

MARITIME TRAFFIC AND HYDROGRAPHY

by Captain L. OUDET, French Navy (Retd.)

One of the purposes of Sailing Directions is to give "directions" to navigators on the manner of avoiding impending dangers. When the danger of collisions reached the point in certain areas of acquiring a systematic aspect, it seemed only natural to indicate in the Sailing Directions the means of avoiding these. This was done in the 1957 edition of the French Sailing Directions for the north and west coasts of France, which recommended that ships on the Strait of Dover — Casquet — Ouessant route keep to the right so as to avoid the stream of ships coming in the opposite direction.

A hydrographic office may take the initiative in making a recommendation; it cannot however expect conclusive results. In a cautious and localised form, it had adopted the principle of one-way routes for marine use. To gain public recognition of this principle required an extensive movement of opinion — a formal agreement between navigators.

The International Conference for the Safety of Life at Sea, held in London in 1960, opened the way to agreement by introducing in the Convention the idea of "converging areas". The Convention entrusted ship owners with the task of delineating these areas and of establishing the shipping lanes to be followed. It also requested Governments to do "everything in their power" to ensure adherence to these routes.

From 1961 to 1963 a working group sponsored by the German, British and French Institutes of Navigation prepared a plan for one-way lanes in the Strait of Dover — the most frequented and most dangerous converging area in the world — and referred to the opinion of navigators on the expediency of recommending these lanes. 92 % declared themselves in favour of the recommendations.

Early in 1964 the Intergovernmental Maritime Consultative Organization gave its approval to the plan. It requested the responsible countries (England and France) to improve beaconage, etc. of the strait and recommended that all its member states use their nautical documents (Notices to Mariners, charts and Sailing Directions) to set into effect the adopted lanes as soon as the improvements reached the minimum standard compatible with safe navigation.

At the same time a group of ship owners made a decision in favour of the generalisation of one-way routes. As a partial and immediate trial application it established, for ships apertaining to it, a similar system of lanes in a certain number of areas : Ouessant, Finistère, Saint Vincent, Gibraltar, the Gulf of Suez, Abu Ail Islands (Red Sea), Bab el Mandeb, Ormuz.

Finally, at the meeting held in Eastbourne in May 1964, the three previously mentioned institutes decided to continue their plans for organising dangerous convergency areas.

Thus the desired movement of opinion has now been created. By declaring that the one-way lanes in the Strait of Dover should eventually come into force through nautical documentation, the IMCO placed all hydrographic offices face to face with a definite task. Strictly speaking, the task is not a complicated one : the basic text will in the ordinary course take its place in the Sailing Directions. It remains to establish between the hydrographic offices an agreement for the adoption of a totally unambiguous text.

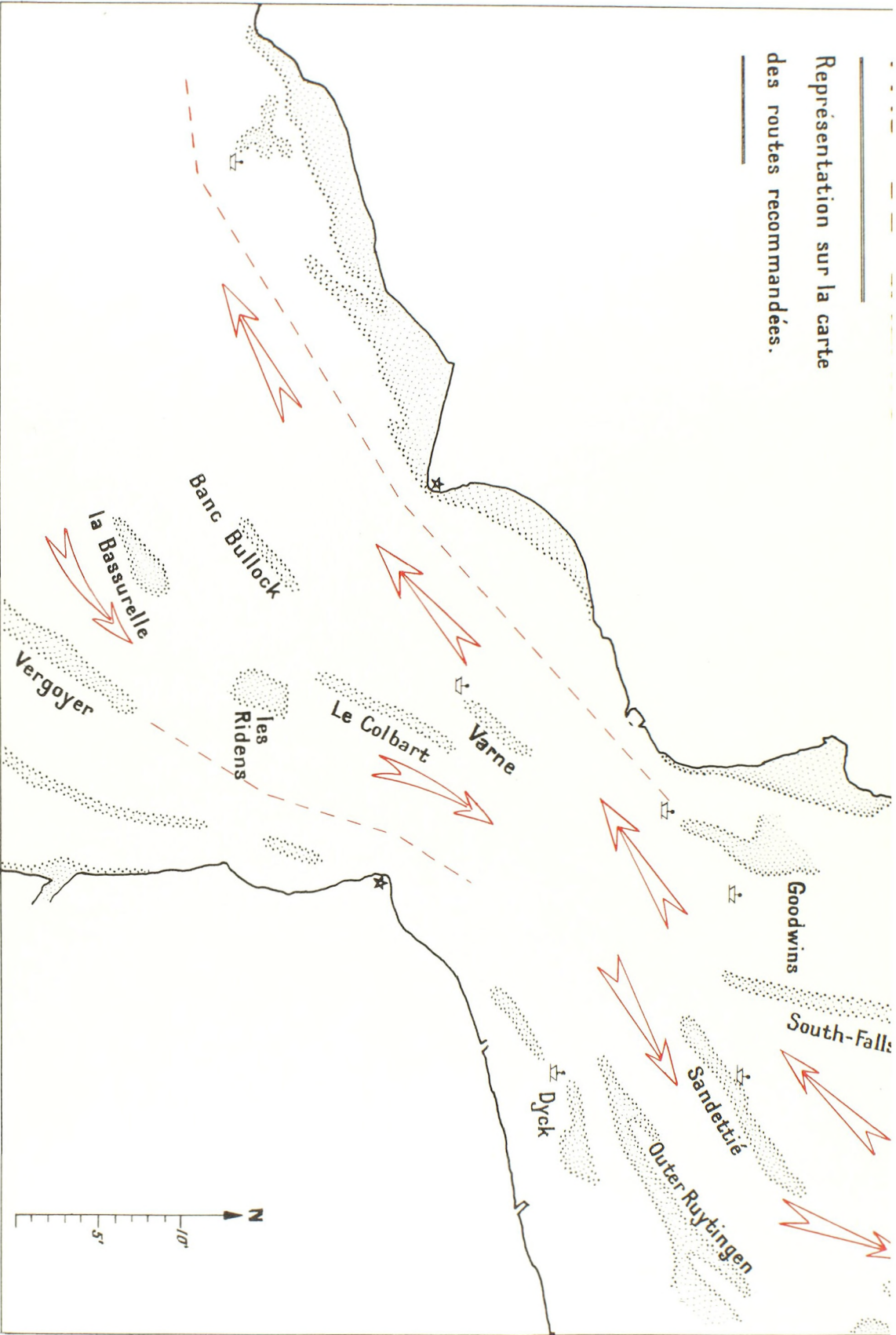
The text must first specify the one-way lanes of concern only to the main traffic and contrive an arrangement for coastal traffic. It must then recall that the Rules of the Road remain fully applicable in the recommended lanes and, in particular, that these lanes give no priority to ships using them. In spite of this, the recommendations should be presented with all the force of conviction conferred upon them by the almost total approval of navigators and the commendation of the IMCO.

