

Costa Concordia: a Sail-Stunt Ended in Tragedy

Francesca Giuliani (January 16, 2012)



What is "the bow?" Why did the Concordia cruise ship divert from its course to sail past the Giglio island? Investigations shed a light on a Costa Crociere tradition that might be the reason for the liner's wreckage.

The wreckage of the Costa Concordia liner last Friday appears to be a tragically misguided attempt to add a little excitement to a cruise by an irresponsible captain.

Allegedly, the Costa Crociere vessels would divert from their course to sail past the coastline of Giglio island, and had done so multiple times in the past without accident. The stunt is a sort of salute to the inhabitants of the island, and used to wow tourists as well.

The local news website [GiglioNews](#) [2] offers evidence of this. As La Stampa's online edition [reports](#) [3], on August 18, 2011 GiglioNews published an exchange of [appreciation letters](#) [4] between the mayor of Giglio Sergio Ortellì and Costa Concordia's captain Massimo Garbarino, who had led the ship close to the coastline on August 14 (and another time "three years ago," as stated in Garbarino's reply), offering the residents of Giglio and the tourists "an incredible spectacle".



In his letter to Gambarino, Ortelli mentions former Costa Crociere's captain Mario Palombo, a legend among the Costa Crociere personnel, who stopped leading cruise ships after a heart attack forced him to resign.

Palombo, born in Savona from a family coming from Giglio, is mentioned in Ortelli's letter as "a dear friend" whose intercession had been precious in that circumstance. In the same letter, Ortelli refers to the passage of the liners as to a "tradition", and as to a "homage" to the island.

Mario Palombo's name has been mentioned in the press these days as the possible recipient of "the bow" (the ship's passage to salute the inhabitants of the coastline, as referred to in the sailors' slang), but he cared to specify his non involvement with the disaster. At the moment of the wreckage, he was in Grosseto.

Concerning the tradition of performing the sail past that he allegedly established, he specified that those events were always signaled to and agreed with the harbor master. "I don't understand how this happened or what was going through my colleague's head," he said.

The most credible recipient of the salute, though, appears to be the Costa Concordia maitre Antonello Tievoli, from Giglio, who was meant to go back to the island for some time off a week before the event, but had to continue working because his substitute never showed up. Italian media report the words of commander Francesco Schettino to Tievoli as the ship approached the coastline: "Antonio, come and look. We are passing over your Giglio." As Italian newspapers write, on 21:08 on Friday night, a Facebook update by Patrizia Tievoli, sister of Antonio, anticipated the sail past.

The trajectory of the ship, a 293 meters long liner weighing 114.500 tons, is available on the website marinetraffic.com [5], tracking vessels' positions using the AIS data system.

The trajectory tracking shows that the commander intentionally steered the liner too close to the shore, to a distance of less than a mile from the island. The liner then hit the rocks of the Le Scole shoal. The collision provoked a 70 meters long crack on the left side of the ship, by the stern, maybe a sign that the commander had tried to take the ship past the rocky area.

The ship is sitting on its right side, which according to the Italian nautical blogger velasenzaparole [6] is a sign that the commander was trying to invert the route and point the ship to the island, where it could have been evacuated. The fact that the ship is sitting on the right side helps the wreck not to plunge, and allows the scuba divers to explore it and perform searches for the 29 missing passengers.

On Sunday night, the rescuers were able to rescue a couple of South Korean newlyweds on honeymoon, and Manrico Giampedroni, cabin service director, who was helping the passengers evacuating the ship and broke a leg in the process. Always on Sunday night, American citizen Lauren Moore was able to fly back home to Bowling Green, Kentucky.

The death toll rose to 6, as another body was found today in the second bridge of the ship. The man, a passenger who was wearing a lifejacket, was found in a non flooded area of the ship, so the causes of the death are still to be investigated.

The other ascertained victims of the shipwreck are 86 years-old Italian retiree Giovanni Masia, on his first trip after 50 years from his honeymoon; 68 years-old Spanish retiree Guillermo Gual on his yearly trip with his wife, who was rescued; 71 years-old French citizen Francis Serve, who died to save his wife giving her his life-jacket; 50 years-old Peruvian janitor Thomas Alberto Costiglia and another French citizen, Jean-Pierre Michaud.

In the afternoon, rescuers had to interrupt their activities due to unfavorable weather conditions. The searches will be suspended until the sea stabilizes. The alarm and the order to stop the operations was given at 11:38 am (GMT+1), when the scuba divers heard noises from the wreck, the Italian authorities state. The Costa Concordia has in fact moved 9 centimeters vertically and 1.5 centimeters horizontally. The rescuers fear that the wreck might plunge from the 37 meters high step it sits on, to then sink.



Another concern for the Italian authorities now is to empty the 17 tanks on the liner, containing 500,000 gallons of fuel and representing a highly dangerous environmental risk.

Captain Schettino earlier asserted that the rock the Costa Concordia hit was not reported on the maps, “a lie trespassing the sense of decency” for the Corriere della Sera editorialist [Pierluigi Battista](#) [7].

Schettino is facing severe accusations such as the one of abandoning the capsizing vessel before ensuring the safety of the 4,232 people on board, a serious violation of the Italian navigation code, and has been arrested under suspicion of multiple manslaughter.

Chief Attorney of Grosseto Francesco Verusio is always more convinced of his guilt: “He sent an SOS at 10:42 pm, an hour after the crash.”

The crash happened 3 hours after the liner had left Civitavecchia’s port last Friday. The passengers were enjoying dinner, when they heard a very loud noise and the power went out. They were instructed to stay at their place, but as the ship started tilting and the crew wasn’t sure what to do, passengers started calling the Carabinieri of Grosseto for help: “We heard a loud noise, help us!,” Corriere della Sera [reports](#) [8]. When the Carabinieri alerted the Coast Guard who tried to contact the Concordia four times, Schettino’s reply was always “We had a blackout, we are fixing it.”

As pictures, videos and viral tweets started spreading online, survivors Patrizia Perilli and her husband Luciano Castro opened a Facebook group for the Concordia passengers: “[Costa Concordia 13 gennaio 2012](#) [9].” The group has already over 6000 likes, and of all the posts, the ones about commander Schettino are surely the most resentful.

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- [9] <http://www.facebook.com/pages/Costa-Concordia-13-Gennaio-2012/302476689797985>