



UNITED STATES COAST GUARD

**REPORT OF THE INVESTIGATION
INTO THE
COMMERCIAL FISHING VESSEL LADY NORA
(O.N. 543395), LOSS OF LIFE IN THE GULF OF
MEXICO, NEAR PORT ARANSAS, TX ON
FEBRUARY 6, 2022**



U.S. Department of
Homeland Security

United States
Coast Guard



Commandant
United States Coast Guard

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16732/IIA #7391812
14 May 2025

**FALL OVERBOARD AND SUBSEQUENT LOSS OF ONE LIFE FROM
THE COMMERCIAL FISHING VESSEL LADY NORA (O.N. 543395) IN
THE GULF OF AMERICA, 7 NAUTICAL MILES OFFSHORE OF
PORT ARANSAS, TEXAS ON FEBRUARY 26, 2022**

ACTION BY THE COMMANDANT

The record and the report of investigation completed for this marine casualty have been reviewed by the Office of Investigations & Casualty Analysis. The record and the report, including the findings of fact, analyses, and conclusions are approved. This marine casualty investigation is closed.



E. B. SAMMS
Captain, U.S. Coast Guard
Chief, Office of Investigations & Casualty Analysis (CG-INV)



16732
NOV 25 2024


**COMMERCIAL FISHING VESSEL LADY NORA (O.N. 543395), LOSS OF LIFE IN
THE GULF OF MEXICO, NEAR PORT ARANSAS, TX ON FEBRUARY 06, 2022**

**ENDORSEMENT BY THE COMMANDER,
EIGHTH COAST GUARD DISTRICT**

The record and the report of the investigation convened for the subject casualty have been reviewed. The record and the report, including the findings of fact, analysis, conclusions, and recommendations are approved. It is recommended that this marine casualty investigation be closed.

COMMENTS ON THE REPORT

1. The loss of the mariner was a tragic and preventable accident. I offer my sincere condolences to the family and friends of the mariner who lost his life.
2. The investigation and report contain valuable information which can be used to address the factors that contributed to this marine casualty and prevent similar incidents from occurring in the future.


A. H. MOORE, JR.
Captain, U.S. Coast Guard
Chief of Prevention
Eighth Coast Guard District
By Direction

U.S. Department of
Homeland Security

United States
Coast Guard



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16732
July 25, 2024

**COMMERCIAL FISHING VESSEL LADY NORA (O.N. 543395), LOSS OF LIFE IN
THE GULF OF MEXICO, NEAR PORT ARANSAS, TX ON FEBRUARY 06, 2022**

ENDORSEMENT BY THE OFFICER IN CHARGE, MARINE INSPECTION

The record and the report of the investigation convened for the subject casualty have been reviewed. The record and the report, including the findings of fact, analysis, conclusions, and recommendations are approved subject to the following comments. It is recommended that this marine casualty investigation be closed.

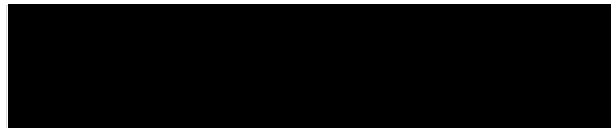
COMMENTS ON THE REPORT

1. I extend my deepest condolences to the family and friends of Michael Ramirez. It is my hope that this investigation will contribute to preventing future tragedies in the realm of commercial fishing vessel operations.

ENDORSEMENT/ACTION ON RECOMMENDATIONS

Administrative Recommendation 1: Recommend this investigation be closed.

Endorsement: Concur. This investigation should be closed.



T. H. Bertheau
Captain, U.S. Coast Guard
Officer in Charge, Marine Inspection

Enclosures: (1) Executive Summary
(2) Investigating Officer's Report



16732
July 25, 2024

COMMERCIAL FISHING VESSEL LADY NORA (O.N. 543395), LOSS OF LIFE IN THE GULF OF MEXICO, NEAR PORT ARANSAS, TX ON FEBRUARY 06, 2022

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

On February 6, 2022, before sunrise, four crewmembers aboard the LADY NORA, an uninspected 65-foot steel-hulled commercial fishing vessel, were conducting shrimping operations approximately 7 miles off the coast of Port Aransas, Texas. The observed weather conditions were slightly overcast with 10 miles of visibility and an air temperature of 60 degrees Fahrenheit. The water temperature was 52 degrees Fahrenheit with 2-foot seas.

