

CG-18 (Rev. 12-55)

UNITED STATES COAST GUARD



ADDRESS REPLY TO:

Commandant
U. S. Coast Guard
Headquarters
Washington 25, D. C.

LVI
(KETURAH a-8 Bd)
21 January 1958

Commandant's Action

on

Marine Board of Investigation; collision of the F/V KETURAH with offshore drilling platform in the Gulf of Mexico, 26 June 1957 and sinking with loss of life

1. Pursuant to the provisions of Title 46 CFR Part 136, the record of the Marine Board of Investigation convened to investigate subject casualty, together with its Findings of Fact, Conclusions, and Recommendations, has been reviewed.
2. At approximately 2235 on 26 June 1957, during heavy weather created by hurricane "Audrey", the wooden hulled American fishing schooner KETURAH, of 77 g. t., proceeding toward Galveston, Texas, under sail, with main engine disabled, collided with an offshore drilling platform in position 29-09-16 N; 94-40-33 W and sank with the loss of the entire crew, estimated at nine persons. There is uncertainty as to the number and identification of those on board other than the Master because he personally engaged the crew and did not deposit a crew list ashore prior to departing Pensacola, Florida, on 6 June. The vessel was valued at \$35,000.
3. The accident was observed by officers and men on the CGC CAHOONE which had been dispatched to assist the KETURAH because of the engine failure. Towing began at 0640 on 26 June; at 1815 the hawser parted, apparently from chafing on the KETURAH. When circumstances prevented regaining the tow, the KETURAH hoisted sail and headed for Galveston, followed by the CAHOONE. The lights on the drilling platform were visible and the structure was illuminated by the searchlight of the CAHOONE. The KETURAH failed to avoid collision, was dismasted, and sank within an estimated five minutes. The CAHOONE searched the area for one and one-half hours without sighting any survivors and was then compelled by the force 10 wind and heavy seas to abandon further search, ride out the storm, and subsequently engage in rescue missions created by the hurricane.
4. The Findings of Fact, Conclusions and Recommendations of the Marine Board of Investigation convened to investigate subject casualty are approved.

(Signed) J. A. Hirshfield
J. A. HIRSHFIELD
Rear Admiral, U. S. Coast Guard
Acting Commandant

REPORT OF
MARINE BOARD OF INVESTIGATION

To inquire into circumstances surrounding the collision
of F/V KATURAH with offshore platform, Gulf of Mexico on
26 June 1957 with loss of life.

United States Coast Guard
Eighth Coast Guard District
Investigating Section
Galveston, Texas

Subj: KETURAH, fishing vessel, sinking with loss of life on 26 June 1957, after colliding with Pure Oil Rig No. 107-1 position 29-09-16 North, 94-40-33 West approximately 10 miles south of the Galveston Sea Buoy in the Gulf of Mexico

FINDINGS OF FACT

1. At or about 2235 on 26 June 1957 the fishing schooner KETURAH, bound for Galveston, Texas, under sail with its auxiliary engine inoperative, collided with the drilling structure Pure Oil 107-1 and sank with the loss of the Captain and the crew, reportedly consisting of nine persons.
2. The vessel involved:
KETURAH - oil screw, schooner rig fishing vessel; official number 225142; U. S. Nationality; home port Pensacola, Florida; gross tonnage 77; net tons 67; length 83.4; breadth 21.3; depth 9.1; wood hull; built 1925 Pensacola, Florida; equipped with a 125 HP diesel engine; owned and operated by Warren Fish Company, Inc., Pensacola, Florida, with Samuel J. Tinsley as Master.
3. Weather conditions at the time of the casualty: Wind easterly 50 knots, 15 to 18 foot seas, visibility reduced due to heavy squalls.
4. At or about 1613 on 25 June 1957, the Coast Guard Cutter CAHOONE got underway from Pier 22, Galveston, Texas, to assist the fishing vessel KETURAH after receiving Operational Priority message 252031Z from Commander, 8th Coast Guard District advising that the fishing vessel KETURAH, with main engines disabled, was at position 28.10 North, 93.00 West.
5. Thereafter the Coast Guard Cutter CAHOONE received Priority message 252214Z from Commander, 8th Coast Guard District that the SS SEATRAN TEXAS advises fishing vessel KETURAH was in a position 28.07 North, 92.18 West at 1630S.
6. At or about 2000 the Coast Guard Cutter CAHOONE made indirect radio contact with the fishing vessel KETURAH through the fishing vessel PROVIDENCE II after the KETURAH had called any Coast Guard unit and the CAHOONE had answered with the KETURAH unable to read the answer.
7. The CAHOONE relayed through the PROVIDENCE II, whose signals could be heard by the KETURAH, that the CAHOONE was en route to assist the KETURAH and requested the KETURAH to give the CAHOONE a long count each hour beginning at 9 P. M. in order that the radio direction finder could be utilized to determine the bearing of the KETURAH.

