

11 October 2013 wreck: boat carrying over 400 people sinks after being shot by Libyan vessel and several hours of delay in the rescue operation

watchthemed.net, 29.11.2013

On the 11 October 2013, a boat carrying over 400 people sank after being shot by a Libyan vessel. Despite the rescue operation led by Maltese and Italian assets that saved 212 people, it is believed that more than 200 people have died. In the weeks that have followed, detailed testimonies by several survivors and the research of investigative journalist Fabrizio Gatti (Espresso) has revealed that there was a serious delay in the organisation of the rescue, without which the passengers could have been saved. Further elements of technical evidence we have analysed such as automated vessel-tracking data (AIS) and distress warnings sent by the Italian and Maltese rescue agencies prove these allegations, which have been further confirmed by official responses to Espresso. The following reconstruction of the events is based on the above sources. It will be continuously updated as new evidence is released.

Around 22.00¹ on 10 October 2013: a large group mostly composed of refugees fleeing Syria are transported by a rubber boat in groups of 10 people to a large fishing boat anchored outside the port of Zuwarah (Libya). When Dr. Jammo, one of the passengers, asked K., the trafficker from Zuwarah, how many people were onboard he answered: “you are about 260 adults, and about 100 children.” Dr Jammo however believes that there were more than 350 adults and 150 children onboard (see video interview). While the exact number of passengers is not known, several other survivors have claimed that there were more than 400 people on board, which may be considered as the baseline.

Around 1.00 on 11 October 2013: the large fishing boat leaves the port Zuwarah.

Around 3.00: A Libyan vessel flying the Berber flag (Berber militias control the city of Zuwarah) demands that the passengers come back to the port but remain outside of it. On board, four to seven men, wearing what appear to be civilian clothes and armed with Kalashnikovs. A., a Tunisian national who is navigating the boat, uses the satellite phone to call the organizer of the trip, K. of Zuwarah, and receives the order to proceed. The armed men shoot rounds of bullets in the air to scare the passengers and then aim towards the drivers’ cabin. Some refugees raise their children in the air, begging them not to shoot. The patrol boat has a powerful spotlight focussed on the vessel and the scene is clearly visible. But the shots continue at least twenty times in the course of the night. Several people are wounded (3-4). Shots are also fired against the hull and near the engine section of the boat, causing water to progressively enter. While the identity of the Libyan vessel is still unknown, these events are consistently described by the survivors. One of them demonstrated to us wounds due to bullets.

Around 6.00: at dawn, the boat with the Berber flag returns to Libya. The migrants’ boat continues heading towards Lampedusa. The mounting water is contained by using the only functioning water pump, the second pump having already broken.

¹ All times are Italian times (UTC +2 at the time of the events)

Around 10.00: A., the “captain”, is informed by some passengers in the bottom section of the vessel that a lot of water is entering the boat. After checking the situation, he asks who speaks English and who knows the Italian number for emergencies at sea. Mohanad Jammo, a prominent Syrian medical doctor aged 40, steps forward. On his mobile phone, he has the number to call in case of emergency at sea because before departing he made a screenshot of it from a Facebook post’s comments on “Al kompis”, a Swedish based Arabic news site.

11.00 – 13.00: Mohanad Jammo calls the Italian number. He describes the call in the following way: “I got in touch with the Italian telephone number before 11 o’clock in the morning. A women answered, first speaking Italian then English: “Give me your exact position”, she said. So I gave her our position. I said: “Please, we are on a boat in the middle of the sea, we’re all Syrians, many of us are doctors, we are in a dangerous situation, the boat is going to fall down because water is coming in. We’re going towards death, there are more than one-hundred children with us. Please, please, help us, please” (see video interview).

While the call at 11.00 has not been confirmed by MRCC Rome, in its letter to Espresso, it has acknowledged that it received a first call at 12.26 and a second at 12.39. The last call occurs at 12.56. Dr. Jammo has also described several calls. He says he called back about 90 minutes after his first call (around 12:30). He recalls the communication in the following way: “I called her back, she said: “OK, OK, OK”. I understood they were coming to us.” However, since nothing was happening, he called again. “The woman put me on hold and the phone was picked up by a man. He said: “Look, you’re in an area due to the Maltese forces, not to us. You have to call the Maltese Navy”. I begged him: “Please, we are dying!” He replied: “Please call the Maltese forces now. I’ll give you the number. 00356...” (see video interview).