While hauling in the nets, processing, sorting, and bagging the catch, the Header, recorded as the Master on board, was leaning over the side of the vessel, cleaning the hanging nets with a piece of lumber. He slipped on the wet deck and fell into the water. At the time of the incident, all four crewmembers were on deck processing shrimp, leaving the vessel's wheelhouse unmanned while it was making way at approximately 3-4 knots. Despite man overboard procedures, rescue attempts were unsuccessful, and before the vessel could be turned around for retrieval, the crewmembers lost sight of the Header due to low light conditions. Multiple surface and air assets, both private and Coast Guard, were deployed to search for the man overboard, but these efforts were unsuccessful. After searching throughout the day, the search was called off at sunset.

On February 21, 2022, a deceased male was found washed up on Aransas County Beach, Texas. He was later identified by tattoo comparison as the Header of the LADY NORA. His manner and cause of death was ruled an accidental drowning.

A review of payroll records revealed that the individual who fell into the water was not the Master of the vessel, but the Header. None of the other three persons on board were U.S. citizens and therefore could not legally be the Master of the vessel. The owner maintained that this individual was the Master to circumvent this issue. As a result, civil penalties were issued for failure to have a documented vessel under the command of a U.S. citizen.

Through its investigation, the Coast Guard determined the initiating event to be the Header falling into the water with subsequent drowning. Causal factors contributing to this casualty were: (1) Failure of Nora Trawlers, Inc. to require personnel on deck to wear personal flotation devices, (2) Failure of the Master to have the wheelhouse manned, (3) Inadequate equipment for cleaning nets, (4) Unsafe working conditions on deck, (5) Inadequate safety boots, and (6) Unfavorable lighting conditions for initial searching.



16732
July 25, 2024

**COMMERCIAL FISHING VESSEL LADY NORA (O.N. 543395), LOSS OF LIFE IN
THE GULF OF MEXICO, NEAR PORT ARANSAS, TX ON FEBRUARY 06, 2022**

INVESTIGATING OFFICER'S REPORT

1. Preliminary Statement

1.1. This marine casualty investigation was conducted and this report was submitted in accordance with Title 46, Code of Federal Regulations (CFR), Subpart 4.07, and under the authority of Title 46, United States Code (USC) Chapter 63.

1.2. There were no parties-in-interest designated as part of this investigation. No individuals, organizations, or parties requested to be designated as a party-in-interest in accordance with 46 CFR Subsection 4.03-10.

1.3. The Coast Guard was the lead agency for all evidence collection activities involving this investigation. No other persons or organizations assisted with this investigation.

1.4. All times listed in this report are in Central Standard Time using a 24-hour format and are approximate.

2. Vessel Involved in the Incident



Figure 1. Starboard aspect of the LADY NORA at dock in the Port of Brownsville. (February 7, 2022/USCG)

Official Name:	LADY NORA
Identification Number:	543395
Flag:	United States
Vessel Class/Type/Sub-Type	Fishing Vessel/Fish Catching Vessel/General
Build Year:	1972
Gross Tonnage:	103 GT
Length:	64.6 feet
Beam/Width:	20.1 feet
Draft/Depth:	4 feet
Main/Primary Propulsion: (Configuration/System Type, Ahead Horse Power)	High Speed Diesel, >900RPM
Owner:	Nora Trawlers, Inc. Brownsville, Texas/USA
Operator:	[REDACTED] Brownsville, Texas/USA

3. Deceased, Missing, and/or Injured Persons

Relationship to Vessel	Sex	Age	Status
Header ¹	Male	40	Deceased

4. Findings of Fact

4.1. The Incident:

4.1.1 On February 06, 2022 at 0645, the crew started work on deck of the LADY NORA while underway in the Gulf of Mexico, approximately 7 miles off the coast of Port Aransas, TX. There were four crewmembers onboard. They began hauling the nets and processing and bagging the shrimp before storing it below deck in the fish holds. One of the crew was working the winch, one was sorting the catch as the other two, including the Header, were cleaning the nets of debris by hitting and scraping the nets with a Pala². This was done as the nets hung from the outriggers out to the sides of the vessel.

4.1.2. At 0659, as the Header was scraping the nets with the Pala, he lost his footing on the wet deck and went over the side. The vessel was in autopilot making approximately 3 knots with no one in the wheelhouse at that time. The other crewmember who was scraping nets on the starboard side of the vessel heard a yell and looked to the port side and did not see the Header on deck. He immediately alerted the other two crewmembers. The crewmember on the winch ran to the wheelhouse to begin turning the vessel around as the other two crewmembers began yelling at the Header, telling him to remove his coat, boots, and pants so that he could stay afloat. They then threw a life ring and a hook

¹ A Deckhand that de-heads the shrimp when they are brought onboard.

