

UNITED STATES COAST GUARD  
Washington, D. C.

MVI  
16 January 1952  
(MARY M. - A-1 Ed)

From: Chief, Merchant Vessel Inspection Division  
To: Commandant  
Via: Chief, Office of Merchant Marine Safety

Subj: Marine Board of Investigation; motor fishing vessel MARY M.,  
stranding on Cuttyhunk Island on 26 November 1951, with loss  
of life

1. Pursuant to the provisions of Title 46 C.F.R. Part 136, the record of the Marine Board convened to investigate subject casualty, together with its Findings of Fact, Opinions and Recommendations, has been reviewed and is forwarded herewith.

2. The MV MARY M., a fishing vessel of 47 gross tons departed from New Bedford, Mass. on 20 November 1951 for the fishing grounds in the vicinity of Nantucket Lightship. On 26 November with about 10,000 lbs. of ground fish on board, the master, due to worsening weather conditions, decided to return to New Bedford. On the return trip the master took Vineyard Sound Light to be Gay Head Light and then took Cuttyhunk Light as a buoy to the entrance of Quick's Hole. Due to this misidentification of lights, the MARY M. headed for Cuttyhunk Light thinking it was the entrance buoy to Quick's Hole and stranded off the southwest end of Cuttyhunk Island about 100 yards from the beach and thereafter broke up. As a result of this casualty, five of the six crew members perished. At the time of this casualty there was a northwest wind, force 8, rough northwest sea, excellent visibility and temperature ranging from 35 to 42 degrees F.

3. The Board made the following Findings of Fact:

"1. The trawler MARY M., official number 224625, length 67.2 ft., depth 8.2 ft., beam 17.3 ft. was built at Essex, Massachusetts in 1925 and is currently owned by Mr. William J. Brady, 38 Wellesley Park, Dorchester, Mass. and Mr. John J. Burke, 118 Weston Avenue, Gloucester, Mass., the Mayor of Gloucester, Mass., each of whom has a one-half interest in the vessel.

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"2. The M. Y. M. was considered a seaworthy vessel. It was equipped with the following: a voice radio with the usual frequencies including 2670 Kcs, a direction finder and a fathometer. She had a 100 H.P. Wolverine diesel engine, and the electrical system was 32 volts, with a generator running off the engine. It carried one dory and a number of lifejackets.

"3. The M. Y. M. departed at 3:00 p.m. on 20 November 1951 to fish in the vicinity of Nantucket Lightship.

"4. The crew of the M. Y. M. on sailing on 20 November 1951, consisted of the following:

Arthur Davis, Master, 9 Western Ave., Gloucester, Mass.  
William H. Shepherd, Engineer, 82 8th St., New Bedford, Mass.  
Arnaldo Mano, Fisherman, 172 Alfa St., Dartmouth, Mass.  
William F. Tarvis, Fisherman, Gloucester, Mass.  
Manuel Rocha, Fisherman, 646 South Water St., New Bedford, Mass.  
Jose Santos Periero, Fisherman, 132 Dean St., New Bedford, Mass.

"5. On the morning of 26 November 1951, after having caught about 10,000 pounds of ground fish and having lost some previous fishing time because of weather, it was decided, after the receipt of the weather report at 0520u from the Coast Guard Radio, Marshfield, Mass. to terminate the fishing trip and proceed to New Bedford, Mass. This particular weather report indicated southeast storm warnings, increasing to 30 to 60 knots and shifting to west and northwest late that day.

"6. After departing the vicinity of Nantucket Lightship, the M. Y. M., sometime between 1900u and 2000u, passed the green flashing Squibnocket lighted bell buoy to starboard at some unknown distance estimated by the sole survivor, Mr. William Shepherd, to be within 100 yards.

"7. It cannot be determined whether the vessel proceeded north-west between No Man's Land and Martha's Vineyard or passed to the westward of No Man's Land. No Man's Land was not sighted by the crew of the M. Y. M. The normal and customary practice is for vessels to pass to the west of No Man's Land, particularly at night.

