

UNITED STATES COAST GUARD

ADDRESS REPLY TO



FILE: MWI
9 NOV 1955
(LEHI II - C-12 Bd)

Commandant's Action

on

Marine Board of Investigation; Raft LEHI II, distress and removal of five persons, 50 miles west of Monterey, California, 2 May 1955

1. Pursuant to the provisions of Title 46 C.F.R. Part 136, the record of the Marine Board of Investigation convened to investigate subject casualty, together with its Findings of Fact, Opinions, and Recommendations, has been reviewed.
2. The LEHI II, a raft 40 x 18 x 2 feet, propelled by outboard motors and sails, designed and intended for the purpose of drifting from San Francisco to the Hawaiian Islands, departed for such voyage on 29 April 1955. On 30 April an unsuccessful attempt was made to sail the raft and on the next day the outboard motors were rendered inoperative by boarding seas. Due to worsening weather and questionable seaworthiness of the craft, a distress message for help was sent to the Coast Guard. The CGC ACTIVE responded, located the raft about 63 miles from the point at which the towing vessel cast her adrift, and rescued the five persons on board. The raft has been reported to have drifted ashore in the vicinity of Ensenada, Mexico.
3. The Board made the following Recommendations:
 - "1. That Headquarters present to Congress proposed legislation which would give Federal Government some measure of control over projects which involve the use of unseaworthy miscellaneous craft on the open sea.
 - "2. If Recommendation 1. is not considered feasible, that changes be made in the numbering laws and regulations which would relieve the Coast Guard of the necessity of granting a Certificate of Award of Number to a craft such as the LEHI II and thereby raising the inference in the minds of the public that the Coast Guard has bestowed its official sanction."

MVI
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REMARKS

4. This casualty is most unique in character and its repetition most doubtful. It follows therefore that this casualty alone is not a sufficient basis for the above Recommendations.

5. Subject to the foregoing Remarks, the Findings of Fact, Opinions, 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

3 October 1955
GN/G-3490

From: Marine Board of Investigation
To: Commandant (MVI)
Via: Commander, 12th Coast Guard District (d)

Subj: Marine Board of Investigation; Raft IEHI II, distress and removal of five persons 50 miles west of Monterey, California, 2 May 1955.

The Board of Investigation, having thoroughly inquired into all of the facts and circumstances connected with subject incident, and having considered the evidence adduced, finds as follows:

- FINDINGS OF FACT -

1. That at 1909, PDT, 1 May 1955, the Rescue Coordination Center, 12th Coast Guard District, received a message from the Raft IEHI II stating that the starboard side of the raft was breaking up in position twenty-five to thirty miles northwest of Monterey and requesting a tow into port.
2. That a Coast Guard plane was dispatched to locate the IEHI II and to vector the CGC ACTIVE and CG-83412 to the scene.
3. That the ACTIVE removed five persons from the IEHI II at 0235, 2 May 1955.
4. That the IEHI II was approximately forty feet in length, eighteen feet in beam, with a two foot draft. The hull consisted of massive timbers with rubber and metal tanks enclosed or attached for flotation purposes. The hull was decked over and a deckhouse, six feet in height, twenty feet in length, and ten feet in width, was constructed approximately amidships. Neither the hull

- FINDINGS OF FACT (Continued) -

nor the deckhouse were designed to be watertight. Two masts were installed on which were rigged a miscellaneous assortment of square and triangular sails. The forward mast was thirty-seven feet in height and the after mast was sixteen feet in height. Two wells were located at the after end for outboard motors and a heavy rudder was installed.

5. That the construction of the raft was commenced by Mr. De Vere F. Baker, 824 - 3rd Street, Petaluma, California, who was also the main promoter of the proposed expedition.

6. That the avowed purpose of the LEHI II was to drift from San Francisco to the Hawaiian Islands.

7. That Mr. Baker was the promoter of a similar venture aboard the Raft LEHI I, which was abandoned on 15 July 1954 after seven days at sea off the coast of California (See San Francisco Case MMIU No. C-3362).

8. That after Mr. Baker started construction of the LEHI II, numerous persons contributed money and/or materials toward its construction and outfitting.

9. That various interested individuals entered into a series of contracts with the LEHI SCIENTIFIC EXPEDITIONS, INCORPORATED looking toward the division of profits to be realized from the venture.

10. That on 28 March 1955, one Alfred G. Martin, appearing as owner of the LEHI II, requested, and was issued a Certificate of Award of Number by the 12th Coast Guard District. The number awarded was 28 A 1370.

11. That on 8 April 1955, the LEHI II was seized by the U. S. Marshal under an attachment filed by the United States Attorney for the collection of motor-boat violations penalties imposed against the LEHI SCIENTIFIC EXPEDITIONS, INCORPORATED, owners of the Raft LEHI I, on which the violations had been detected. On 16 April 1955, the raft was freed when Mr. Martin paid the assessed penalties in full.

12. That subsequent to this seizure the LEHI II underwent brief trials in protected waters of San Francisco Bay. No trials were made at sea.

13. That on 27 April 1955, while it was enroute from the Oakland Estuary to San Francisco, the LEHI II was boarded by a Coast Guard patrol boat and all safety equipment was found to be in order.

- FINDINGS OF FACT (Continued) -

14. That the following persons comprised the crew of the IEHI II:

De Vere F. Baker -- "Master".
Lawrence J. Hall -- "First Mate".
William H. Souza -- "Navigator and Radio Operator".
George B. Harris -- Crew member.
Crawford L. Hartley -- Crew member.

These men were selected on a volunteer basis and all had contracts to share in the expected profits of the venture. With the exception of Mr. Baker's brief excursion on the IEHI I, none of these individuals had any experience in the navigation of small craft on the open ocean. None of them held any Merchant Mariner's Documents or Licenses.

