

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

Subj: Marine Board of Investigation; disappearance of fishing vessel SUSAN off Atlantic Coast of United States with seven persons on board

1. The motor vessel SUSAN, converted from an 83-ft Coast Guard vessel for commercial fishing purposes, departed from Wildwood, New Jersey, on 5 December 1953 for fishing activities. The weather conditions during the ensuing five days were stormy but not severe. On 19 December 1953 the SUSAN was reported to the Coast Guard as overdue and a thorough search for the vessel has been made with negative results. It would appear that the fishing vessel SUSAN has been lost at sea while engaged in fishing activities and that all seven crew members on board have perished. The cause for the vessel's disappearance cannot be ascertained.

2. 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, Opinions and Recommendations, has been reviewed and is forwarded herewith.

REMARKS

3. A review of the record of investigation of subject casualty indicates that the Board has unsuccessfully explored all possible features of the case which might explain or account for the SUSAN's disappearance. However, it would have been helpful if the Board had included in its report those pertinent facts which were learned during the investigation, and which described such details as type of lifeboat - where and how carried, essentials of conversion, repairs to the vessel, areas fished in, and the experiences of former crew members respecting the vessel's performance.

REPORT

of a

BOARD OF INVESTIGATION

convened at

OFFICE OF THE COMMANDER

THIRD COAST GUARD DISTRICT

80 Lafayette Street

New York 13, N. Y.

on

14 January 1954

By Order of

THE COMMANDANT, UNITED STATES COAST GUARD

To inquire into the disappearance of
the Fishing Vessel SUSAN off the Atlantic
Coast of the United States with seven per-
sons on board.

From: Marine Board of Investigation
To: Commandant (NY)

Subject: Marine Board of Investigation into disappearance of fishing vessel SUSAN off Atlantic Coast of United States with seven persons on board.

- Findings of Fact -

1. The diesel-propelled fishing vessel SUSAN disappeared off the Atlantic Coast subsequent to 5 December, 1953.

2. The SUSAN, official number 280251, was a commercial fishing vessel of 43 gross tons, owned by Mr. Paul F. Wood, 2054 Bragg Street, Brooklyn, New York. The master was Mr. Norman Josephson, 27-A Church Street, Brooklyn, New York.

3. At the time the SUSAN departed Wildwood, New Jersey on 5 December, 1953, the following named crew members were aboard:

Norman Josephson, 27-A Church Ave., Brooklyn, N. Y., Master;
Harry Didrecksen, 571 - 51st St., Brooklyn, New York, Engineer;
Lars Thompson, 623 - 48th St., Brooklyn, New York;
Ray Lyskagen, 5412 - 6th Avenue, Brooklyn, New York;
Lars Johansen, 473 - 52nd Street, Brooklyn, New York;
Paul Fredericksen, 414 - 51st St., Brooklyn, New York, and
Bjorne Peddersen, 4901 - 8th Ave., Brooklyn, N. Y., Deckhands.

4. The SUSAN was an ex-eighty-three foot Coast Guard vessel which had been converted into a commercial fishing vessel. From evidence established by witnesses, and profile picture of vessel (exhibit 5), the following changes were made when the vessel was converted into a fishing vessel: the pilot house was removed from its original position amidships to the after end of vessel; engine room changed from amidship to aft part of vessel; former engine room space converted into a fish hold with two hatches, four feet square; a mast approximately 40 feet high and 16 inches in diameter installed forward; a mast approximately 25 feet high and 12 inches in diameter aft; an additional 400 gallon fuel tank installed on deck forward; a 300 gallon fuel oil tank installed on deck aft of pilot house; two steel galleys installed, one on each side of the forward mast. Also, all deck armament normally carried on an eighty-three foot Coast Guard vessel was removed.

3. The vessel was equipped with radio-telephone, loran, fathometer, and magnetic compass. It was also equipped with a lifeboat, a life raft, and life preservers, sufficient to accommodate the entire crew.

6. The vessel had made approximately twenty-five trips as a fishing vessel since being converted.

7. The weather conditions between 5 December, 1953, when the vessel departed Wildwood, New Jersey, and 10 December, 1953, between which dates two storms occurred, were as follows:

- a. 5 December, 1953 -- clear skies, good visibility, surface winds west to northwest 15 to 20 knots;
- b. 6 December, 1953 -- visibility good 10 to 15 miles; light variable winds SE to S 10 to 15 knots, increasing to 20 to 25 knots by 1930 hours. Small craft warnings were posted, Block Island to Hatteras;
- c. 7 December, 1953 -- wind NW 20 to 25 knots, rain and fog with fair to poor visibility, seas building to an average of 7 feet;
- d. 8 December, 1953 -- wind W to SW 15 knots;
- e. 10 December, 1953 -- wind S to SW 25 to 30 knots, shifting to NW 30 to 35 knots, storm warnings posted. Seas building to an average of 9 feet.

8. On 4 December, 1953, the master of the SUSAN, Mr. Norman Josefson, notified the owner, Mr. Wood, by telephone that the vessel was in Wildwood, New Jersey; that they had entered that port because of rough weather, also to make some minor engine repairs. He also advised Mr. Wood that the vessel would depart Wildwood, New Jersey on 5 December, 1953, to resume fishing activities. Since that date, Mr. Wood has had no word from any of the crew members, nor has he seen the vessel.

9. At 11:50, 19 December, 1953, the Group Commander, Cape May, advised the Commander, Third Coast Guard District, by dispatch, that a Mr. Peter Tollsen had advised that office that the fishing vessel SUSAN was at least four days overdue. Aircraft were immediately dispatched by the Commander, Third Coast Guard District, to make a search of the area. All ships off New Jersey coast and Cape May area were notified by radio. Broadcasts were repeated every half hour. On 20 December, 1953, the Commander, Eastern Area, took over the search from the district and

3 February, 1954
A25 (AMUS-012053)

ordered additional planes from the First, Third, and Fifth Districts into the search. All commercial aircraft were notified, all Coast Guard ships going to or coming from station were alerted; also, one plane was dispatched by the U. S. Air Force. This search covered an area of approximately 200,000 square miles, without results. Numerous communication checks were also conducted by the First, Third, and Fifth Districts with negative results. This intensive search was continued through 23 December, 1953. Since that date all surface vessels have been kept alerted by means of notice to mariners.

* * *

- Opinions -

1. That the Coast Guard exhausted all reasonable means available in its effort to locate the vessel.
2. That due to the various changes which were made when the vessel was converted into a fishing boat, the vessel's stability may have been affected. However, in the absence of any available sister ship of the same construction on which an inclining test could be made, or actual measurement, weight of material, et cetera, that was either added to or removed from the vessel at the time of conversion, this opinion would be purely conjecture.
3. It is, therefore, the opinion of this Board that the fishing vessel SUSAN was lost at sea with all hands aboard, and that the exact cause of the vessel's disappearance cannot be determined.

* * *

Executive Order

1. The following persons are appointed to the position of

(Signed) **John D. [Name]**
JOHN D. [Name], [Title]

(Signed) **E. K. [Name]**
E. K. [Name], [Title]

(Signed) **James W. [Name]**
JAMES W. [Name], [Title], [Position]