WRECKAGE OF CARGO SHIP BELIEVED TO BE *EL FARO* LOCATED IN MORE THAN 15,000 FEET OF WATER

It was announced from the (US) National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB) in Washington on 31 October that a search team on board the USNS *Apache* has found the wreckage of a vessel that they believe to be the cargo ship *El Faro*, which went missing on 1 October during Hurricane Joaquin. The vessel was located at a depth of about 15,000 feet in the vicinity of her last known position.

Sophisticated sonar equipment towed from Apache first detected what are believed to be images of the vessel using Orion, a side-scanning sonar system, at about 1336 ET on 31 October during the fifth of 13 planned search line surveys.

To confirm the finding, specialists on Apache will use CURV 21, a deep ocean remotely operated vehicle, to survey and confirm the identity of the wreckage. This survey was due to commence on 1 November.

The target identified by Orion is consistent with a 790-foot cargo ship, which from sonar images appears to be in an upright position and in one piece.

Shortly after the NTSB opened its investigation into the accident, it contracted with the US Navy to locate the missing ship, document the wreckage and debris field, and if possible, recover the voyage data recorder.

Apache departed Little Creek, Virginia, on 19 October after being fitted with a suite of state-of-the-art underwater detection equipment. On 23 October, after arriving at the last known position of *El Faro*, specialists on Apache placed a towed pinger locator (TPL) into the water and began slowly traversing the area according to a preset search pattern in hopes of picking up sounds of the pinger from *El Faro*'s voyage data recorder. After three days without any indication of a pinger signal, the TPL was withdrawn from the ocean and Orion was put in the water in an attempt to locate *El Faro* with sonar technology, which creates sonar images from the processing of sound patterns.

If the vessel is confirmed to be *El Faro*, CURVE-21, outfitted with a video camera will start the documentation of the vessel and the debris field and attempt to locate and recover the voyage data recorder. Those operations are expected to take up to 15 days to complete in ideal conditions but could take longer depending on weather and conditions encountered during the documentation process.