

## mv Athol Voyage 10/5 Report. Chapter 3

At 1620 hours on December 3<sup>rd</sup> a mountainous wave, at least 40/50 feet high, was sighted approaching from the southwest, four points on the port bow, about a half-mile distant. The mere sight of this wave was staggering and unbelievable. Whosoever saw that wave approaching was certain that the ship would be swamped and that this was the end (even I said my last prayers). Instinctively the helm was put hard over to port to place the wave at two points on that bow. The vessel began to climb this behemoth and continued until half of the ship's length forward was out of the water and she was inclined at a very steep angle. In the chartroom everything smashed to the floor. The crest of the wave finally broke just above the top of the deck cargo at No. 4 hatch and then the ship plummeted downwards with a roll to starboard, burying her head into the next wave. Simultaneously the lashing chains at Nos. 4 & 5 parted with a crack like a pistol shot. The starboard half of the deck cargo slid into the sea. Number four and five U.C.G. booms swung violently to starboard, shearing off the slewing block and its bracket from the No. 4 mast crosstree. The chains went overboard along with the cargo. Corrective action to save the propeller from the chains could not be contemplated because the vessel was now riding the next mountainous wave and the helm had to be fought to prevent the vessel from being broached. Had the vessel not come around to ride this next wave she would certainly have capsized with all hands.

The radio operator was summoned and instructed to send out an XXX (Urgency Message) indicating the vessel's position and requiring other vessels to standby to assist. At 1628 SMT the following message was sent: -  
XXX CQ de 5MZN = M.V. ATHOL/5MZN POSITION AT 030600Z 3820N 15712E DECK CARGO OVERBOARD SHIPS IN VICINITY PLEASE STANDBY

In the meantime at 1622 SMT the Master addressed the crew on the P.A. system as follows: -

*This is the Captain speaking. We have just lost our deck cargo. We are in danger. All hands will please wear lifejackets and assemble on the boat deck inside the accommodation. Please do not panic.*

The ship continued to ride the mountainous waves. One wave came from a slightly different direction and the helm could not respond fast enough. Consequently she pitched and rolled heavily to starboard. This caused the remaining cargo to slide from port to starboard, some of it going overboard. This movement sheared off the already damaged ventilator at No. 5 and also No. 3 ventilator. The roll also caused the cargo overhanging at Nos. 2 & 3 to fall back to the original position. No. 4 U.C.G. boom, which was swinging violently and completely broken, wedged itself in the deck cargo abreast the No. 3 masthouse on the starboard side.

*The Master phoned the Engine Room and ordered the First Assistant Engineer, who was on watch, to remain at the controls. In case of emergency he would be informed. The Engineer gladly obeyed.*

At 1631 the Urgency Message was re-broadcast and only then was it learned the Main Transmitter power was weak so the R/O quickly changed to the Emergency Transmitter which sent out the message soon afterwards.

At 1657 the message was acknowledged by the m.v. *Jag Asha*/ATBO, in position 41N 157.3E.

*At 1700 hours the wind was howling from the West at force 12 and above. The swell was confused with waves about 30 feet high. Visibility was almost nil and the barometer read 985.5 mbs.*

As ordered by the Master, all Officers and crew not on duty were assembled, wearing lifejackets, inside the accommodation on the boat deck. There were no visible signs of panic although were afraid and prepared to face death. All hands were joined in prayer as they prayed for survival. They were properly clothed and no one was concerned about their personal belongings. Under the circumstances of course, it would have been almost impossible even to crawl outside. Any person attempting to do so would have been blown overboard. Also, the chances of lowering a lifeboat in those conditions were very slim.

The Chief Mate assisted the Master on the Bridge and attended to the Radio Reports. The Third Mate was in charge of the crew to ensure that all was in readiness. The Second Mate was engaged in communicating with the crew and attending to other duties. Seaman B. Sinha, the best helmsman on board, who had been at the wheel since 1400 hrs, declined to be relieved, even to get his lifejacket. For traditional reasons, neither the Master nor the Mate wore theirs.

