

ANCHOR DRAGGING

SIR,—I hesitate to join issue with the author of the article on Anchor Dragging in the July 1954 issue of the *Journal*, particularly since he is an old colleague of mine with whom I have shared several of the rather alarming incidents which he recounts.

However, while mutely disagreeing with many of his assertions, I cannot let pass, in particular, his remarks in paragraph 7 (Emergency Measures) without drawing to some extent on my own experience in command of frigates—also ‘in the uttermost parts of the sea’.

Generally speaking, in calm water, a freely-drifting twin-screw vessel can be easily turned at rest by working the engines in opposite directions, preferably with the aid of the rudder. With a strong wind on the beam this is usually only possible in one direction—i.e. down-wind, the reason being that, as your contributor states, the screws grip the water while the ship’s head continues to pay off. Thus the vessel quickly finds herself stern up-wind.

As all seamen know, this useful characteristic can often be turned to advantage in ship-handling manœuvres, or in extricating a vessel from awkward situations. However, it only applies *provided* the ship’s head is free. Just as a vessel under way will not steer to port if her stern is held from swinging to starboard, so a vessel dragging heavy anchors and cables along the bottom will not be able to fling her stern up into the wind. The prerequisite of such a manœuvre is that she frees her head, either by slipping her cable or rapidly veering a few more shackles.

In the situation so graphically portrayed in Fig. 2 of Commander Sharpey-Schafer’s article, neither of these requirements seems likely to be met (the latter if only because there is no more cable to veer!), and as far as (c) is concerned, unless the second anchor is let go at once the commanding officer, while praying hard for divine intervention, or mentally drafting his Grounding Report, might well start thinking of salvage operations.

I would further suggest that in this instance the Board of Inquiry with which your contributor seems somewhat preoccupied might well be justified in recommending a Court Martial, on the grounds that no vessel should find herself $\frac{1}{2}$ cable off a lee shore in a Force 11 gale unless earlier action to prevent her becoming embayed had been neglected.

Hydrographic Department (Admiralty),
Oxgate Lane, Cricklewood,
London, NW.2

Yours faithfully,
G. P. D. HALL
(Commander, Royal Navy)

Commander J. M. Sharpey-Schafer writes:

Regrettably some ships have done just what Commander Hall supposes to be impracticable and others, even more regrettably, have gone ashore through failing to try their engines. To be more particular on the point, which is not easy for all points within the scope of an article, it is reasonable to suppose that most ships can turn in such a manner when held fast by the anchor in winds up to about Force 4 to 5. On the other hand if dragging fast in a fierce squall the bow is partly free and the grip of the propellers and turning moment can be started. True there may come a time when the wind is on the quarter and with decreased pressure on the ship’s side the anchor may hold, and further turning moment be

difficult unless a shackle of cable is veered freely. This veering of cable also applies if she will not start the turn in a lesser wind with only slow occasional dragging, or if the scope is already short and the friction not too great, the cable might be hove in till the anchor drags faster. This seems reasonable.

Some allowances should be made for awkward circumstances such as that described in the first sentence of the text following Fig. 2 (p. 296)—‘In getting clear of an awkward berth, with an anchor and some cable still down and dragging’; or a ship trapped in a small or congested harbour by a tidal bar or war-time boom; or a sudden fierce unexpected squall.

Perhaps both Commander Hall and I, and many other mariners, may seem assertive on such subjects, and if there is sharp disagreement, that is all the more reason for discussion so as to arrive at the best balanced views. After all ships do drag and get into difficulties, so there would seem some point in wondering why, and how best to prevent or mitigate it.

ERRATUM

THE NATIONAL MARITIME MUSEUM

IN ‘The National Maritime Museum’ by Commander W. E. May, R.N. (Vol. VII, p. 336), two lines were transposed in printing. The words ‘thus antedating the invention of Captain K. R. Belch, U.S.N., by many years’ printed on line 39 of p. 337 should come after the words ‘in about 1870’ on line 43, and refer to the double-sextant combined with a station-pointer made by Admiral C. E. Von Pott.