15. That the voyage of the IEHI II began shortly after daybreak on Friday, 29 April 1955. A fishing vessel, whose owners had volunteered to tow the raft to sea, appeared at the IEHI's anchorage and Mr. Ed Torrey, a self avowed part owner, gave orders for the tow to begin although only one member of the IEHI's crew was aboard at the time.

16. That the weather forecast on 28 April 1955 indicated small craft warnings hoisted off the northern California coast. The 0900 forecast on 29 April 1955 did not indicate any warning but did show a low pressure area moving toward the California coast.

17. That the weather off San Francisco at the time the IEHI II was towed out was excellent.

18. That Mr. Baker and the other three members of the crew obtained transportation from another fishing vessel and boarded the IEHI II near the San Francisco Light Vessel. Mr. Torrey left the raft at that time.

19. That the fishing vessel towed the IEHI II to the vicinity of the Farallon Islands, twenty-five miles west of the Golden Gate, at which point the raft was cast adrift.

20. That throughout the night of Friday, 29 April 1955, the raft proceeded in a southerly direction under power of outboard motors.

21. That on Saturday, 30 April 1955, an attempt was made to sail the craft but the sails either ripped or were unmanageable and were taken down.

- FINDINGS OF FACT (Continued) -

22. That throughout Saturday night and Sunday, 1 May 1955, the wind and sea increased to such an extent that seas coming aboard over the stern drowned out the outboard motors. It was found that the rudder was ineffective under any condition and finally became jammed.
23. That the seas coming aboard finally filled flotation tanks secured under the starboard side of the raft. The water entered the tanks through vents which extended to the deck level of the raft and had not been plugged. The raft assumed a starboard list.
24. That at approximately 1900, Sunday, 1 May 1955, the crew took a vote and unanimously agreed that a radio message for assistance should be sent. As a result a message was sent to the Coast Guard requesting a tow into port.
25. That the CGC ACTIVE arrived at the position of the IEHI II, fifty-eight miles due west of Monterey, California in latitude 36° 40' North, longitude 123° 1' West at 0130, 2 May 1955.
26. That the weather conditions at the time were wind, northwest fifteen to twenty-two knots, sea, eight to ten feet in height.
27. That the ACTIVE drifted a rubber raft to the IEHI and all personnel from the IEHI II boarded the raft which was then hauled to the ACTIVE and the personnel were removed.
28. That at the time the personnel were removed from the IEHI II, the raft had travelled a total of sixty-three miles in a southerly direction from the point at which the towing vessel had cast her adrift.
29. That the various owners and interested parties made several attempts, subsequent to 2 May 1955, to locate and tow the IEHI II into port. These attempts were unsuccessful. Subsequent information obtained from newspapers indicates that the IEHI II came ashore in the vicinity of Ensenada, Mexico.

- OPINIONS -

1. That the LEHI II was poorly designed and poorly constructed for making ocean voyages.
2. That the persons aboard the LEHI II did not possess the qualifications, training, or experience to sail a small craft across the open ocean.
3. That the failure of the enterprise was due to a combination of poor design of the raft and its equipment, combined with the utter lack of experience of the persons aboard.
4. That the expedition was poorly conceived and lacked sufficient financial backing to foster any hopes of success.
5. That, as so often happens in unsound ventures of this nature, the participants' relations with each other degenerated into open disagreement and dispute.
6. That the departure of the LEHI II on 29 April 1955 was fraught with confusion which forecast its early collapse.
7. That the weather encountered during the brief voyage was not unusual and could easily have been anticipated.
8. That the radio request for a tow sent to the Coast Guard by the LEHI II, was influenced as much by the misery of the crew as by the actual condition of the raft.
9. That the Coast Guard was justified in removing the personnel and not towing in the raft.
10. That the personnel aboard the raft had made no attempt to condition themselves for the ordeal which they should have anticipated.
11. That the object of this expedition was mainly pecuniary, and that any scientific value was doubtful.
12. That a well planned and properly financed expedition, with a soundly designed craft, manned by qualified personnel could make a successful raft trip across the ocean and might have some scientific value.
13. That a project of this nature could be a basis for a swindle by obtaining contributions with no intention on the part of the promoters to go through with the planned voyage.

- OPINIONS (Continued) -

14. That the Coast Guard, by issuing a Certificate of Award of Number to this craft, lent a color of official approval which could be exploited.
15. That expeditions or stunts of this nature are certain to result in the expenditure of Government funds for SAR operations, since the Coast Guard is bound by tradition and law to remove persons from positions of peril on the waters even though they have been foolhardy in placing themselves in such positions.
16. That no legal basis exists for the control of such ventures by any Governmental agency.

- RECOMMENDATIONS -

1. That Headquarters present to Congress proposed legislation which would give Federal Government some measure of control over projects which involve the use of unseaworthy miscellaneous craft on the open sea.
2. If Recommendation 1. is not considered feasible, that changes be made in the numbering laws and regulations which would relieve the Coast Guard of the necessity of granting a Certificate of Award of Number to a craft such as the LEHI II and thereby raising the inference in the minds of the public that the Coast Guard has bestowed its official sanction.

(signed) W. C. Capron
W. C. CAPRON
Captain, U. S. Coast Guard
Chairman

(signed) R. R. Smith
R. R. SMITH
Commander, U. S. Coast Guard
Member

(signed) F. A. MacGurn
F. A. MACGURN
Captain, U. S. Coast Guard
Member

(signed) A. C. Hoene, Jr.
A. C. HOENE, JR.
Lieutenant Commander, U. S. Coast Guard
Recorder