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"8. Except for sighting Gay Head Light an hour or two after passing Squibnocket green flashing buoy, Mr. Shepherd had no direct knowledge of the movements, courses steered or the navigation of the MARY M. as he spent part of the time in the engine room and part in the pilothouse.

"9. The navigation of the MARY M. was supervised by the master, Mr. Arthur Davis, who after sighting what was assumed to be Gay Head Light, directed a change of course to Quick's Hole lighted bell buoy No. 1. The Board cannot determine the bearing, the distance off Gay Head Light, or course steered when the vessel made the change of course. In spite of Mr. Shepherd's insistence that they had sighted Gay Head Light after leaving the Squibnocket green buoy, there is a question in the minds of the Board as to whether or not they had sighted Vineyard Lightship instead of Gay Head at this first time.

"10. The MARY M. crew at this time saw no other navigational aid light.

"11. The speed of the MARY M. during this time was slow, the vessel was probably not making more than two or three knots into the rough northwesterly sea which prevailed in this area about this time. The vessel was also taking considerable spray and solid water and was doing considerable rolling and pitching, which made the sighting of anything from the low pilothouse very difficult.

"12. After running a set time in the direction of Quick's Hole, as indicated in finding 9 and not sighting it, the master, Davis, decided to turn back towards Gay Head Light, get a new departure from it and return to Quick's Hole buoy. A light was picked up which was identified by both Davis and Shepherd as that of Gay Head and which was approached until about 2200R when they reversed course again for Quick's Hole buoy. Mr. Shepherd, while not being able to describe Gay Head Light accurately, believed the vessel was 300 to 400 yards from it when they reversed course. He also stated that the light which he saw and identified as Gay Head the second time was the same light which he had seen the first time. See finding No. 9.

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"13. While the fathometer was in operating condition up to about an hour after passing Quibocket flashing green buoy, or until about 2000R to 2100R, it was inoperative after that due to lack of an adequate amount of electrical power. This lack of adequate power was due to an insufficient generator output due to the vessel running slowly and inefficient operation of the generator (see A 45 page 5). Of the four storage batteries on board, two were considered to be in fair condition and two were useless.

"14. The MARY M. was exhibiting the following navigational lights: the usual side lights, a white masthead light and a stern light. She was fitted with an all round red light above the masthead light as required by the Pilot Rules for a vessel when trawling. As far as Shepherd knew this light was not burning, but this point is controversial.

"15. Mr. William Shepherd joined the crew of the MARY M. for the first time on this particular trip and previously knew none of the other members of the crew.

"16. The Commanding Officer, Chief Boatswain Lyman J. Clark, and Osborne M. Wilcox, BTL, of Vineyard Lightship saw the lights of what to them was a fishing vessel which had been observed approaching the lightship from the eastward for the previous half hour, reverse its course at about 2210R on 26 November 1951 and stand up the Sound towards the south side of Cuttyhunk Island. The observed course was estimated at about east northeast magnetic, and the lights of this fishing vessel were kept in sight until about 2315R. This vessel was showing a red light above the masthead light in addition to the regular running light as it approached the lightship. The nearest approach to the lightship was estimated by the Commanding Officer to be between one-half and one mile and between two and three miles by Wilcox, the man on watch. The lightship made an entry in its "passing ship record" at 2210R of the presence of this fishing vessel.

"17. Because the course of the fishing vessel, after reversing, was taking it dangerously close to Sow and Pigs Reef, the Commanding Officer of the Vineyard Lightship ordered Wilcox to keep a close watch on the fishing vessel. It was last seen by him at 2315R apparently close under the lee of Cuttyhunk Island where it was thought the vessel was proceeding to seek the lee of the island.

