

US Navy ship damaged in collision with container ship off Japan, 7 sailors missing

18/06/2017 09:24 by admin

Yokosuka (Japan): Crew members from the destroyer USS Dewey were helping stabilize the damaged USS Fitzgerald after it collided with a container ship off the coast of Japan before dawn Saturday, leaving seven sailors missing and at least three injured. Family members were frantically seeking news, appealing via social media for calls from sailors aboard from the ship as it slowly made its way to its home base at Yokosuka, south of Tokyo.

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Rescuers were searching for seven sailors who were thought to have been thrown into the sea or possibly trapped inside damaged sections of the destroyer, said Japanese coast guard spokesman Yoshihito Nakamura. No one on the container ship was reported injured.

Footage from the Japanese TV network NHK showed Navy crew members working to pump water from flooded sections of the crushed mid-right side of the USS Fitzgerald.

The ship's captain, Cmdr. Bryce Benson, was airlifted to the U.S. Naval Hospital in Yokosuka and was in stable condition with a head injury, the U.S. Navy's 7th Fleet said in a statement. Two other crew suffered cuts and bruises and were evacuated, it said. It was unclear how many others may have been hurt.

The Fitzgerald had limited propulsion and a U.S. defense official said there was flooding in three compartments. Most of the more than 200 sailors aboard would have been asleep in their berths, some of which were reportedly flooded.

The Navy said that the collision occurred 56 nautical miles (103 kilometers) southwest of Yokosuka, which is home to the 7th Fleet.

"Right now we are focused on two things: the safety of the ship and the well-being of the sailors," said Adm. Scott Swift, commander of the U.S. Pacific Fleet.

An investigation was underway to determine what caused the nighttime collision between the destroyer and the container ship four times its size.

Conditions at the time were clear, though Yutaka Saito of the coast guard said the area is particularly busy with sea traffic.

The Japan coast guard said it received an emergency call from a Philippine-registered container ship ACX Crystal around 2:20 a.m. (1720 GMT Friday) that it had collided with the Fitzgerald southwest of Yokosuka, Japan.

Relatives of crew members were awaiting news of their loved ones.

"Just heard the sweetest voice and saw a wonderful face. He's okay. Thank you all for the prayers," Rita Schrimsher of Athens, Alabama, tweeted after speaking with her 23-year-old grandson Jackson Schrimsher via Facetime.

"It could have been worse so we're grateful," she said by phone.

The Philippine ship is 29,060 tons and is 222 meters (730 feet) long, the coast guard said, much larger than the

8,315-ton naval destroyer. Aerial television news footage showed its bow on the left side was dented and scraped, but it did not appear to have suffered any major structural damage.

Nippon Yusen K.K., the Japanese shipping company that operates the Philippine-flagged container ship, said all of its 20-member Filipino crew was safe.

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