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# Russian Captain Found Guilty in Fatal North Sea Crash

By AFP

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Smoke rises from the MV Solong cargo ship in the North Sea, off the coast of Withernsea, east of England, on March 11, 2025, after it collided with the MV Stena Immaculate tanker on March 10. **Paul Ellis / AFP**

The Russian captain of a cargo ship that hit an anchored oil tanker in the North Sea last year was on Monday found guilty by a U.K. court of killing a crew member.

After eight hours of deliberation, the jury convicted Vladimir Motin of the manslaughter by gross negligence of Filipino sailor Mark Angelo Pernia.

The seaman, 38, who was married with a young child, was lost at sea following the crash in which Motin's cargo ship, the Solong, collided with the oil-laden Stena Immaculate, triggering a fiery blaze off the eastern U.K. coast.

Pernia's body has never been recovered.

Motin, from St. Petersburg, showed no emotion as he was convicted by a jury at London's Old Bailey court.

He was remanded in custody and will be sentenced on Thursday.

Speaking after the verdict, investigating officer Craig Nicholson described the crash as a "senseless tragedy."

"It's a miracle that there weren't more fatalities or serious injuries," he said.

Prosecutor Tom Little told the court Pernia's wife — who was seven months pregnant with their second child at the time of his death — lived in a remote area of the Philippines.

She would need to make arrangements to travel somewhere with good internet access to watch the sentencing remotely.

"This was a tragic, and entirely avoidable death of a member of crew caused by truly, exceptionally bad negligence," said prosecutor Michael Gregory.

"It is with great sadness for his family that his body has never been found," he added.

## 'Collision course'

The collision at speed in March set both vessels ablaze and triggered a massive offshore rescue operation.

Motin's defense lawyer, James Leonard, had previously told the trial that the captain had attempted to take the Portuguese-flagged Solong out of autopilot and change course manually to avoid crashing into the Stena Immaculate, which had been chartered by the U.S. military.

"That attempt, however, was not successful and the Solong did not change course at all," he said.

Motin told the court he had made a "mistake" and pressed the wrong button.

The jury was told Motin was a "highly trained" sailor who had captained the Solong for 15 years.

But the prosecution insisted that he "did nothing to avoid the collision."

"He could, and should, have acted differently" when his ship was on "an obvious collision course" with the tanker, Little told the trial.

The CPS said the Solong's black box showed no course or speed adjustments before the collision.

It added that Motin had disabled the alarm system, "leaving him alone to be on watch as the eyes and ears of the ship."

WhatsApp messages sent to Motin by his wife had "undermined his credibility", the CPS

noted.

She had told him to "think of an alibi and advised him to say he had not seen the other vessel on the control devices."

## 'Catastrophic'

Audio recordings from the Solong's bridge control room were played to jurors, accompanied by a visual reconstruction of the ship's trajectory towards the Stena Immaculate.

An hour before the collision, men could be heard speaking calmly in Russian about the price of cigarettes. Then a Russian folksong is heard, an apparent phone ringtone which went unanswered.

As the Solong approached the anchored oil tanker, no conversation could be heard in the control room at all. The ensuing sound of the collision's initial impact was so loud that jurors winced after being warned to decrease the volume on their listening devices.

The jury saw phone footage recorded by Joesen Mariposila, the Solong's third-in-command, showing fire at the ship's other end.

He was heard saying "Lord help us" five times as dark smoke began to fill the air.

Malcolm McHaffie, head of the Crown Prosecution Service's special crime division, said the case underlined "the gravity of a captain's duty of care while out at sea."

"If that duty of care is breached, the consequences can be catastrophic."

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