

FORUM

Patterns in Encounters Between Ships

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I WOULD take issue with Spooner on his article in the April 1974 issue of the *Journal*. On a clear night, with no navigational hazards, a ship is reported at green 30, three miles! An assessment is made and decision to alter course to starboard is ordered. In this time the approaching vessel has made her own decision and altered course to port. Why therefore is the approaching vessel criticized for a port alteration? In my opinion she, the 'stand on vessel', has taken such action as to avoid collision without bringing on a close-quarters situation. On such a clear night the approaching vessel must have been visible for at least ten miles and at that range would have been showing all her lights, a clear case for an alteration to starboard on the part of Spooner's vessel to pass clear of the other vessel port to port. Was a lookout being kept at all?

Spooner goes on to say, 'My officer's assessment was based on radar tracking confirmed by visual bearings'. I can only comment that at three miles sighting the decision to alter course to starboard was far too late. It is possible that the action of the other vessel in altering to port saved Spooner from a nasty incident.

Another issue to be raised is the use of radar in clear weather. If radar sets were infallible we could have them on from commencement of voyage to termination, but all too often the radar is a temperamental instrument, and requires nursing against the time when it is really wanted. Why then should it be used in periods of good visibility, when visual assessment is a required training for inexperienced bridge personnel. In my own considerable experience there is an alarming tendency for younger personnel to rely solely on the radar for lookout duty and to navigate by radar when coasting. They do not, and will not, realise that the radar is fallible and that an efficient lookout is a prerequisite of safe navigation; the radar being considered, what it was originally designated to be, an aid to navigation.

In conclusion, and with reference to the remarks about deciding at what stage to take avoiding action, action must always be taken to avoid a close-quarters situation; so if you are in a 20-knot vessel action must be earlier than in a 14-knot vessel. Surely our training dictates what constitutes 'early action' without the necessity for legislation.