(Looking down on the deck from the bridge it was a truly tragic sight. The familiar height of the deck cargo, with its smooth surface, and the catwalk were all gone. No. 4 boom appeared ghastly, bent and twisted and wedged into the cargo at No. 3 masthouse was definitely out of place. We could not help but think about all the work we had done to keep the cargo secure, but now it was lost.)

At 1717 SMT the Urgency Message was sent again on the Main Transmitter. Then a cable was sent to the owners: -  
SEVERE STORM NUMBER FOUR FIVE CARGO WASHED OVERBOARD URGENCY MESSAGE ISSUED VESSEL INTACT 030600Z DR  
POSITION 3820N 15712E = MASTER

In the mean time, No.5 U.C.G. boom, which had swung violently to starboard, remained there possibly due to wind pressure. But with each successive pitch it would bang heavily against the bridge front and other protuberances. At about 1730 hrs the deck crew were called and with great risk and difficulty they managed to pass a line around the topping wires and secure the boom to the starboard wing of the bridge. This probably saved that boom from the same fate as at No. 4.

At 1751 hrs Kushiro Radio replied to our Urgency Message and arranged for rescue ships at once. He was told that rescue ships would not be required. Thereafter he persistently and methodically asked all details pertaining to the cargo, nationality and number of crew, tonnage, ship's behaviour, weather conditions port of destination and departure.



By 1800 hrs the weather began to ease down and at 1830 hrs the Master once again addressed the crew on the P.A. system. *"This is the Captain speaking. The weather has improved and as you can see, we are still afloat. The situation is well in hand. I thank you all for carrying out my orders without panicking. You may now disperse. A word of advice – 'Say your prayers tonight, keep your cabin door open and your lifejackets handy'. Thank you.*

Soon afterwards the Chief Engineer reported that the Morgan Barkley cathodic protection system was not working. There was a chance the electrodes had been damaged by chains hanging over the side and rubbing against them.

At 1837 SMT the following message was broadcast: -

CQ = MV ATHOL/5MZN QTA XXX AT 030805 GMT SITUATION UNDER CONTROL = MASTER

And at 1849 the following navigational warning was broadcast: -

TTT CQ de 5MZN = MV ATHOL/5MZN DECK CARGO (LUMBER) WASHED OVERBOARD AT 0600Z IN POSITION 38.20N 157.12E SHIPS IN THE VICINITY PLEASE TAKE CARE.

The 0918Z (1948 SMT) weather report extracted as follows: -

STORM WARNING = DEVELOPED LOW 980 MBS AT FOUR ONE NORTH ONE FIVE SEVEN EAST MOVING NORTHEAST 40 KNOTS WITH OCCLUDED FRONT TO 40N 162E THENCE WARM FRONT TO 31N 174E AND COLD FRONT TO 30N 155E 20N 142E = WINDS 30 TO 50 KNOTS WITHIN 600 MILES IN SOUTHSIDE AND 400 MILES IN NORTHSIDE = FORECAST POSITION FOR 040600Z BETWEEN 46N 176E AND 52N 172W.

Again Kushiro Radio called and solicitously enquired about the condition of the ship, the crew and the weather.

By 2000 hours the wind had reduced to force 10/12 and the swell, though confused, was down to 30 feet. The barometer read 995.0 mbs. Visibility had improved. Due to cargo being lost the ship had a 3° starboard list.

At about 0030 hours on December 4<sup>th</sup> the following message was sent to the Tokyo agents: -

REGRET INFORM FOUR FIVE DECKCARGO LOST OVERBOARD IN POSITION 3820N 15712E AT 030550Z URGENCY MESSAGE BROADCAST SIMULTANEOUSLY AND CANCELLED AT 030807Z SUBSTANTIAL DAMAGE BUT VESSEL TIGHT STOP HOVETO AWAITING IMPROVEMENT WEATHER CONDITIONS DETAILS LATER PLEASE INFORM TRANSMACAN AND OWNERS = MASTER

By 0400 hours the wind had dropped to force 5 from NWxW with a NW swell of 10/12 feet. The barometer had risen to 1012.0 mbs. The Chief Mate called out the deck crew and inspected the gear and hydraulic systems of No. 5 U.C.G. The boom was then lowered to rest on the deck cargo at No.5.