² A piece of lumber that measures approximately 2" x 8" x 60-72" used in the shrimping industry to clear nets.

towards the Header as he was trying to swim towards the vessel. The vessel lost site of the Header due to it being dark out.

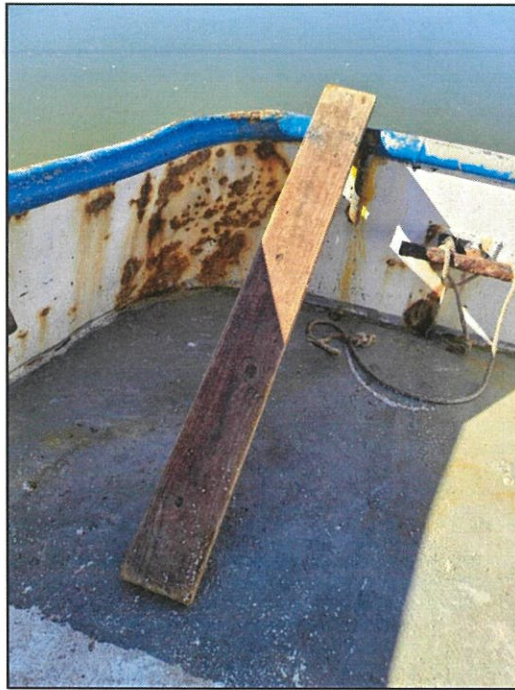


Figure 2. Pala (2" x 8" x 67") found on the LADY NORA in Brownsville Shrimp Basin. (February 7, 2022/USCG)

4.1.3. At 0700, as the crewmember who was in the wheelhouse turned the vessel around, he put out a call over the radio to fishing vessels in the area that they had a man overboard. Four other vessels that were fishing in the area made their way to the LADY NORA's position and joined the search.

4.1.4. At 0703, USCG Sector Corpus Christi was notified of the man overboard by one of the fishing vessels involved in the search.

4.1.5. At 0710, USCG Station Port Aransas launched a small boat enroute to scene.

4.1.6. At 0713, Air Station Corpus Christi launched helicopter MH-65 and commenced aerial search patterns.

4.1.7. At 0737, Air Station Corpus Christi launched HC-144 and commenced aerial search patterns.

4.1.8. At 1140, USCGC MANTA deployed to the scene with orders to board the LADY NORA and then join in the search efforts.

4.1.9. The search and rescue operations continued throughout the day by both Coast Guard air and surface assets as well as private commercial fishing vessels that were in the area at the time.

4.1.10. At 1803, sunset, the search for the crewmember was suspended indefinitely with negative results.

4.1.11. At 1813, the LADY NORA was released from the scene and allowed to return to its homeport of Brownsville, TX. The following morning, Coast Guard Marine Safety Detachment Brownsville Investigators met the vessel as it docked in the Brownsville Shrimp Basin.

4.1.12. On February 21, 2022, at 1342, the Header's body was located on Aransas Beach. Tattoos confirmed positive identification and matched photos provided by his family.

4.1.13. On February 28, 2022, an autopsy was conducted by the Nueces County Medical Examiner. Manner and cause of death was ruled an accidental drowning. No other form of trauma was indicated in the report.

4.2. Additional/Supporting Information:

4.2.1. The LADY NORA was an uninspected commercial fishing vessel last examined by the Coast Guard on April 23, 2021, for a Dockside Renewal Exam. The vessel was found in compliance with applicable laws and regulations and was issued a Commercial Fishing Vessel Safety Decal.

4.2.2. It was later discovered through payroll records that the Header, an American citizen, was being portrayed as the Master of the vessel but was being paid as a Header while a Mexican National onboard was operating the vessel as the Master. This was done to circumvent 46 United States Code (USC) 1231 which requires an American citizen to be in command of a vessel.

4.2.3. The Header had 20 years' experience working on fishing vessels in the Brownsville, TX area.

4.2.4. At the time the Header went overboard he was not wearing a personal floatation device. The Header was wearing several layers of clothing, including a jacket and work boots, that would have hindered his ability to stay afloat. He was approximately 67 inches tall.