MRCC Rome has further confirmed to the Espresso that despite the vessel being located closer to the Italian island of Lampedusa than Malta (70 nm or 130 km from Lampedusa and 124 nm or 230 km from Malta, see map), because the vessel is located in the Maltese Search and Rescue zone, AFM Malta was handed over the coordination of the rescue at 13.00. MRCC Rome claims to have provided the identity of the closest assets to the vessel in distress at the time, including the Italian naval ship ITS Libra and two commercial ships the Stadt Bremerhaven and the Tyrusland, respectively 25 and 70 miles away.

13.34: After checking the position of the vessel with Thuraya, the satellite phone provider, MRCC Rome sends out a message concerning the vessel in distress through the SafetyNET international safety service and as a Hydrolant Navigational Warning to all vessels in the Central Mediterranean, informing them of the vessel’s distress and position (See Hydrolant). The warning states:

EASTERN MEDITERRANEAN SEA. VESSEL, 250 PERSONS ON BOARD, REQUESTING ASSISTANCE IN 34-20-18N 012-42-05E. VESSELS IN VICINITY REQUESTED TO KEEP A SHARP LOOKOUT, ASSIST IF POSSIBLE. REPORTS TO MRCC ROME

At 13.34, MRCC Rome, AFM Malta, and all vessels in the Central Mediterranean are thus informed of the distress of the passengers and of their position. The analysis of AIS (Automated Identification System) data by Don Ferguson, Geospatial Analyst at West Virginia University and GISCorps volunteer, shows the movements of several vessels in vicinity. The AIS data which provides the position of large commercial vessels as well as some state operated vessels indicates that at this time there are several coast guard boats in operation off the coast of Lampedusa. The AIS data also shows several commercial ships that came less than 50 km from the vessel (see AIS analysis). Finally, in the letter to Espresso, Italian authorities confirmed the Italian naval ship ITS Libra was located around 27 nm (48 km) from the vessel in distress at this time. None of these vessels directs itself towards the position of the migrants in distress until after the boat capsizes at around 17.00. AFM has not released the position of its assets at the time (in particular the P 61 that was sent to operate the rescue) and they are not accounted for by the AIS data.

13.00-15.00: At first the passengers do not want Dr Jammo to call AFM Malta, because they want to go to Italy. However, as of 13.00 and up to 15.00 Dr Jammo calls AFM several times. After the call to Malta, Dr Jammo also calls K., the trafficker in Zuwarah, to put more credit on the satellite phone. Around 15:00, Dr. Jammo calls Malta again and is told that the position has been identified and that rescue will arrive in 45 minutes (see video interview). The vessel continues to take in water.

Around 16.00: According to a press statement of the AFM, the AFM aircraft B 200 detects the migrants at about 4 PM. Dr Jammo calls again and is told that rescue will arrive in another hour and ten minutes. The 2nd water pump stops working and water rises rapidly. Dr Jammo calls again AFM Malta and begs the crew of the aircraft to send down life jackets and inflatable boats to begin as soon as possible the evacuation of the boat (see video interview).

Around 17.00: According to Dr Jammo, around 17.00, the vessel sinks rapidly. Part of the passengers do not manage to exit the boat, since they are located in the small cabins on the deck.

17.07: According to the MRCC Rome's letter to Espresso, MRCC Rome is contacted by AFM Malta and informed of the wreck and the many people at sea. The support of Italian means is requested and the message is passed to Lampedusa. At 17.14 the Italian naval ship ITS Libra is directed to the location of distress. It is located 10 nm or 18 km away. The AFM plane launches two large sacs filled with life jackets and an inflatable dinghy. It is soon joined by the helicopter sent from the ITS Libra.

17.49: The AIS data shows the CP 302 coast guard speedboat leaves from Lampedusa, followed by CP 301. They are followed by two vessels of the Italian Customs Police (not accounted for by AIS data.)

17.51: According to the press statement of AFM Malta, the AFM patrol boat P 61 reaches the location and starts the rescue.

Around 18.00: The ITS Libra arrives on location

18.15: The AIS data shows that two large Italian fishing vessels, the Famavia and Chiaraluna are heading towards the location of distress.

18.26: A second Hydrolant warning is sent out to the area. It provides the coordinates of the capsized vessel (34-28N, 012-41E), also indicated on the map released by AFM (see AFM map). It places the vessel 61.4 nm or 111 km from Lampedusa and 118 nm or 218 km from Malta.

20:18 - 20.30: The AIS data shows CP 302 arriving, followed by CP 301.

During the rescue operation, AFM Malta rescues 147 people, while Italian assets 65, often separating families in the process. 26 bodies are recovered. Considering that 212 people were saved and that there were more than 400 people on board, it is believed at least 200 have died.

