Article from the *Panama Canal Spillway.* August 10, 1979, by Susan Hall Liang

## Quidnet sinks in Canal

At 10:08 p.m. on Sunday, July 29, the 360-foot motor vessel *Quidnet* heavily laden with a type of rock known as barite (barium sulphate) and bound for Trinidad, collided with the Greek ship *Seatide* near the junction of Mamei Curve and the San Pablo Reach. The bow sank immediately and an hour and half later the stern went under. The vessel came to rest crossways in the Canal channel in 50 feet of water.

Moments after the collision, the Dredging Division dredge tender *Clem Perrin* was dispatched and later joined by the launch *Seahorse* to rescue the crew from the sinking ship.

Before the *Quidnet* sank, the crane boat *Atlas* came along side to render assistance but, because the ship was sinking so fast, this was not possible. By 11:40 p.m. the entire ship had gone under.

The bow of the ship *Seatide*, a freighter carrying clay destined for Japan, was damaged in the collision. She received emergency repairs at the Gamboa anchorage and went further repairs at Balboa.

The morning after the accident divers went down to determine the extent of the damage o the *Quidnet*, both external and internal. The also searched unsuccessfully for the log book and the bell recorder, which appear to be missing and for drawings of the ship.

The bell recorder records the exact engine orders. The ship drawings will be of aid in salvage operations.

According to the manifest, the ship's cargo, 4,383 long tons of barite (a long ton weights 2,240 lbs.) was loaded aboard at Callao, Peru and destined for Trinidad. Baryte is a type of rock which is transported in fist-size pieces to be ground and used in the oil well drilling process. A piece of baryte was brought up by Company Divers and tested to determine whether it would pollute Canal waters. This was not the case, however, as barite is a very stable chemical and presents no hazard.

Because the ship is lying across the channel, "about the worst position for it to be in, " a Canal spokesman commented, it is a serious hazard to navigation of all vessels transiting the Canal. Traffic has been restricted to on-way passage through the 300-foot open portion of the Canal next to the wreck.

Buoys have been placed at either end of the vessel and mariner have been notified of its size and location and pilots have been advised to maintain a speed no faster than six knots.

Although ships of maximum beam (106 feet) have moved around the site of the *Quidnet* they have done so with the aid of two tugboats, one of which is available in the area to assist any size ship. Night transits have been limited to ships no larger than 600 feet long with an 82-foot beam and 34-foot draft.

At the moment the dredge *Cascadas* is working at the widening a 200 to 250-foot path off the stern of the ship, as job the Dredging Division estimates will take from a month to a month and a half.

Although some oil was leaking from the *Quidnet's* bunker tanks, a boom was placed around the stern and has completely contained the oil.

The Canal Zone Board of Local Inspectors conducted an investigation into the circumstance surrounding the accident and will issue its findings of fact and opinion as to the cause of the accident.

The ship's owner were notified of the accident and were asked to give notice of their intentions with regard to the raising and removing the ship.

Representatives of the ship's owners have examined the wreck site and have decided to abandon the vessel. It will now be the Panama Canal Company' task to remove the *Quidnet* either by itself or through the use of a commercial salvor.

The last time a ship sank in the Canal was in April 1976 when the Columbian *Tairona,* a cargo ship carrying salt, struck the Cristobal east breakwater and sank in the entrance of the Canal. It took the Industrial Division about six months to raise it with pontoon. Before that there was the *Sian Yung* laden with cotton and rice, which sank in 1970 and took almost two years to be removed from the Canal by an outside contractor.