

THE COLLISION INCIDENT

The collision between the USS Gearing and The coal ship SS Malden took place at the entrance to the Chesapeake Bay July 10, 1959 at 4:15 a. m. eastern daylight time. The Gearing suffered a long vertical gash in the starboard side running from the main deck to just below the water line. Three compartments were flooded but no major injuries resulted.



Commander John R. Hanky inspects damage

Destroyer Blamed in Collision

The Virginia Pilot, Saturday January 4, 1964 NORFOLK -- A federal judge has ruled that the destroyers USS Gearing was at fault in a 1959 collision with the merchant vessel Malden about 13 miles off Cape Henry.

The decision was handed down by judge Edward S. Northrop of the District of Maryland in the case of the United States vs. the SS Malden and Eastern Gas and Fuel Association.

The collision took place about 5:15 am Eastern Time on July 10, 1959, as the Malden was leaving Norfolk harbor en route to Boston.

At the time the Gearing was entering the harbor as the seventh vessel in a Naval formation of 20 ships.

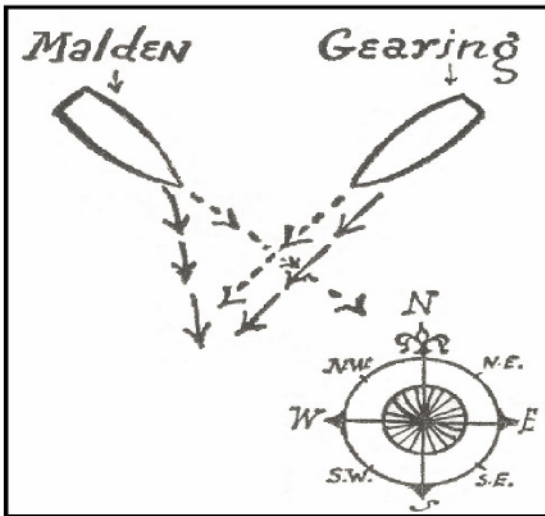
Evidence in the case indicated that the Gearing made a wide turn to starboard placing it on collision course with the Malden, which was approaching from the starboard side, attempting to cut through the formation. The Navy ship ahead were proceeding at intervals of 500 yards. The six ships ahead of the Gearing had

just executed right turns. The Gearing suffered a long vertical gash in the starboard side, running from the main deck to just below the water line. Three compartments were flooded, but no major injuries resulted, and both ships proceeded under their own power. The Malden suffered "minor damage."

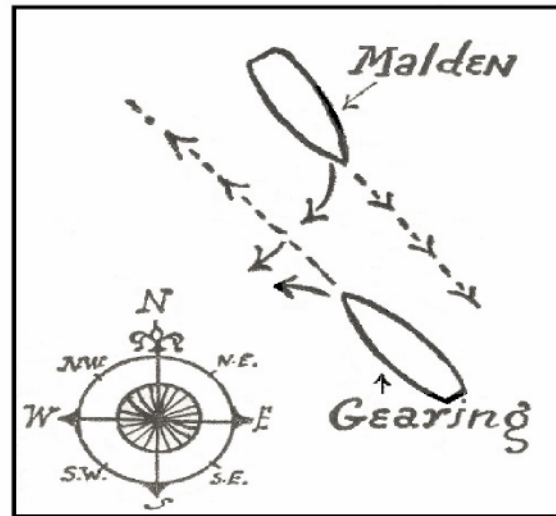
Judge Northrop found that the Gearing had an "unqualified, untrained and inexperienced lookout" on duty at the time--a man standing his first watch.

He held that the "starboard hand rule" applied in the case. This rule states that when two power-driven vessels are crossing, the vessels which has the other on its starboard side must keep out of the way. The United States was suing the Malden's owners for \$600,000. The ship line was suing the government for \$60,000.

In his findings and conclusions of fact and law, Judge Northrop held that the Gearing was entirely at fault. The amount of damage to be awarded must be decided in a separate proceeding.



Malden's Version



Gearing's Version

Two different versions, one from the officers of each ship, have been given of the Malden - Gearing collision. Broken lines indicate original courses allegedly followed by the ship. Solid lines show the maneuvers taken to avoid collision.

Radar Dead When Destroyer Collided

By Gene Roberts

NORFOLK - Radar normally used to track approaching vessels was out of order aboard the Gearing last Friday when she collided with S. S. Malden at the harbor entrance.

This stated by two Navy witnesses in testimony Thursday during a Coast Guard hearing. Radarman W. G. Johnson said at the time of the collision he was trying to search the water's surface with radar designed primarily for tracking aircraft. Surface search radar, designed for locating objects on the surface, was "mechanically inoperative on the morning of the accident, he said.

Poor Substitute

Johnson said the air search radar proved to be "very poor" in locating approaching vessels. "it is not built for that use," he said.

Ens. John R. Eggleston, watch officer in the Gearing's Combat Information Center radar room at the time said the surface search radar was also inoperative the day before the accident when his was on watch."

In testimony given earlier in the 3 day hearing, Comdr. John R. Hanky, commanding officer of the Gearing, said the lights of the coal ship were not spotted in the pre-dawn darkness until two minutes before the 4:16 a. m. collision.

Visual Sighting

The sighting was a visual one The

Malden was not tracked by radar, according to the testimony.

Several minutes prior to the collision, however, the lead vessel in the destroyer flotilla signaled that it had spotted a ship and was turning 10 degrees right to a 315 degree course to avoid contact.

Johnson said he then tried to track the vessel reported by the lead destroyer -- but was unable to locate even the destroyer on his radar because of "sea return," (waves created by ship movement). Ens. William Kehl testified that just prior to the collision he saw the Malden's masthead light and a range light about five to 10 degrees off the Gearing's starboard bow. Hanky has testified that he also saw the coal ship about five degrees off the Gearing's starboard bow. But he said the light he first saw was the Malden's green (starboard) running light.

Hard left

To avoid collision, Hanky said he turned hard left but the Malden turned right and struck the Gearing in the side.

The collision, which caused on serious injuries to personnel aboard either ship, took place about seven miles off Cap Henry.

The Gearing was the seventh ship in a 20-destroyer formation headed into Norfolk. The Malden was sailing to Boston with a cargo of coal loaded at Newport News.

The impact tore a gaping hole in the side of the Gearing just behind the bridge. Damage to the destroyer has been estimated at about \$200,000 but the Malden suffered only slight bow damage.

Officers aboard the Malden have claimed that the accident happened because the Gearing failed to follow its convoy and cut across the Malden's bow.

Testimony from crew member serving on the Gearing will continue today at 9:30 a. m.

Engineering testimony was completed Wednesday when bell books from the Gearing were entered into the record.

Two Navy throttle men said they neglected to log a full ahead order reportedly given just before the collision.

The two sailor, who were working in separate engine rooms, said they did not have time to log the "full ahead order because the captain gave a "back full" order about 30 seconds later.