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MVI

11 MAY 1955

(UNNAMED OF MB - a-5 Bd)

Commandant's Action

on

Marine Board of Investigation; capsizing of outboard motorboat in Sinepuxent Bay, Maryland, on 27 March 1955, with loss of six lives

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. On 26 March 1955 at 1600 a party consisting of four adults and two children in a 14-foot, fibreglass, outboard motorboat, with an estimated freeboard of four inches at the stern, departed from South Point on Sinepuxent Neck for Assateague Island to the eastward of Tingle Island, Maryland. The wind was from the west, force 3, with a rough sea. The party was warned by experienced local watermen that the Bay was too rough to attempt a crossing, which warnings were disregarded. On the next day the weather was cold, wind northwesterly, force 6, and the Bay dangerous for small boat operation. In the face of these most dangerous conditions, the party departed from Assateague Island for South Point on the afternoon of 27 March, during which crossing the outboard motorboat capsized and all persons on board perished. At 2245 on 28 March, the Coast Guard at Ocean City, Maryland, was alerted and search immediately thereafter instituted. Between 0130 and 0900 29 March, the overturned boat and six bodies were located in the vicinity of Big Eggin Island.
3. The Findings of Fact, Conclusions, and Recommendations of the Marine Board of Investigation convened to investigate subject casualty are approved.

(signed) A. C. Richmond

A. C. RICHMOND

Vice Admiral, U. S. Coast Guard
Commandant

REPORT
OF
MARINE BOARD OF INVESTIGATION

convened at
UNITED STATES COAST GUARD LIFEBOAT STATION
FIFTH COAST GUARD DISTRICT
OCEAN CITY, MARYLAND

By order of
THE COMMANDANT
UNITED STATES COAST GUARD

to inquire into the
Casualty involving an Unnamed motorboat
As a result of which six persons
Lost their lives in Sinepuxent Bay, Maryland
on 27 March 1955

FINDINGS OF FACT

1. At approximately 2245 EST on 28 March 1955, the Coast Guard Lifeboat Station at Ocean City, Maryland was advised by telephone that a party of six persons, together with their outboard motorboat, were missing in Sinepuxent Bay between South Point and Assateague Island, approximately ten miles south of Ocean City (USC&GS Chart No. 1220). The Officer in Charge of the Lifeboat Station immediately organized three search parties. Between 0130 and 0900 EST on 29 March 1955, six bodies and the overturned motorboat were recovered from the bay in the vicinity of Big Eggin Island. The bodies were released to the County Coroner on the same day by the Officer in Charge at Ocean City Lifeboat Station. The coroner certified all six deaths were caused by accidental drowning. Those persons who lost their lives were:

- a. Mitchell D. Clogg, age 44, 217 Edgevale Road, Baltimore, Md.,
Owner of Motorboat
- b. Dorothy G. Clogg, age 44, " " " " "
His Wife
- c. Judson D. Clogg, age 10, " " " " "
Son
- d. Lillian D. (Chanel) Clogg, age 7, " " " " "
Daughter
- e. William B. Pollard, age 46, 715 Woodbourne Ave., Baltimore, Md.
- f. Roberta M. Pollard, age 44, " " " " "
His Wife

2. The boat involved was:

An uninspected and unnamed outboard motorboat of fibreglass construction, built in 1953 by the Heblin Corporation, Port Washington, Long Island, New York, and owned by Mitchell D. Clogg. The dimensions and characteristics of the boat are:

- a. Length - 14 feet
- b. Width amidships - 5 feet
- c. Width at stern - 4 feet, 2 inches
- d. Depth amidships - 26 inches

- e. Depth at stern - 15 inches
- f. Light draft amidships (less motor) - 9 inches
- g. Light draft at stern (less motor) - 2 inches
- h. Weight - Not known

The boat is constructed with a 4½ foot covered foredeck on which is installed a windshield. It is fitted with two cross thwarts in the midship section and a small seat on each side of the outboard motor bracket on the transom. One air tank is installed under the bow and one under each of the two stern seats. These air tanks are reportedly of sufficient volume to supply a reserve buoyancy which would enable the boat filled with water, with its motor attached, to remain afloat with several inches of freeboard. The boat was fitted with a 25 horsepower Evinrude outboard motor complete with battery starter and remote bow controls. The boat and motor were purchased as a unit in 1953 by its late owner. Freeboard and stability tests conducted on this boat are the subject of a separate memorandum attached hereto.

3. The weather at the time of the casualty was clear, with a strong northwest wind, force 6. The sea was rough with short choppy waves approximately 2½ to 4 feet high in the open water.

4. As there were no survivors nor eye witnesses to the casualty, the Board convened at Ocean City, Maryland for the purpose of taking testimony from those persons that were known to have seen the party when it departed on its fatal trip, and those persons who might have some knowledge of local conditions which could be of value to the Board in evaluating the cause of the casualty.