8. At that time the Coast Guard Cutter CAHOONE was in the vicinity of Heald Bank. The bearing of the KETURAH as determined by the radio direction finder on the CAHOONE was 117 degrees.
9. The CAHOONE during this time heard the KETURAH talking to a fishing vessel, the identity of which could not be ascertained by the CAHOONE, relating that the main engine of the KETURAH was inoperative and that the vessel had been drifting for eight days.
10. Direct radio contact was established with the KETURAH at about 0400 on 26 June at which time the KETURAH desired to know if he should anchor while the CAHOONE took him in tow, at which time the CAHOONE replied that it would be unnecessary to anchor.
11. At approximately 0410 on the morning of 26 June 1957 the CAHOONE sighted the KETURAH at position 28.36 North, 93.03 West, approximately 73 miles southeast from Heald Bank. At that time the KETURAH was flying two sails and making good a course of approximately 310 degrees and apparently under full control.
12. The KETURAH was sighted approximately 3 hours earlier than expected as calculated from its last known position.
13. The KETURAH lowered its sails and began drifting and preparations were made to take the KETURAH in tow. At this time the visibility was good between frequent rain squalls, the wind was approximately 25 miles per hour, the seas were moderate with 8 to 10 foot swells, the wind and sea being from the southeast. The barometer reading at 0400 was 29.77.
14. By about 0640 the CAHOONE had the KETURAH in tow on an eight inch manila hawser approximately 675 feet in length. The towing hawser had a galvanized thimble eyespliced on the end and spliced through the thimble was a 25 foot length of 4 inch spring lay. There was an eye $3\frac{1}{2}$ or 4 feet in diameter in the end of the spring lay served with leather to reduce the chafing on towing bits of wooden vessels that were taken in tow from time to time. The spring lay was utilized since it was more resistant to abrasive action when towing a vessel in that on normal tows, the spring lay only contacts the vessel towed. The spring lay bears on the vessel's bow and the manila line which is more susceptible to abrasion never contacts the vessel that is towed after the tow is shaped up and underway.
15. The hawser was made fast to the towing bit on the CAHOONE approximately 15 feet from the aftermost extremity of the vessel, a point well forward of the rudder. The KETURAH was instructed to place the eye of the spring lay over their towing bit, if they had any, but having none, it was fastened to some object further aft, possibly the foremast of the vessel. So much of the spring lay was utilized making it fast to the KETURAH that only 2 feet of the spring lay extended over the starboard rail of the KETURAH after the vessel got underway with the tow.

6. The hawser from the CAHOONE led from the towing bit over a towing rail and chafing gear was fitted to the hawser at that point.

17. As the tow shaped up, the KETURAH rode slightly to the port of the CAHOONE with the spring lay leading over the starboard bulwark rail about 5 to 7 feet from the bow of the KETURAH.

18. Immediately after taking the KETURAH in tow, that vessel called the CAHOONE and the Master of the KETURAH advised that he had difficulty with his generator that supplied the power for the radio and that it would be necessary to secure his radio. The Commanding Officer of the CAHOONE replied that if other communication was necessary, the CAHOONE's searchlight would be flashed and at that time attempts would be made to re-establish communication.

19. While taking the KETURAH in tow, there was a man in the pilot house of that vessel and after the tow had been made up, the KETURAH towed satisfactorily until about 0930 when the KETURAH took a bad yaw to the starboard to such an extent that it overran the hawser and made it necessary to reduce speed and change course to bring the hawser from under the KETURAH.

20. The tow had been shaped up at about 0640 and a course of 300 T degrees was set and shortly thereafter changed to 297 T degrees towards the Galveston Sea Buoy.

21. The tow was started at 600 RPM on both main engines, increased to 650 RPM for a very short while, then reduced to 600 RPM.

22. The top operating speed of the CAHOONE was 1100 RPM which would propel the vessel without a tow at 12.8 knots. At 650 RPM, under ideal conditions without a tow, the vessel had been observed to make good $7\frac{1}{2}$ to 8 knots.

