201526 Familiar port - unfamiliar outcome

Edited from official report RS 2014:11 (Swedish Accident Investigation Authority)

In darkness and good visibility a ferry (196m in length) was making a routine entrance into one of its normal ports of call. There was a light northerly current and SSE wind of about 20 knots. As the ship approached the port at a speed of 14 knots, the OOW initiated the turn to port to follow the fairway using the autopilot and a preset turning radius of 0.3 nm. The autopilot was set in ‘heading mode’, which meant that the drift was to be corrected manually. After the turn, the first green buoy encountered was passed somewhat closer than planned and a little beyond the intended route. At that moment, the Master told the OOW he was manually taking over the steering and engine control on the starboard bridge wing. He then disengaged the autopilot.

Soon thereafter the OOW indicated to the Master that they had drifted from their planned course and the Master affirmed. He applied starboard rudder in an attempt to bring the stern away from the starboard shore before the aft part of the vessel had completely passed the buoy. The Master then looked forward and perceived that the next green buoy was straight ahead, so he put the rudder to port and crossed the engines to place the ship on the correct side of the buoy. He then saw the green buoy disappear under the vessel at approximately midlength. The vessel made contact with the bottom shortly thereafter.

The investigation found, among other things, that:

* The central navigation stations were not equipped with hand steering, and bridge routines had developed whereby control of the ship was taken at the bridge wings during the last (critical) part of navigation into the port.
* There were no log or wind indicators at the bridge wing controls.
* The division of workload between bridge team members when navigating in narrow fairways is critical.

Editor’s note: Entering a port, even a familiar one, where the room for error is so small, given the size of the vessel, the speed of 14 knots, and that it was night time, is also cause for concern here. Night navigation and manoeuvring is more tricky than in daylight; visual perception of speed, distance and general situational awareness are less than in broad daylight.

