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USS Fitzgerald Collision Tracked with AIS Data

By Chris Leslie June 26, 2017



The ACX Crystal vessel track from PortVision 360. The red segments indicate where the vessel slowed to below 5 knots. (Image: PortVision)

In the early hours of June 17, U.S. destroyer the USS Fitzgerald was hit by a containership just off the coast of Shimoda, Japan. The collision claimed the lives of seven U.S. Navy Sailors. In the aftermath, both sides are trying to figure out exactly what happened.

The containership, ACX Crystal, and the U.S. Navy initially reported the incident at 2:25 a.m. local time. However, they

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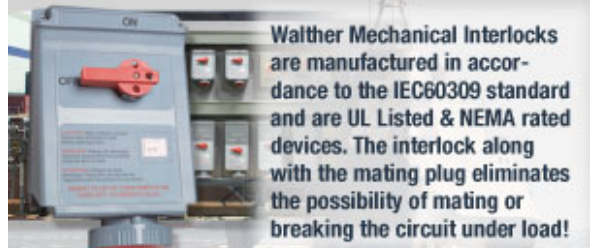
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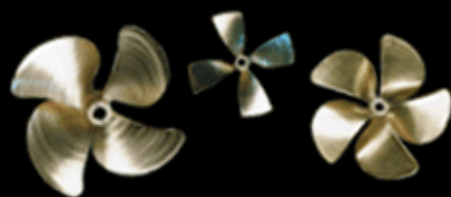
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have since revised the time to 1:30 a.m.

Apparently, the ACX Crystal made a U-turn at around 2 a.m. to go back and see what it hit. It arrived back at the scene at 2:20 a.m., at which point it was called in to the Coast Guard.

PortVision 360's AIS vessel tracking functionality supports these times and gives a clear picture of the cargo ships movements.

The U.S. and [Japan Coast](#) Guards will set out to determine exactly what happened. Some initial impressions from the incident include:

- Why did the ACX Crystal wait 55 minutes before reporting the collision?
- Maritime rules say that vessels are supposed to give way to ships on their starboard, which would indicate that the ACX Crystal had the right of way.
- Steffan Watkins, an IT security consultant and ship tracking analyst for Janes Intelligence Review told Dailymail.com, "I suspect, from the data, that the ACX Crystal was running on autopilot the whole time, and nobody was on the bridge. If anyone was on the bridge, they had no idea how to turn off the autopilot" and after analyzing the tracking data, "This is, to me, proof that a computer was driving. No captain shakes off a collision with a U.S. Navy Destroyer and resumes course so perfectly."



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- How could such a technologically advanced warship, made to be able to maneuver quickly, not avoid the containership?
- The Navy captain was not on the bridge, he remained in his cabin where he was injured during the collision. Did the Officer on Duty fail to call him up to the bridge for help managing the situation? Did he ignore the OOD's call for help? Or, did the bridge team not realize they were in trouble until it was too late?

We will continue to learn more about this incident as the crew interviews begin and the investigations get underway. Whatever the findings, hopefully we can learn from them and prevent future events like these from happening.

In the meantime, our thoughts and prayers go out to all of the friends and families of the seven U.S. Navy sailors, which included two local men from San Diego and Chula Vista, Calif.



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