



UNITED STATES COAST GUARD

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MARINE SAFETY ALERT

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LIMIT SWITCHES AND GRAVITY LIFE BOAT DAVITS

The Coast Guard publication, "Manual for Lifeboatmen, Able Seamen, and Qualified Members of Engine Department" (CG-175) gave the following instructions for hoisting lifeboats under gravity davits:

On boats handled with gravity davits, the boat is hoisted to a position where the tricing lines can be made fast. It is next lowered to the embarkation deck where men in boat can get out. It is then hove up to the stowed position, using the hand cranks for the last 12 inches or more. In the stowed position, men can get back in to pass gripes, replace ridgepole and cover, etc.

In a recent report of a casualty concerning the failure of a wire-rope fall on a gravity lifeboat davit, the investigating officer stated that, "While securing port lifeboat, utilizing a gravity davit system, the limit switches apparently failed to operate properly, causing the boat to be hauled up too far, resulting in the after lifeboat fall parting."

In reality, the Coast Guard recommended hoisting procedure quoted above is telling shipboard personnel not to trust the limit switches installed on the trackways of gravity davits. The crew is strongly advised to hand crank the boat for the last 12 inches of its travel up the trackways and thus avoid any mishaps that could occur from inoperative limit switches. During long periods at sea, these switches frequently become water-soaked and short circuited; their failure to operate can occur when least expected. The replacement of the lifeboat which followed the above casualty could have been avoided if the boat had been hand cranked for its last 12 inches of movement up the trackways.

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