23. While underway the KETURAH continued to take short yaws to her starboard which would bring the manila portion of the hawser across the KETURAH's cutwater. The cutwater appeared to be constructed of wood and was of a broad as contrasted with a narrow or sharp construction.

24. As the tow proceeded towards Galveston, the seas increased, the wind velocity increased, the sky became overcast with intermittent rain squalls and the visibility decreased.

25. The yawing of the KETURAH became worse and efforts to establish communication with the KETURAH by flashing a light were unsuccessful. Also unsuccessful were attempts to communicate directly by radio on 2182 kilocycles, the frequency on which the CAHOONE had previously talked to the KETURAH.

26. To prevent the hawser from chafing on the towing rail of the CAHOONE, a towing board was used which consisted of a 2 by 12 board about 12 feet long secured to the towing hawser with short pieces of line. Over each end of the hawser pieces of leather had been fastened at a point where the hawser would go over the end of the board. The board was attached at a point so that after the tow was underway the board would be about half inboard and half outboard of the HOONE.

As the KETURAH yawed violently, this towing board turned over several times and grease was applied to the towing rail which would allow the towing board to slide easily when the KETURAH yawed, causing the hawser to change its position on the towing rail.

28. The KETURAH was first taken in tow by passing a heaving line to the KETURAH to which was attached a 3 inch messenger and to which in turn was attached the 8 inch hawser.

29. The Captain of the KETURAH attempted to pass the eye of the hawser through his hawse pipe but was unable to do so; therefore, the tow was made up with the hawser or the spring lay part thereof leading over the starboard rail to the object with which it was made fast.

30. The cutwater continued to contact the manila hawser at each yaw of the KETURAH and there were several more violent yaws of the KETURAH causing the vessel to override the hawser until at about 1815 on 26 June 1957 after a violent yaw in which the KETURAH overrode the hawser, the towing line parted at a point just outboard from the KETURAH. Frequent inspections of the point where the cutwater had frequently contacted the hawser had been made with binoculars but there had been no visible fraying or other imperfection in the tow line.

31. The towing hawser in use was not a new towing hawser but it was in good condition with no visible imperfections or defects.

32. At 1800 before the hawser broke the weather conditions had been logged to show the wind from the east, force 5, and the sea conditions 5. The barometer at that time read 29.61.

33. Before getting underway, the CAHOONE had been in a state of readiness designated BRAVO 2 which mandated readiness for getting underway within two hours for any search and rescue or other operations which the vessel might be ordered to perform.

34. Before getting underway, the CAHOONE had received one hurricane advisory relative to Hurricane Audrey issued by the U. S. Weather Bureau. The advisory had set a hurricane watch and gave the center of the disturbance at 12 noon on 25 June 1957 at 22.5 North, 93.0 West.

35. The authorized complement of the CAHOONE was 32 enlisted men and 4 officers. On board at the time the CAHOONE sailed were 25 enlisted men and 3 officers with the Executive Officer, Raymond W. Willcox, LTJG, USCG, Acting Commanding Officer of the CAHOONE, the Commanding Officer then being on leave.

36. After getting underway, further hurricane advisories were issued by the U. S. Weather Bureau indicating that the hurricane was increasing in force and proceeding in the general direction of the rescue operation. Hurricane Condition 2 had first been set and thereafter had been changed to Hurricane Condition 1.

37. After the towing hawser broke, the hawser was pulled on board the CAHOONE and a bowline was made in the end and the CAHOONE went alongside the KETURAH in an effort to regain the tow.

38. Notwithstanding repeated efforts it was not possible to get the hawser back on board the KETURAH due to the adverse sea conditions prevailing.

39. While attempting to pass and receive the hawser, it was necessary for the crews of both vessels to work on the main decks which were awash much of the time due to the condition of the sea. It was necessary for the CAHOONE to rig life lines around the outer extremities of the vessel and to require that all personnel wear life preservers.

40. The position of the vessels at the time the hawser parted was about $1\frac{1}{2}$ or 2 miles beyond and north of Heald Bank Whistle Buoy No. 2 on their course towards Galveston. The wind being in gusts to 45 or 50 knots with heavy swells, 15 to 10 feet in height, rain squalls and visibility reduced and the CAHOONE unable to take the KETURAH back in tow, the KETURAH advised that it would be able to make good a course of 310 degrees to Galveston, so the KETURAH raised a jib and proceeded on a course which appeared to the CAHOONE while astern of the KETURAH to be approximately 320 or 315 degrees true. The wind shifted somewhat to the north but the KETURAH was still able to maintain its course towards Galveston.