According to the above reconstruction, the incident has been initially caused by the Libyan vessel that shot onto the migrants' boat and caused it to take in water. Subsequently, the delay in the rescue following the distress call led to the failure to prevent the loss of over 200 lives. While the first 1st call at 11.00 has not been confirmed by MRCC Rome, considering the first confirmed call at 12.26, coast guard vessels from Lampedusa could have been on location as of 15.00, at least 2 hours before the boat sunk. Several other commercial vessels as well as the military ship ITS Libra could have assisted in the rescue and the latter could have covered the 27nm of distance from the migrants' boat in less than 1:30 hour considering a speed of 20kn.²

In its email response to the Espresso dated 11 November 2013, MRCC Rome justifies the lack of deployment of Italian assets by claiming that it was AFM Malta's responsibility to demand it since it assumed to coordination of the rescue. AFM has not responded to these allegations.

Annexe 1: Interview with Dr Mohanad Jammo by Fabrizio Gatti

Annexe 2: Hydrolant Warnings

Annexe 3: AIS data analysis

Annexe 4: AFM Malta map

² See: <http://www.marina.difesa.it/uominimezzi/navi/Pagine/Libra.aspx>

Annexe 1: Interview with Dr Mohanad Jammo by Fabrizio Gatti



Available at: <http://video.espresso.repubblica.it/tutti-i-video/left-to-die-english/1248/1249>

Annexe 2: Hydrolant Warnings:

HYDROLANT 2517/2013 (53)
(Cancelled by HYDROLANT 2600/2013)
EASTERN MEDITERRANEAN SEA.
VESSEL, 250 PERSONS ON BOARD, CAPSIZED AND ADRIFT
IN 34-28N 012-41E. VESSELS IN VICINITY REQUESTED
TO KEEP A SHARP LOOKOUT, ASSIST IF POSSIBLE.
REPORTS TO MRCC MALTA, PHONE: 356 215 7267,
FAX: 356 2180 9860, E-MAIL: RCCMALTA@GOV.MT
OR MRCC ROME, INMARSAT-C: 424744220,
PHONE: 39 065 908 4527, 39 065 908 4409,
FAX: 390 6592 2737, 3906 5908 4793,
E-MAIL: ITMRCC@MIT.GOV.IT,
UFFICIO3.REPARTO3@MIT.GOV.IT,
CGCP3REP4@MIT.GOV.IT.

(111626Z OCT 2013)

HYDROLANT 2512/2013 (53)
(Cancelled by HYDROLANT 2545/2013)
EASTERN MEDITERRANEAN SEA.
VESSEL, 250 PERSONS ON BOARD, REQUESTING ASSISTANCE
IN 34-20-18N 012-42-05E. VESSELS IN VICINITY
REQUESTED TO KEEP A SHARP LOOKOUT, ASSIST
IF POSSIBLE. REPORTS TO MRCC ROME,
INMARSAT-C: 424744220,
PHONE: 39 065 908 4527, 39 065 908 4409,
FAX: 390 6592 2737, 3906 5908 4793,
E-MAIL: ITMRCC@MIT.GOV.IT,
UFFICIO3.REPARTO3@MIT.GOV.IT,
CGCP3REP4@MIT.GOV.IT.

(111134Z OCT 2013)

1st message (HYDROLANT 2512/2013):

Sent at "111134Z OCT 2013", meaning 11 October 2013 at 11:34 UTC (13:34 Italian time). The position 34-20-18N 012-42-05E places the vessel 70 nm or 130 km from Lampedusa and 124 nm or 230 km from Malta, but in the Maltese Search and Rescue zone.

