Association, and the Board
24 of Pilot Commissioners for Harris County Ports.