41. The CAHOONE kept a station approximately 500 yards from the KETURAH with various changes of course and speed to maintain station.

42. The vessels continued on their course being set heavily to the west by the east wind and seas until at or about 2200 the CAHOONE sighted the flashing lights of an oil rig after that target had been on radar for a short while prior thereto. The squalls were almost continuous at this time and the radar target was obscured at times.

43. It appeared to the CAHOONE that the bearing of the targets was such that the vessels would safely pass it to their port hand, however, the KETURAH apparently either changed course or encountered an exceptionally heavy set such as to make it doubtful that the vessel would avoid the rig.

44. The CAHOONE then began flashing its searchlight alternately on the rig and on the KETURAH to attract the KETURAH's attention to the rig and indicate that she was standing into danger.

45. An attempt was also made to contact the KETURAH by radio on the outside chance that it had accomplished repairs to the power source.

46. At about 1130 of the vessel KETURAH was observed to strike the platform, Fire Oil No. 104-2, on its southerly side and approximately 5 minutes later the KETURAH had worked clear from the platform and sank 150 to 200 yards on the east side towards Galveston from the rig.
47. The charted position of this rig is 29-09-16 North, 94-40-33 West.
48. At the time the KETURAH struck the rig, the masts were observed to break and fall.
49. Only two persons were observed sitting on the deckhouse of the KETURAH after colliding with the rig without life preservers.
50. After the KETURAH sank, a search for about 1½ hours was conducted but no survivors nor any parts or equipment from the vessel could be found.
51. There were lights burning on the rig prior to the KETURAH's collision with it, however, just about the time of the collision the lights did go out for a minute or two after which they came back on. During this entire time, the searchlight of the CAHOONE was playing on the rig as much as possible consistent with the rolling and pitching of the vessel.
52. The lights on the platform were visible intermittently between squalls for a distance of two to 2½ miles prior to the collision.
53. The CAHOONE was only about 500 yards distant from the KETURAH at the time it collided with the rig and after the KETURAH sank the CAHOONE changed course to pass through the immediate vicinity of the sinking and continued to search downwind from the datum point and as close to the area as possible. No parts of the KETURAH or anything that had been on board could be located until several days later when the Coast Guard Cutter IRIS retrieved a mast believed to be from the KETURAH.
54. The CAHOONE had its radar on the 8 mile range. Although the sea at the time was very bad, it picked up the target at a distance of approximately 5 or 6 miles, although it could not be determined whether the object was the rig or another vessel until the rig was actually sighted. The KETURAH being a wooden vessel and conditions for radar operations being bad at the time, the KETURAH never presented a good radar target.
55. The persons on board the KETURAH were never observed with lifejackets on even while working on decks that were awash part of the time while attempting to regain the bar.
56. At one time while taking the KETURAH in tow, the Acting Executive Officer, CAHOONE, counted 5 men on board, although it was difficult to make a count due to the movement of men about the vessel.
57. The fog signal from the rig with which the KETURAH collided was audible by the CAHOONE after getting to the east side of it.

58. The platform had been manned but due to the impending hurricane, the persons on it had been evacuated prior to the casualty.

59. After making an extensive search and being unable to locate any survivors or any part of the KETURAH, the CAHOONE proceeded on course 180 degrees true to ride out the hurricane.

60. At approximately 0800 the next day, 27 June 1957, the CAHOONE found its position to be off Freeport, Texas, due to the set encountered.

61. About noon on the 27th the CAHOONE changed course to a westerly direction and at approximately 1430 that afternoon it was ordered to proceed to the last known position of the fishing vessel JESTER which was in the area and had not been heard from. It was later ascertained that the JESTER had survived the hurricane and had made its way to Galveston.

62. The CAHOONE thereafter proceeded to Cameron, Louisiana, a scene of great devastation by the hurricane, to assist and finally returned and docked at Pier 22, Galveston, Texas, at 0250 on 30 June 1957.

63. Prior to the casualty, the KETURAH had last departed from Pensacola, Florida on 6 June 1957 with Samuel J. Tinsley, Newbern, Virginia, as Master.

64. The owners of the KETURAH did not know the identity of any person on board other than the Master who obtained and employed his own crew.

65. There was no written agreement between the Master and his crew nor was there a list of the crew members given to the company before departure. It had been the usual practice for the vessel to carry 8 or 9 crew members upon leaving Pensacola.

66. The owners and operators of the KETURAH did not know the location of the fishing banks to which the KETURAH proceeded.