5. The Clogg and the Pollard families arrived in Ocean City, Maryland on the evening of 25 March 1955 after a short trip from Baltimore. They stayed overnight at a local motel and on the following day, 26 March, they visited Mr. William H. Scott. Mr. Clogg and Mr. Scott were one-sixth owners of the Hi-Winds Lodge, located on the west side of Assateague Island, behind Tingles Island in Sinepuxent Bay. This lodge is approximately three miles south of South Point on Sinepuxent Neck. Mr. Clogg informed Scott that he and his party planned to drive to South Point, board his motorboat and proceed to the lodge. On Sunday, 27 March, Mr. Clogg planned to return his party to South Point and then proceed alone in his boat to Ocean City where the party was to meet him with his car and a boat trailer. It was his intention to load the boat on the trailer and carry it to Baltimore.

6. Mr. Clogg and his party left Scott's home in Ocean City at approximately 1500 EST and drove to South Point, where his boat was berthed. They were approached by Mr. Edgar Fisher, when he saw them loading their boat. He advised them that it was rather rough in the bay and offered them a tarpaulin as protection against the spray, which Mr. Clogg refused. Fisher remained in the vicinity and observed the following items being loaded in the 14-foot boat:

- a. Two or three suitcases
- b. One gun case
- c. Two bags of groceries
- d. One or two 5-gallon gasoline cans
- e. One spare 3 horsepower outboard motor
- f. One small dog (approximately 6 weeks old)

Fisher also observed that there were one or more life jackets stowed under the bow of the boat. While the boat was being loaded, Mr. Harry C. Gunby, who operates a ferry at South Point, approached the party. He advised Mr. Clogg that the bay was too rough to attempt a crossing. Mr. Clogg stated that he would be all right and Mr. Gunby left. Mr. Fisher remained in the vicinity and observed the boat as it prepared to depart. Mr. Fisher stated that after loading the aforementioned items in the boat, all six persons entered the boat. At that time he noted that the boat was so deeply loaded that only four inches of freeboard remained at the stern. It is estimated that the boat had on board at that time a total weight of approximately 1100 pounds, including the motor and battery. At approximately 1600 hours, the boat got underway, bound for the hunting lodge on Assateague Island three miles to the south. The persons in the boat were not seen alive again. When the boat left South Point, the wind was from the west, force 3, and the sea was rough. The air temperature was 63 degrees, but by 2400 that night it had dropped to 31 degrees F.

7. On Sunday, 27 March, the weather remained cold. The wind increased from northwest to force 6 and blew steadily all day. In this locality, a strong northwest wind tends to blow the water across the bay, causing low tides on the west side of the bay, and piling the water up against the western side of Assateague Island. After a period of time, depending on the strength of the wind, the water is blown entirely out of the bay, causing extreme low tides in the vicinity of South Point and Assateague Island. This latter condition existed on Monday, 28 March. The tide was so low that no water remained in the vicinity of Tingles Island or the hunting lodge.

8. On 28 March 1955, Mr. Daniel Trimper III, a close friend of the Cloggs, received a phone call from Mr. Pollard's daughter, expressing concern as to their whereabouts, since they had not returned to Baltimore on Sunday night as planned. She was told that it was felt that the party was still at the lodge, as it was too rough Sunday to cross to South Point and the tides were too low Monday to attempt a crossing. On that same evening, Mr. Trimper and Mr. Scott decided to visit the lodge and make certain the party had sufficient food, as they had been gone for 48 hours. They were aware that the tide was extremely low and they carried a small dinghy with them to cross the shoals off the lodge. Trimper and Scott arrived at the lodge sometime after 2030 on 28 March, but found no one about. A search of the grounds revealed that they had been at the lodge at some time previous, as a bag of ice cubes lay on the porch. A check of the garbage also indicated that several meals had been eaten at the lodge. Mr. Scott and Mr. Trimper returned to South Point thinking that the party may have passed them in the bay. When they arrived back at South Point at 2245 and saw Mr. Clogg's car on the dock, they immediately alerted Ocean City Lifeboat Station by telephone. Edward B. Lewis, BMLC, USCG, Officer in Charge of the station, obtained the services of several local persons who owned boats at South Point and had local knowledge of the islands and sloughs. Those persons, together with Lewis and four crew members from the lifeboat station, departed for South Point at 2330. Lewis organized three separate search parties and assigned each a section of the bay and the islands. At 2400 on 28 March the search parties departed South Point. Lewis returned to the station to coordinate the search and request the services of a helicopter from the Coast Guard Air Station, Elizabeth City, N. C., at daybreak.

