

Radar Saw Ships Converge

By Duffy Jennings

A Coast Guardsman watched the minute-by-minute collision course of the two ill-fated Standard Oil tankers on his radar scanner — but was powerless to prevent the colli-

sion, it was learned yesterday.

As the two seemingly insignificant blips moved inexorably closer on the screen, the radarman, sensing the impending disaster, attempted to radio the outbound Oregon Stanford.

But his efforts failed because the vessel was monitoring a different frequency than his — and the two blips continued to draw closer.

Helpless to warn the ships' pilots, the radarman sat tensely at his control pan-

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el in the Coast Guard's Harbor Advisory Radar Project facility at Pier 45, continuing to monitor the movement of the tankers.

The resulting crash between the Oregon Standard and the Arizona Standard caused the massive oil spill which soaked beaches and birds for miles around.

The radarman had ~~stray~~ enough to the ship ~~ns~~, it is doubtful there ~~have~~ been sufficient ~~time~~ for them to alter their courses.

BAY

The radar facility is an experimental Coast Guard project designed to provide navigational assistance and information on ships in the bay.

Adjacent to the Marine Ex-

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change offices at the end of Pier 45, it was set up a year ago to provide shore-based radar statistics to bay water traffic, as an aid to in-port navigation and to prevent accidents.

Its purpose — and limitations — were clearly defined yesterday by Lieutenant James L. MacDonald, the facility's 29-year-old officer in charge.

"The only information we provide is strictly advisory," he said. "The pilots are free to use it — or not to use it — as they see fit.

"We give no conjecture or opinions. In fact, most of our communication with ships begins with the words, 'the radar shows...'"

MORNING

But that morning, the radarman didn't even have a chance to say that.

Because the Coast Guard has no authority to exercise any controls over bay shipping traffic, it may not redirect any vessel, but merely provide information about it to other ships which may be in the area.

"As a ship comes in, the pilot calls to let us know that he is passing a certain reporting point," explained MacDonald. "But these are strictly voluntary reporting points. We only request that he contact us, we can't force him to."

"If he doesn't, we'll still see him on the radar, but we won't know who he is, how



LT. MACDONALD
'Ships

big he is, where
is or where it's goin

TRACK

Once contact is established, however, one of MacDonald's two-man duty crew can track the vessel and let other ships in the harbor know that she's there.

MacDonald, scheduled to testify today before the Coast Guard panel investigating the tanker collision, said the facility has been quite instrumental in aiding bay navigation among ships.

"But this is not a sophisticated system, he said, mentioning to the control panel. "We can't determine a ship's course and speed, or a collision potential.

"A precise ship location is available immediately. We know where it all is. But normally ships move at a speed of 10-12 knots, that's about 1000 yards every three minutes.

"A thousand yards is a pretty long way. But by the time we contacted a ship, transmitted the information, and got the two ships in communication with each other, it would probably be too late."

"One problem is that ships in the harbor change their course and speed so frequently, it's almost impossible to predict a collision on radar until it happens," said MacDonald.

The project, the only one of its kind operated by the Coast Guard in the United States, was set up here in conjunction with the existing Marine Exchange, which has been instrumental in early establishment of bridge-to-bridge, or ship-to-ship, communications.

But even when the radarman on duty the morning of the tanker collision attempted to contact the outbound Oregon Standard, he was unable to do so.

"The Oregon notified us when she left the Richmond Long Wharf," said MacDonald, "but we lost radio contact after that."