The recommended routes could be represented on charts as indicated in the figure. Large arrows printed from place to place were chosen to indicate that the lanes to be followed are not rigidly defined. Dashed lines along the coast delimit the area reserved for coastal shipping. These lines do not appear on the plan adopted by the working group of the three institutes, but consultations with navigators have made apparent that this omission disturbed certain of them. Moreover, its plotting is obviously of a purely indicative nature. It would probably be desirable that these arrows and dashed lines be printed in an appropriate colour (magenta for instance) so as not to overload the fundamental chart.

Be that as it may, with respect to the Strait of Dover, the situation faced by the hydrographic offices is clear. They must simply insert in their documentation a recommendation similar to those normally made, but of a rather more official nature. It is this official nature which must be stressed if navigators are to respect these recommendations. Another matter entirely is the problem created by the initiative of certain ship owners. There can be no question of dealing immediately with these private undertakings, but nevertheless hydrographic offices cannot ignore them.

It is true that the institutes of navigation have decided to take up again their functions with a view to organising dangerous areas the world over, but this is an enormous task which they obviously cannot accomplish alone as they were able to in the case of a single area, the Strait of Dover. For instance, they cannot aspire to organise world-wide referendums for all the areas of concentration, as navigators would quickly tire of incessant consultations. Nevertheless, how may an organisation procure unquestioned authority if it is not based on almost unanimous agreement ? Here lies the advantage of the hydrographic offices, which are already organised for this purpose. We remarked at the beginning that the principle of one-way routes first appeared in Sailing Directions. For the principle to gain the necessary credence, directives adopted by the 1960 Convention and the assistance of

Representation sur la carte
des routes recommandées.



the institutes of navigation were necessary. However, once results were secured, the IMCO restored the recommendations to their logical setting — nautical documents.

Furthermore, the hydrographic offices actively participated in the work of the institutes of navigation. Why did they seek this unobtrusive role? Because the decision rested with their clients — the navigators — and they did not wish to bring any pressure to bear on them. Now that the principle of regulated maritime traffic appears to be universally accepted, and now that maritime opinion wishes to see these principles applied to all dangerous convergency areas, the hydrographic offices no longer have any reason to remain non-committal. Everything seems to indicate that they will offer their cooperation in assisting their clients to undertake the desired reform.

Sailing Directions are designed to make accessible to all the knowledge acquired by the most experienced seamen (*). Hydrographic offices collect this experience through continuous enquiries to navigators. To obtain qualified opinions on the organisation of convergency areas, the form of the enquiry must simply be adapted to the goal sought; for instance :

- a meeting, without distinction of nationality, of the captains of the principal shipping companies;
- the insertion of questionnaires in weekly groups of notices to mariners.

If each hydrographic office follows this procedure for the areas adjacent to its coast, a sizeable documentation will quickly be assembled. The hydrographic offices of neighbouring countries could then meet to exchange the information gathered and to study the introduction of new recommendations in nautical documents.

These suggestions in no way lead to the hydrographic offices taking over the role of the institutes of navigation. The latter bring together persons concerned with all aspects of nautical problems : hydrography is but one of these aspects. In return, although the drafting of recommendations to navigators comes under the purview of the hydrographic offices, this work remains of only secondary importance in their aggregate tasks.

Therefore it appears normal to leave to the institutes of navigation the task of overall guidance of the work on maritime traffic. However, it is likely that in the future the hydrographic offices will be led to take an increasingly active participation in this work. Moreover it is to be hoped that exception will not be taken to the assistance of private organisations by official organisations, when the contrary would appear more logical. The essential object of both is to improve navigational safety and, as has always been the case, this primary preoccupation will prevail to avert any risk of conflict of functions.

(* See the article "The New Golden Age of Hydrography", *International Hydrographic Review*, Vol. XXXIII, No. 2, page 9.