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"18. The weather at Vineyard Lightship between 2200A on 26 November 1951 and 0400A, 27 November 1951 was northwest, force 8 (Beauford), rough northwest sea, and excellent visibility. The temperature ranged between 42 degrees F. at 2000, the 26th, to 35 degrees F. at 0400, the 27th. All navigational aid lights in the vicinity which could be seen from the Vineyard Lightship were observed to be functioning.

"19. After the last sighting of the lights of the fishing vessel at about 2315, the 26th, no other signals were seen from it or from the vicinity of Cuttyhunk Island by the personnel of the lightship.

"20. That, with the existing northwest gale causing heavy surf and spray to break over Sow and Pigs Reef and the beach at the southwest end of Cuttyhunk Island, it was difficult for personnel on the lightship, 3.4 miles away, to see any signal from the point where the MARY M. stranded.

"21. At the last sighting of the fishing vessel at 2315R, it appeared to the Commanding Officer, Chief Boatswain Clark, that the vessel had successfully passed Sow and Pigs Reef. No action toward alerting Cuttyhunk Lifeboat Station was made by him as there was no indication at that time the vessel was or would be in distress as she seemed to him to be under control at all times.

"22. The fishing vessel logged by the lightship at 2210A when it changed course to an east northeast direction and kept in view until 2315R was, in fact, the MARY M. No one on board the lightship had any reason to believe or know that the vessel approaching it did not know they were heading for Vineyard Lightship and not Gay Head Light.

"23. Sometime after reversing course at 2210A, as cited in Findings 12 and 16 and which the Board estimates as about 2300A, the master, Davis, sighted a light to port which he thought might be Quick's Hole buoy. He turned to port with the idea of getting sufficiently close to it to read its markings. About 10 or 15 minutes later the MARY M. ran ashore off the southwest end of Cuttyhunk Island about 100 yards from the beach. The position where the vessel struck is indicated

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by Mr. Shepherd and Boatswain R. W. Lee on USCGS Chart 207, exhibit 7. The light towards which they turned was in fact Cuttyhunk Light. The Board takes notice that it was low tide at about 2300R on 26 November at Cuttyhunk Island when the vessel struck. The range of tide was about four feet.

"24. That after striking, the surf began breaking over the vessel and eventually filled her living quarters and engine room, thus making these spaces inaccessible.

"25. After stranding some of the crew attempted to signal with flashlights to the Vineyard Lightship. This continued for two or more hours, but the signals were not seen on board the lightship. The crew of the MAY M. could see the deck lights of the lightship.

"26. Before striking the beach, the MAY M's radio became inoperative due to the antenna's carrying away due to the sail's letting go, and the very weak batteries not being able to furnish sufficient power. The master made several attempts to use the radio without success. Had the batteries been adequate the loss of the antenna would still have prevented the functioning of the radio.

"27. That flares were aboard, but these were inaccessible in the flooded forecabin. Evidently the use of these was not thought of before the forecabin became flooded.

"28. While the Board has no knowledge of the navigational ability of Davis, it is evident that he did not have much experience piloting the waters in which he was operating. He had made only two or three trips as master, previously serving as engineer of the MAY M.

"29. The MAY M's dory was smashed beyond use when it was launched after striking.

"30. That, other than using flashlights in an attempt to signal their distress, no other means of making a signal was tried. Fuel oil was not accessible in which to soak rags, and what rags were available were wet and would not burn although such attempts were made.

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"31. That at about 3:00 a.m. on 27 November, as the surf was breaking over the MARY M. and the vessel was beginning to break up, and the crew who were wearing Kapok lifejackets and had previously agreed to attempt to swim to the beach, it appeared to them that it was time to leave the vessel and try for the beach. There were rocks in the vicinity and serious danger that the men, after they were in the water, might be thrown against them and injured before reaching the beach 100 yards away. At this time Jose Periero was washed overboard and then Shepherd. Torvis and Davis then followed Shepherd. It is presumed the others, Mano and Rocha, either entered the water at this time or were washed overboard due to the seas breaking over the vessel. The pilothouse of the MARY M. had broken loose from the hull about this time.