67. It had been the practice for some of the crew members to obtain financial advances before leaving on a fishing trip and through this means and by talking to other persons in the vicinity, the owners of the KETURAH arrived at the conclusion that the following persons were likely on board the KETURAH at the time of the sinking:

Captain Samuel J. Tinsley, Newbern, Virginia
Gilbert L. Stowe, 13 North Tucker Street, Belmont, N. C.
Clinton Morris, Route 1, Box 214, Tampa, Florida
Fred Mashburn, Pensacola, Florida and Roanoke, Virginia
L. B. McDaniels, Pensacola, Florida
Floyd Winters, Moline, Illinois
Robert L. Tusler, 1318 7th Avenue, Moline, Illinois
J. W. Graham, Box 467, Hattiesburg, Mississippi

68. Graham and Stowe appeared at Pensacola after their names had appeared in newspapers as being missing, stating they had not made the voyage.

69. The owners of the KETURAH listed the number of crew members lost as 8 or 9 persons.

70. The estimated loss or damage to the vessel was given by the owners as \$35,000, the vessel being a total loss.

71. Witnesses interviewed:

1. Francis W. Taylor, 617 Bayshore Drive, Pensacola, Florida, President Warren Fish Company
2. E. J. Braswell, 2215 Whaley Avenue, Pensacola, Florida, Secretary, Warren Fish Company
3. James Norman Calvert, Route 6, Box 86, Pensacola, Florida, Owner-Captain, Fishing Schooner PROVIDENCE II
4. Raymond W. Willcox (5499) LTJG, Acting Commander Officer, CGC CAHOONE, Galveston, Texas
5. Billy R. Wilson, 3814 Alsace, Houston 21, Texas, Civil Engineer, Pure Oil Company
6. Mitchell J. Whiting (5904) ENS, USCG, CGC CAHOONE
7. John H. M. Douglas, EML, USCG, CGC CAHOONE
8. Frank O. Thompson, MACH, USCG, CGC CAHOONE
9. Joseph P. Preston, GM2, USCG, CGC CAHOONE

CONCLUSIONS

72. That the cause of the casualty was the mistake by those sailing the KETURAH in incorrectly estimating the leeway that the vessel was experiencing and attempting to maintain a course to leave the rig on the port hand until the vessel stood into danger. The change of course to port to approximately 290 degrees True twenty minutes prior to the collision was too late or insufficient in degree especially in view of the visibility of the lights on the rig and the easterly direction of the wind which should have allowed a drastic change of course to port to pass clear of the danger.

73. That the failure of the towing hawser while the CAHOONE was attempting to lessen the peril of the KETURAH was due either to the absence of a suitable means of securing the hawser or the inability of the KETURAH to properly make fast the spring lay towing pendant, resulting in insufficient spring lay loading from the KETURAH, thereby allowing the outstar to contact the mainline hawser during excessive yaws. This is coupled with the failure of the KETURAH to steer properly while under tow or possibly failing to maintain a wheel watch at all causing the KETURAH to yaw violently and override the hawser, thereby subjecting it to excessive stress.

74. That no persons serving on the KETURAH were acting under authority of documents issued by the Coast Guard or its predecessor authority.

75. That no personnel of the Coast Guard or any other Government agency contributed to the casualty. The Coast Guard Cutter CAHOONE did everything possible while standing by to attract the attention of the persons on board the P/V KETURAH to the fact that the vessel was in a dangerous position, and every effort possible was made by the CAHOONE to prevent the collision of the KETURAH with the platform.

76. That no laws or regulations relating to vessels have been violated.

77. That the extinguished lights on the rig for a few minutes before and after the collision did not contribute to the casualty as the cause might have been the activation of the light switch by the searchlight from the CAHOONE which amply lighted the rig.

78. That no aids to navigation were involved.

79. That no uncharted or incorrectly charted area or objects were involved, the presence of the drilling structure with which the KETURAH collided having been duly promulgated in Notice to Mariners.

80. That at and after the misfortune all possible efforts were made to avert impending disaster.

RECOMMENDATIONS

81. In view of the foregoing findings of fact and conclusions drawn therefrom, it is recommended that no further action be taken and that the case be closed with the submission of this report and executed Form CG 2692 forwarded herewith.

/s/ JAMES B. RUCKER
JAMES B. RUCKER
Captain, USCG
Chairman

/s/ J. L. JONES
J. L. JONES
Commander, USCG
Member

/s/ FORREST E. STEWART
FORREST E. STEWART
Lieutenant, USCG
Member - Recorder