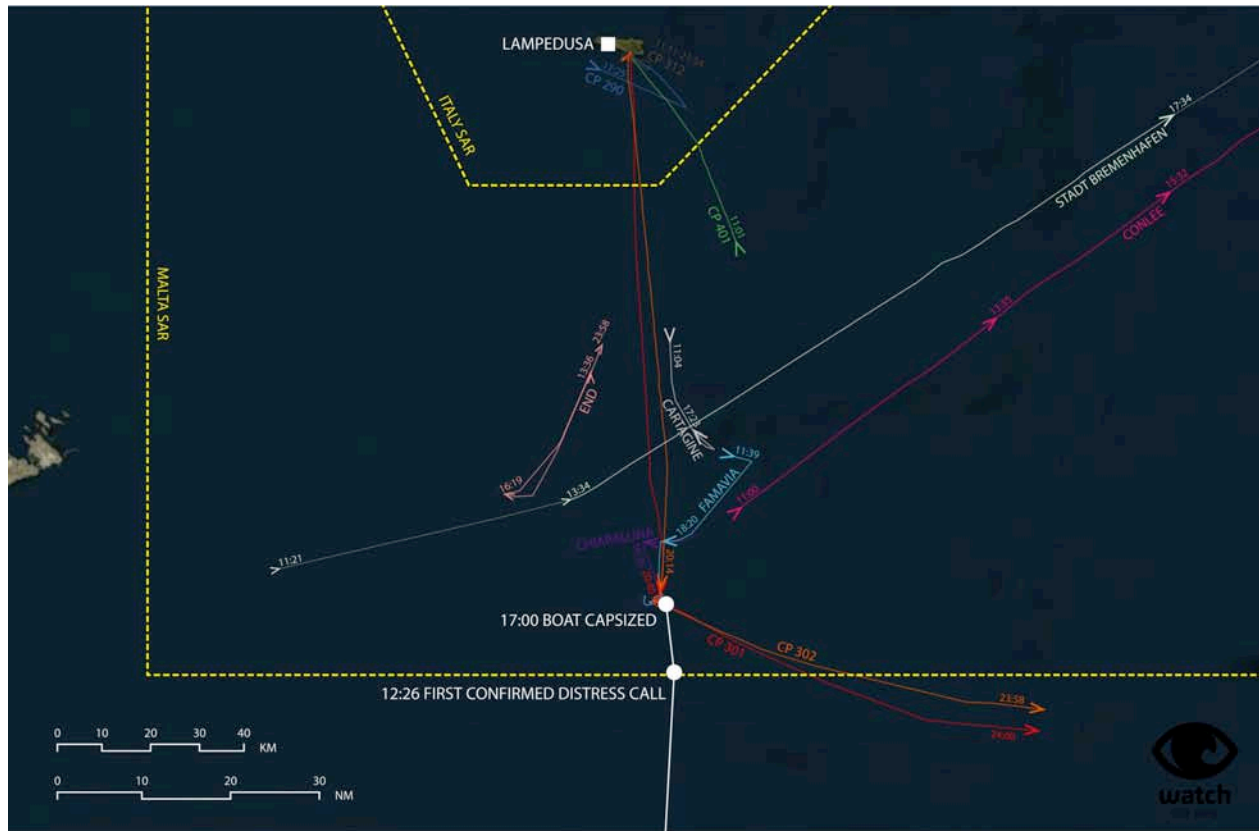
2nd message (HYDROLANT 2517/2013):

Sent at "111626Z OCT 2013", meaning 11 October 2013 at 16:26 UTC (18:26 Italian time). The position 34-28N 012-41E corresponds to the location of the wreck. It places the vessel 61.4 nm or 111 km from Lampedusa and 118 nm or 218 km from Malta, still within the Maltese Search and Rescue zone.

Both messages are sent through the World Wide Navigational Warning Service (WWNWS) to Hydrolant area 53 covering the Central Mediterranean. These messages were accessed through the Hydrolant archive available on the following website:

http://msi.nga.mil/NGAPortal/MSI.portal?nfpb=true&st=&pageLabel=msi_portal_page_63

Annexe 3: AIS data analysis



AIS (Automated Identification System) data analysis by Don Ferguson, Geospatial Analyst at West Virginia University and GISCorps volunteer, for watchthemed.net. Data provided by marinnetraffic.com.

AIS (Automatic Identification System) is a ship-borne transponder system designed in the first instance for maritime safety and in particular collision avoidance. It consists of a transponder unit which broadcasts a message at regular intervals containing its identification, position, speed, course. The carriage of AIS is mandatory on the basis of international conventions by ships of 300 Gross tons and above and up, with the notable exceptions of warships and state-operated vessels, fishing vessels, traditional ships and recreational craft shorter than 45 m, and bunkers below 5,000 tons.

The analysis of AIS data for 11 October 2013 provided by Don Ferguson, Geospatial Analyst at West Virginia University and GISCorps volunteer, demonstrates that five Italian coast guard vessels were in activity in the area around the island of Lampedusa at the time of events. Three were never dispatched to the location of distress (CP 312, 290, 401), while CP 301 and 302 were dispatched as of 17.49 and arrive on location as of 20.18. Several commercial in vicinity continue their path, while two fishing vessels, the Famavia and Chiaraluna are directed to the point of incident as of 18.15. The AIS data analysis demonstrates that not a single vessel responded to the distress warning sent out in the area at 13:34. Vessels were only dispatched after the boat capsized around 17:00.

Annexe 4: Map released by the AFM Malta

