

Built in 2001 in Louisiana, the Nathan E Stewart was a 95-foot long, 35-foot wide steel tug with a gross tonnage of 116. She was named after a K-Sea Transportation employee who sadly was killed aboard the tug, but her bad karma did not end there. She was powered by two Cummins KTA-50 diesel engines turning two 87-inch fixed propellers, and was rated at 3400 horsepower.

The 91-foot long DBL 55 tank barge was built in 2011 in Portland, OR with no such ominous naming, or history.

These two vessels are be linked together in a marine casualty investigated by IAMI members who used their IAMI training to successfully navigate the ins and outs of the investigation.

On October 11, 2016, the NATHAN E STEWART and the DBL 55 departed Ketchikan (KETCH-ih-kan), Alaska heading southeast toward the Seaforth Channel on a voyage to Vancouver, British Columbia. The NATHAN E STEWART had seven crewmembers and approximately 60,000 gallons of marine grade diesel fuel onboard, while the tank barge DBL 55 had its tanks with over 2 million gallons of capacity were empty.

On October 13, 2016, shortly after midnight, the Second Mate on watch in the upper wheelhouse of the NATHAN E STEWART missed a scheduled course change traveling at 10 knots. Approximately an hour later, the NATHAN E STEWART ran aground on Edge Reef off Athlone (ATH-lone) Island, in the Seaforth Channel near Bella Bella, British Columbia, Canada. At the time of the grounding, the NATHAN E STEWART had two of her seven crewmembers on watch – the previously mentioned Second Mate, and the Assistant Tanker-man conducting rounds in the engineering spaces. Luckily there were no injuries, however, the grounding caused the NATHAN E STEWART to sustain a hull breach. This breach released approximately 29,000 gallons of fuel and lube oil, and caused the NATHAN E STEWART to be declared a \$6.4 million total loss. The DBL 55 was repaired and placed into service at a cost of \$5.6 million.

The investigation, led by IAMI members from the United States Coast Guard, determined that the event that initiated the accident was the missed course change by the Second Mate on watch. Additional factors included negligent practices by the second mate, failure of the NATHAN E STEWARTs owners to properly crew the ship, failure of the voyage plan to adequately address regulations applicable in Canadian waters and numerous other failures by the ships master and owner.

Our Investigators of the Year report several key factors to the successful investigation: close collaboration with the US and Canadian Transportation Safety Boards, immediate response and contact with all crewmembers, determining a logical explanation for the sequence of events involved (in accordance with Chapter 19 of the IAMI Marine Investigations Manual), and writing an effective report with clarity and reading ease (in accordance with Chapter 17 of the IAMI Marine Investigations Manual).

Our winners also provide three suggestions to other investigators and IAMI members:

1. When interviewing persons involved, ensure each interview is as non-accusatory as possible to prevent witnesses from holding back information. Project genuine sympathy for perceived tragic accident.
2. When other agencies of differing jurisdictions are involved, ensure information is being shamelessly shared in order to provide all facts relevant to the investigation.

3. Continue attending training provided by IAMI and other agencies to further investigators prowess in gathering facts and documenting them effectively.

Our 2020 Investigators of the Year are:

Lieutenant Brian Hennessy, CMI, USCG, Chief Investigations Division

Paul Tramm

Lieutenant Commander Kira Moody, USCG