

Fatal lifeboat accident onboard Hong Kong Registered “OOCL Britain” on 5.3.2006

1. The Incident

- 1.1 At about 0845 hours on 5 March 2006, while alongside at Seattle Container Terminal, a Hong Kong registered ship “OOCL Britain” conducted a lifeboat lowering exercise during a lifeboat safety inspection by the ship’s Classification Society. During launching of the port side lifeboat from its stowage position, it swung and struck the side of the Vessel. The lifeboat overturned, detached from its securing and dropped approximately 20 metres into the water.
- 1.2 The port lifeboat sustained structural damage to the top canopy after dropping into the sea. One of the crew assigned to the port lifeboat, namely, the Third Officer died in the incident and one crewmember suffered from injury.
- 1.3 During launching the Third Officer might have applied the hand brake incorrectly inside the lifeboat and caused the lifeboat to swing. As a result of swinging the lifeboat banged against the shipside and caught on the gangway. Secondly he did not stop the lowering when the lifeboat swung and hit heavily against the shipside.

2. Lessons

- 2.1 The investigation revealed that the probable cause was due to the forward skate being caught by the stowed gangway as the lifeboat swung in the lowering operation. When the lifeboat continued to go down, it overturned to almost 90° causing the forward and aft hooks to disengage from their positions and dropped into the water.
- 2.2 The design of short skate and the recess opening above the stowed gangway might pose a danger to the launching of the lifeboat from the Vessel. It is also doubtful that the lifeboat can be safely launched when the ship is listed to 20° .