"32. After sometime in the water, estimated as 30 to 45 minutes, Shepherd reached the beach at the base of the cliff, climbed it and found shelter in a shanty used to shelter goats. After daylight he saw and walked to a house about one mile away. This house was not then occupied, but did have a telephone. He called the Coast Guard and was connected to the Cuttyhunk Lifeboat Station, a short distance away. At that time he was not sure of which island he was on or where the vessel had stranded until later advised by the Coast Guard Lifeboat Station.

"33. The Board takes notice of the fact that the Coast Guard owns a telephone cable which runs from Fisham Point near New Bedford, Mass. to Cuttyhunk Lifeboat Station. The New England Telephone Company leases a circuit of this cable to serve four telephones on Cuttyhunk Island through the New Bedford exchange. This fact alerted the officer-in-charge of the station to the probability that the call from Shepherd originated on Cuttyhunk Island. This call, at 0730H, was the first information received by the Coast Guard of the casualty. Mr. Shepherd was quickly located and brought to the station about a quarter of a mile away.

"34. An intensive search was then conducted for possible survivors or for bodies of the other members of the crew of the MARY M. The following Coast Guard units participated in the search:

- (a) Cuttyhunk Lifeboat Station which patrolled the beaches by foot and with its motor lifeboat searched the vicinity of the island.

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- (b) The CGC HORNBLEAM from Woods Hole was assigned as Officer in Tactical Command to conduct search operations.
- (c) The CG-83388 from Woods Hole for general searching of the Vineyard Sound area.
- (d) The Amphibious Patrol plane UFLG-1242.
- (e) Seaplane PB4 #84728.
- (f) The HO3S helicopter 235.
- (g) The Gay Head Lifeboat Station which searched the beaches in its vicinity and furnished a motor lifeboat for offshore search in the area.

"35. Boatswain Lee of the Lifeboat Station sighted the wreck of the MARY M. shortly after organizing the search. The UFLG No. 1242 also sighted the position of the wreck at about 0947, the 27th.

"36. All of the five bodies of the crew of the MARY M. were located and eventually delivered to the Medical Examiner at New Bedford, Mass., for identification and proper disposal.

- (a) The first body was sighted by the helicopter at 1420, 27 November and picked up by the HORNBLEAM at 1511 about 500 yards north of Buoy No. 29 off Gay Head, which delivered it to New Bedford that evening.
- (b) The second body was found on the beach northeast of Gay Head Lifeboat Station by the crew of that station at about 0300, November 28th. This body was later identified as that of Jose Santos Pariero.
- (c) A body was sighted by the helicopter at 0940 in Menemsha Bight and this was picked up by the CG-83388.
- (d) The fourth body was sighted by the Fishing Vessel FLEETING near Buoy No. 29 at 0950, the 28th. This was picked up by the CG-36466 from Gay Head Lifeboat Station shortly thereafter.



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- (e) The fifth body was sighted and picked up by the HORNBREAM at 1010 in position about a mile southwest of Buoy No. 29. The CG-83388 brought the last three bodies to New Bedford.

Identification of the bodies of the five members of the crew of the MARY M. was made by the Medical Examiners, exhibits 1 through 5, indicated the following men lost their lives as a result of this casualty:

Arthur Davis  
Arnaldo Mano  
William F. Tarvis  
Manual Rocha  
Jose Santos Periero.

"37. The lookout on the 2000 to 2400 watch at the Cuttyhunk Lifeboat Station watch on 26 November 1951, John J. Reddick, SN, saw the lights of a ship heading east at about 2330, but no other vessels.

"38. The lookout tower is a 50-foot tower located on top of the highest point of the island, 154 feet above sea level. As the cliffs at the southwestern end of the island near where the MARY M. struck are 30 to 40 feet high, it is physically impossible for the lookout at the tower to observe anything seaward from the top of the cliffs for about 300 yards or more.