9. At 0130 EST on 29 March one of the search parties reported to the lifeboat station that four bodies, two women and two children, had been located on the southeast beach of Big Eggin Island, approximately one mile southeast of South Point. During the operation of recovering the bodies, a fifth body was located nearby. The bodies were transported to Ocean City Lifeboat Station, where a positive identification was made by Mr. Trimper. The bodies were identified as those of Mrs. Pollard, Mr. and Mrs. Clogg and their two children. As it was nearly daylight, the search was discontinued pending the arrival of the helicopter. At 0700 three crew members from the lifeboat station were dispatched to South Point and continued the search, assisted by the helicopter, which arrived at 0815. At 0830 the missing motorboat was located 600 yards southeast of Sinepuxent Bay Day Beacon #29, capsized in approximately three feet of water. At 0900 the body of Mr. Pollard was located off the northeast shore of Big Eggin Island and was transported to the lifeboat station by the helicopter, where positive identification was made by Mr. Trimper. All six bodies, when found, were fully clothed except that Mrs. Clogg's shoes were missing. None wore life jackets. The bodies were released to a local funeral parlor by the County Coroner.

10. When found, the motorboat was capsized with its small kedge anchor firmly embedded in the sandy bottom. The 25 horsepower motor was still attached and was badly dented and scraped as a result of pounding on the bottom for a period of time. The only items still in the boat were a small suitcase and a scoop. The boat was righted after a great deal of effort by three persons, and was towed to South Point. The boat was examined and was found to be undamaged except in areas where the paint was scraped.

11. Mr. Clogg had been a boat owner for at least twenty years and, at the time of the casualty, owned an 80-foot converted PT boat, in addition to the aforementioned motorboat.

CONCLUSIONS

1. The weight of evidence adduced in this case supports the conclusion that the unfortunate party of six persons left the Hi-Winds Hunting Lodge on Assateague Island, Maryland, sometime Sunday afternoon, 27 March 1955. Also that the fibreglass boat in which they were riding, capsized.
2. The weather at the time was definitely unfavorable and dangerous for small boat operation. It consisted of a force 6 wind of northwest or north northwest direction, diminishing, with probable choppy, rough, and whippy short seas from a west northwest or northwest direction. This would place the small motorboat at the time of the casualty on a course from the hunting lodge northward toward South Point, with the wind and sea on the port bow.
3. The actual boat and motor were in possession of and available to the Board for examination at Ocean City, Maryland. Floating, freeboard, and tipping tests of the same boat were conducted by the Board at Ocean City, Maryland on 4 April 1955; this with the same estimated weight on board that was on board at the time of the accident. These tests indicated that the boat was seaworthy in protected or smooth waters but definitely unseaworthy when operated in open waters and rough seas with approximately 1109 pounds on board and with a high-powered motor. With this same load, the boat was also found sensitive to tipping.
4. The Board is unanimous in the opinion that the high horsepower of the engine, operating under a rough sea condition, could have actually capsized the boat or furnished the primary reason for a capsizing. It is concluded that this occurred through the tiller being placed or forced in a hard over position, thereby causing an upward, diagonal and capsizing force through the propeller. This force (the propeller) at the end of a vertical shaft acts as an upsetting lever from the bottom up, with such lever having a fulcrum at the top of the transom where the outboard motor is secured. Experience indicates this is a common expectancy where outboard motors are installed on small boats of usual design, when high horsepower units are used. It would obtain especially under conditions of large seas with initial tilting or rolling caused by the sea, and the secondary capsizing force caused by the upward thrust of the propeller when the tiller is hard over.
5. In the absence of any evidence to the contrary, it is concluded therefore that the unfortunate incident resulted from:
 - a. A deadweight of 1109 pounds, approximately, loaded into a small boat fourteen feet in length.
 - b. A small boat using an outboard motor of excessive weight and excessive horsepower.

- c. The person or persons responsible committing an error in judgment in underestimating the dangers incident to operating a small boat under conditions (a) and (b) during a period of strong to gale force wind, with a choppy, rough, and probably dangerous cross sea.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. The evidence indicates no violation of existing statutes or regulations. Also, there were no survivors.
2. Under these circumstances, it is recommended that the case be closed with the further recommendation that a report of this unfortunate incident be widely publicized by the U. S. Coast Guard, pointing out the dangers of small boat operation under adverse conditions while overloaded, and especially the sale and use of high horsepower engines on small boats that are not designed to safely use high horsepower propulsion.

(signed) Alfred W. Kabernagel
ALFRED W. KABERNAGEL
Captain, U. S. Coast Guard, Chairman

(signed) Richard E. Hastings
RICHARD E. HASTINGS
Commander, U. S. Coast Guard, Member

(signed) Walter B. Alvey
WALTER B. ALVEY
Lieutenant (jg), U.S. Coast Guard, Member and
Recorder