

How the **EVER GIVEN** stopped world trade



On March 23rd 2021, the **EVER GIVEN**, a *container ship* operated by transport company Evergreen, got *stuck* in the Suez Canal, leading to one of the most expensive maritime incidents in world history.

A growing canal

The Suez Canal is one of the world's most important *waterways*. It was completed in 1869 by the French, and at the time was only eight metres *deep*, 22 metres *wide* at the *bottom*, and between 60 and 90 metres wide at the surface. In its first decades of operation, thousands of ships *were grounded* because of its *narrowness*, until *improvements* were made in 1876.

The canal was, however, over 161 kilometres long, from the Gulf of Suez to the Mediterranean Sea, and by bringing together these two bodies of water, it changed the history of the world. Today, the canal is up to



Suez Canal, 1869

24 metres deep, has a *width* of 205 metres, and has up to three lanes and four passing places; in 2016, the Egyptian government invested \$8 billion in further improvements...all of which did not prevent another *grounding*. Unlike the groundings of 150 years ago, however, the impact of this grounding would be felt all around the world.

The big boat and the full moon

The **EVER GIVEN** had *barely* gone five kilometres on its *journey* up the Suez Canal when it was caught in strong winds and a *sandstorm*. Its cargo caught the wind, which pushed both ends of the ship against *the edges* of the canal. At over 400 metres long, it is one of the largest cargo ships in the world and is more than long enough to block the canal.

Immediately, *tug boats* were sent to try to free the *vessel*, but this didn't work. This is when the Egyptian authorities sent two *dredgers* and a third tug boat; by the third day, there were 14 tugboats operating on clearing the **EVER GIVEN**, and a day later, a specialty tugger was sent from the Netherlands and a third dredger sent from Cyprus¹.

¹Chypre

a container ship un porte-conteneur
 stuck bloqué, coincé
 to lead to (ici) donner lieu à
 a waterway une voie navigable
 deep profond
 wide large
 the bottom le fond

to be grounded s'échouer
 narrowness l'étroitesse
 an improvement une amélioration
 width la largeur
 a grounding un échouement
 barely à peine
 a journey un voyage

a sandstorm une tempête de sable
 the edge le bord
 a tug boat un remorqueur
 a vessel un bateau
 a dredger un dragueur (bateau qui empêche
 l'ensablement et l'envasement
 des fonds marins)



Satellite image of EVER GIVEN blocking the canal in March 2021

It was on the sixth day that, finally, the full moon appeared. When the moon is full, it is directly aligned with the Earth, which *increases* its gravitational pull. The sudden increase in *gravitational pull* from the moon generates “king tides,” tides that either rise or fall very fast. When the full moon raised tides on the sixth evening of the sixth day, the EVER GIVEN was able to break free.

The world economy chokes

The EVER GIVEN was like a *bone* stuck in *the throat* of the world economy, preventing it from *breathing* easily. By the time it broke free, it had already done considerable *damage*, not only to the world economy, but also to Egypt, and to the future of the canal as a major shipping lane.

Ten to 12 % of the world’s commercial shipping goes through the Suez Canal, as well as 2.5 % of its *oil*. There were 300 ships about to use it when the EVER GIVEN *ran aground*, and an equivalent number had had the intention of using it within the following two weeks. Many of those ships had to wait *idly* for the canal to re-open, or else take the long passage around the Cape of Good Hope², in South Africa. By the end of the crisis, it is estimated that these *delays* and extra travel cost global trade over \$6 billion, without taking into account the *inconvenience* and risk of inflation inflicted on consumers.

²Le Cap de Bonne Espérance



The boat vs. the canal

Unlike a chicken bone, however, the EVER GIVEN was not *tossed away* – on the contrary, it wasn’t allowed to leave the *holding lake* where the tug boats deposited it. This is because the Suez Canal Authority, which operates the Canal, is requesting compensation for the money spent on the *rescue operation*, as well as the lost revenues for the six days when the canal was inactive. The authority is asking for \$550 million.

The boat’s *owners claim* that the ship’s *crew was not at fault*. On the contrary, they say that, given the poor *weather conditions*, the authority should never have let the boat into the canal in the first place. In fact, the ship’s owners have also *filed a suit*, asking for \$100,000 in compensation for losses resulting from the boat’s *seizure*. ■



EVERGREEN truck blocks highway – a coincidence?

Evergreen is one of the world’s biggest transport and logistics companies, with teams of trucks and ships *crisscrossing* the world at all times. Still, it *defies* all probability that, at the same time the EVER GIVEN was blocking all traffic through the Suez Canal, another Evergreen vehicle, thousands of miles away, was also blocking traffic. And yet, this is what happened.

A tractor-trailer in China, on the Taiwan Highway, blocked four lanes and the *road shoulder* when it came to a stop at a 45-degree angle to the highway. On the side of the truck were written the words: Evergreen.

to crisscross
to defy
a road shoulder

sillonner
défier
une bande d’arrêt
d’urgence



to increase
the gravitational pull
a tide
to choke
a bone
the throat
to breathe
damage

augmenter
l’attraction gravitationnelle
une marée
s’étouffer
un os
la gorge
respirer
un dommage, un dégât

oil
to run (ran, run)
aground
idly
a delay
an inconvenience
to toss something away
a holding lake

le pétrole
s’échouer
sans rien faire
un retard
un désagrément
jeter quelque chose
un mouillage, un lac
à l’abri des courants

a rescue operation
an owner
to claim
a crew
to be at fault
the weather conditions
to file a suit
a seizure

une opération de sauvetage
un propriétaire
affirmer
un équipage
être fautif, responsable
les conditions météorologiques
déposer une plainte
la saisie