"39. At no time during his watch did Reddick use the binoculars furnished to scan the waters in view from his station.

"40. The vessel struck the beach about 2,000 yards from the lookout tower.

"41. That after stranding the flashlight signals could not be seen at Cuttyhunk Lifeboat Station lookout tower.

"42. That prior to the sailing of the MARY M. there was no central, accurate record kept on shore of the names of the crew."

4. The Board expressed the following Opinions:

"1. That Davis was not competent as a navigator or as a pilot in these waters as evidenced by his mistaking Vineyard

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Lightship for Gay Head Light and accepting Guttyhunk Light as a buoy and turning toward it, thus standing into danger.

"2. That the stranding of the vessel was due exclusively to errors in navigation.

"3. That lack of assistance to the M Y M. was due to the inability of the crew to make adequate distress signals which could be seen and acted upon.

"4. That it was remote that the signals of the flashlight could be seen on the deck of the lightship 3.4 miles away from the beach where the M Y M. struck, particularly in view of the existing sea conditions and the surf breaking over Sow and Pigs Reef.

"5. That if there had been a suitable liferaft available on board it might have permitted the other members of the crew to safely reach the beach.

"6. That the Coast Guard upon becoming aware of the casualty immediately took all necessary action in the case."

5. The Board made the following recommendations:

"1. That in the interest of safety to life at sea the feasibility of requiring fishing vessels, equipped with a dory, to carry a liferaft be explored.

"2. That a system be set up whereby fishing vessels will leave on shore a copy of a crew list prior to sailing.

"3. That fishing vessels of 15 gross tons or over be subject to the inspection laws."

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6. Recommendation 1 of the Board suggests that in the interest of safety of life at sea the feasibility of requiring fishing vessels, equipped with a dory, to carry a liferaft be explored. Under existing statutes the Coast Guard has no authority to require either dories or liferafts or similar lifesaving equipment on motor-propelled fishing vessels. Desirable action in this connection should, however, be brought to the attention of the fishing industry by appropriate personnel under the jurisdiction of the district commander.

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7. Recommendation 2 of the Board suggests that a system be set up whereby fishing vessels will leave on shore a copy of a crew list prior to sailing. The Coast Guard has no statutory authority to institute this requirement. Desirable action in this connection should, however, be brought to the attention of the fishing industry by appropriate personnel under the jurisdiction of the district commander.

8. Recommendation 3 of the Board to extend marine safety statutes to require inspection and certification of fishing vessels of 15 gross tons or over is not sustained, since the record and report of the Board clearly indicated that the stranding of the MARY M. was due exclusively to errors in navigation and incompetency on the part of the master. In this connection, however, the following bills for the extension of the marine safety statutes and regulations to commercial fishing vessels are now before Congress for consideration:

(a) H.R. 1762 - A bill for the safety of life and property by making all commercial fishing vessels subject to the rules and regulations of the United States Coast Guard Marine Inspection.  
Introduced January 14, 1951.

(b) S. 1286 - A bill to amend the Act of June 20, 1936, so as to broaden the application of laws governing the inspection of steam vessels to vessels propelled by internal-combustion engines.  
Introduced March 26, 1951.

9. Subject to the foregoing remarks, it is recommended that the Findings of Fact, Opinions and Recommendations of the Marine Board of Investigation be approved.

/s/ P. A. OVENDEN  
P. A. OVENDEN  
Acting

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21 January, 1952

From: Chief, Office of Merchant Marine Safety  
To: Commandant

Forwarded, recommending approval.

/s/ H. C. SHEPHEARD  
H. C. SHEPHEARD

APPROVED JAN-24 1952

/s/ MERLIN O'NEILL

MERLIN O'NEILL  
Vice Admiral, U. S. Coast Guard  
Commandant