

Official note regarding ‘unknown vessels’ in an illustration in the report into the loss of ESTONIA.

Background

SHK has been asked questions about Figure 17.1 in the JAIC report, which shows two vessels that are labelled ‘unknown vessel’, and which two vessels these are. As I came into contact with a colleague who mentioned that he had been crew on board a vessel nearby the accident site on the night ESTONIA sank, the question about the unknown vessels was brought to the fore.

Investigatory actions and supplementary information

General

During the work to find out whether it is possible to get information about any of the vessels in Figure 17.1 of the JAIC report that was labelled ‘unknown vessel’, colleagues in Finland have been asked to investigate with the ports in Kotka and Hamina regarding vessel movements at the time in question, as well as whether the MRCC in Turku has registered detailed vessel movements during the occurrence. In addition, colleagues in Estonia have been questioned about vessel movements in the Port of Tallinn. The intention has been to establish what vessels are present in this material. Thereto, the JAIC report has been studied in detail, focussing on this query.

The ports Kotka/Hamina and MRCC Turku

Information from Finland indicates that the ports in Kotka and Hamina have now been merged, but that there is no record of which vessels have called there going that far back. Furthermore, MRCC Turku has informed us that they do not have any detailed information from the night of the accident.

Port of Tallinn

Colleagues in Estonia were able to provide register extracts from the Port of Tallinn¹ which showed that the following vessels had arrived on 28 September after the early hours of the morning:

TALLINK	11:50
ALANDIA	12:10
CAP CANAILLE	12:40

¹ SHK file no. S-200/20 ab 1120.

KRISTINA REGINA	14:45
GEROG OTS	14:00
SILJA FESTIVAL	18:30
KAPTEN VOOLENS	19:10
VANA TALLINN	21:30
CORBIERE	22:55

All of these had come from Helsinki, with the exception of CAP CANAILLE, which had arrived from Stockholm.

Information from the JAIC report

According to the JAIC report, six vessels were at the accident site two hours after ESTONIA sank², and a total of eight vessels were at the site at around 04:50 hrs³. Figure 17.1 in the JAIC report shows seven, namely SILJA SYMPHONY, ISABELLA, SILJA EUROPA, MARIELLA, TURSAS, and two named 'unknown vessel'. Of these, TURSAS still has quite far to go to the accident site. It can be noted that Figure 17.1 covers the area from the accident site north to the outer part of the Finnish Archipelago, while only covering an area approximately three M south of the accident site. The explanatory text for the figure says that it shows 'movement of certain vessels that participated in the rescue operations 0012-0344 on 28 September 1994'.

During the work, other investigation material in the JAIC report has shown that the ferry FINNJET was close to the accident site and actively participated in the search operation after having reported at 01:36 hrs, coming from the east, and that she was on site at 03:20 hrs (JAIC Table 7.6). The vessel FINNMERCHANT was also on site but reported an arrival time of 03:25 hrs. In Figure 7.1 in the JAIC report, the two vessel's positions at the time of the accident appear (i.e. a few hours earlier from the positions for the two vessels labelled 'unknown vessel' in Figure 17.1).

The description in Chapter 17 of the JAIC report is based on data from various sources, e.g. information from the radar monitoring station on Utö, the active vessels at the accident site, as well as information from MRCC Turku. The details in Figure 17.1 are based on radar observations⁴. Not all vessels are reported by name in the report, e.g. it is stated in 17.3.1 that three vessels west of the accident site reported themselves to the rescue coordinator but were given permission to continue on their way south-west. One of these has disclosed that the vessel was not able to assist given the prevailing circumstances⁵. The JAIC has made the assessment that there was reasonable justification for these vessels to continue their voyages.

² JAIC 7.5.3 Final remarks.

³ JAIC 7.1.

⁴ JAIC 17.3.1.

⁵ JAIC 7.5.2.

The distance between the accident site and Tallinn is c. 90 M.

Analysis

On the basis of the available evidence, it is possible to draw some conclusions about the vessels that were mentioned in the supporting documentation. SHK does not intend to take any further action at present.

General

The heading changes in Figure 17.1 suggest that the vessels in the figure actively participated in the rescue operation, which is also stated in the explanatory text for the figure. They are also close to the accident site and should therefore have been able to constitute some of the first six vessels that were on site. In which case, it is likely that the vessels named 'unknown vessel' in the figure are FINNJET and FINNMERCHANT. This is very much consistent with other information in the JAIC report, including the list in Table 7.6 and the text in 7.5.3 where both are said to constitute two of the first six to arrive on site. It is also well consistent with these vessel's positions in Figure 7.1.

CAP CANAILLE

CAP CANAILLE could theoretically be one of the radar tracks but if so this requires an average speed of 15 knots from 06:00 hrs in order to get to Tallinn by the specified arrival time, which may be regarded as unrealistic under the prevailing circumstances.

Furthermore, nothing is mentioned in the JAIC report to suggest that CAP CANAILLE could be one of the first vessels at the accident site.

Summary

It is likely that the vessels named 'unknown vessel' in Figure 17.1 of the JAIC report are FINNJET and FINNMERCHANT.