At 0600 a stellar fix gave a position 38° 02'N 157°33'E and the course was now set at 260°(T). The weather report an hour later stated: GALE WARNING = DEVELOPED LOW 988 MBS AT FOUR FOUR NORTH ONE SIX FIVE EAST SEA EAST KURILS MOVING EASTNORTHEAST 35 KNOTS WITH OCCLUDED FRONT FROM 47N 163E TO 46N 170E 42N 172E THENCE WARM FRONT TO 38N 176E 34N 177W AND COLD FRONT TO 44N 165E 25N 152E WINDS 30 TO 45 KNOTS WITHIN 600 MILES IN SOUTHSIDE AND --- MILES IN NORTHSIDE.

At 0830 hours the Master, Mate and First Assistant Engineer inspected the vessel thoroughly to appraise the situation. The Mate and the Engineer each lead a damage control party.

The list was corrected by transferring Fuel Oil from No. 2 Stbd. Double Bottom to No. 5 Port Double Bottom tank.

*The expected trim was corrected by filling the After Peak tank with ballast water.*

*No. 5 U.C.G. Boom was raised and secured to the starboard bridge wing against the rubber stopper using wire slings and chain blocks. The No. 4 U.C.G Boom was secured, in its present position, to the Mast Stays using chains.*

No. 3 Exhaust ventilator, which had been sheared off above the trunk level completely, was blanked off with a steel plate cut to size, secured with 'C' clamps and cemented.

No. 5 Exhaust ventilator was inaccessible hence only cement was poured in places where water could enter the hold.

The deck lumber lashing chains at Nos. 2 & 3 were stretched bar taught and the stoppers of the senhouse slips were on the verge of failing. The slightest jolt would have released the turnbuckles with consequent loss of cargo and perhaps further damage. To prevent this from occurring, the loose ends of the chain were secured to the standing parts with a series of half hitches.

The following message was transmitted: -

ICANSHIP TOKYO SITUATION ABOARD RATHER GRIM DETAILS FOLLOW STOP NUMBER ONE TWO THREE DECKCARGO INTACT EXCEPT ABREAST TWO MASTHOUSE PROTRUDING OUTBOARD STOP NUMBER TWO THREE CHAINS BAR TAUT AND SENHOUSE SLIPS VERGE OF SLIPPING STOP NUMBER FOUR FIVE APPROXIMATELY 50 PERCENT CARGO OVERBOARD REST CHAOTIC NO LIKELIHOOD RETAIN STOP NUMBER ONE MAROL AT WINCH CONTROL BROKEN NUMBER THREE SLEWING WINCH BRAKE ACCUMULATOR UNSEATED SAME NUMBER FOUR PIPES BROKEN NUMBER UCG BOOM COMPLETELY BENT AND TWISTED NEEDS RENEWAL PORT MAT SLEWING SHEAVE ADRIFT NUMBER FIVE UCG MINOR DAMAGES SAME RAISED AND SECURED STBD BRIDGE WING NUMBER THREE FIVE EXHAUST VENTS BROKEN NUMBER FOUR FIVE GUARDRAILS AND NUMBER FOUR TANK AIRPIPES ADRIFT STOP 032000Z STELLAR POSITION 3802N 15733E 840 MILES TO GO ETA ON ARRIVAL HEAVY CROSS SWELL PROCEEDING GINGERLY DO NOT WISH TO BREAK ANYMORE EGGS IN BASKET CREW SAFE AND MORALE HIGH ALL SINNERS CONVERTED STOP MY SINCERE APOLOGIES STOP PLEASE COPY TO ALGONQUIN CROYDON TRANSMACAN AND NIPPONMARITIME = MASTER