4.2.5. The rail height in the location the Header went overboard measured 30 inches from the deck to the top of the rail.

4.2.6. The LADY NORA's deck was painted but did not have nonskid material to prevent slipping.

4.2.7. Observed on scene weather conditions were slight overcast with a visibility of 10 miles and an air temperature of 60 degrees Fahrenheit. The sun had yet not fully risen so conditions were dark. The water temperature was 52 degrees Fahrenheit according to offshore sea state buoy in the area. Wind speed was 7 knots, with gusts up to 14 knots, out of the East. Wave height was 2 feet.

4.2.8. Probability of Survival Decision Aid determined a cold functional time of 6.5 hours and cold survival time estimate of 9 hours.

5. Analysis

5.1. *Failure of Nora Trawlers, Inc. to require personnel on deck to wear personal flotation devices.* The Header was not wearing a personal flotation device while working on deck. Nora Trawlers, Inc. neglected to mandate the use of personal flotation devices for deck personnel. Additionally, had a personal flotation device with a light been worn, the probability of detection would have increased. If such a policy had been established and enforced by the vessel's Master, the Header would likely have stayed afloat long enough for rescue operations to be effective.

5.2. *Failure of the Master to have the wheelhouse manned.* The LADY NORA was in autopilot mode with no one in the wheelhouse at the time of the incident. The Master failed to ensure the wheelhouse was manned while the vessel was underway. If someone had been present in the wheelhouse, they could have immediately put the throttles in neutral, keeping the vessel closer to the Header when he went overboard. This would have reduced response time and increased the chances of the Header's recovery.

5.3. *Inadequate equipment for cleaning nets.* Proper equipment should have been provided to avoid using a cumbersome and heavy tool for cleaning the nets. The autopsy report stated he was 5'7" (67 inches) tall. At the time the Header went overboard, he was reaching and leaning over the 30" side of the vessel, cleaning the nets with a 2 x 8" piece of lumber approximately 5 to 6 feet long. Significantly shifting his center of gravity increased the likelihood of losing his balance. This untreated, unpainted piece of lumber was likely soaked with water, weighing over 25 pounds. It lacked any handles for better grip. If a lighter, easier-to-handle tool had been available, it is likely the Header would not have had to lean over the side of the vessel with a heavy piece of lumber to clean the nets and would not have fallen overboard.

5.4. *Unsafe working conditions on deck.* The painted deck of the vessel, lacking nonskid material, was wet and covered in organic matter, making it extremely slippery. This hazardous condition significantly increased the risk of falls. If the deck had been treated with nonskid material, it would have provided better traction, even when wet or dirty. This enhanced grip could have prevented the Header from slipping and losing balance while working on deck, ultimately preventing him from falling overboard.

5.5. *Inadequate safety boots.* The Header was wearing rubber work boots with almost no traction, and the vessel was constantly moving due to 2-foot waves. The lack of traction in the work boots significantly increased the risk of slipping, especially on a moving vessel. If the Header had been provided with boots designed for better grip and traction, it would have reduced the likelihood of slipping. Additionally, the constant movement of the vessel due to the sea state made maintaining balance more challenging. Proper footwear with adequate traction could have helped the Header maintain stability and balance, thereby preventing him from falling overboard.

5.6. *Unfavorable lighting conditions for initial searching.* The Header fell overboard shortly before sunrise. The lack of natural light would have impaired visibility, making it difficult for the crew and rescuers to spot the Header in the water immediately after he fell overboard. Poor lighting reduces the effectiveness of visual searches and can delay the initiation of rescue operations. This critical time lost in the initial search phase likely diminished the chances of locating and retrieving the Header promptly, thereby contributing to the unsuccessful search efforts.

6. Conclusions

6.1. Determination of Cause:

6.1.1. The initiating event for this casualty was the crewmember falling into the water. Causal factors contributing to this event were:

6.1.1.1. The use of a heavy, water-soaked scraping tool required the Header to lean over the side of the vessel.

6.1.1.2. The LADY NORA deck was not equipped with nonskid material on deck.

6.1.1.3. The Header was wearing work boots that lacked traction.

6.1.2. The subsequent event was the Header drowning. Causal factors contributing to this event were:

6.1.2.1. Inability of the vessel crew to turn the vessel around in time to pick up the man overboard before he drowned.

6.1.2.2. Lack of donned personal floatation device while working on deck.

6.1.2.3. Lack of daylight to assist with immediate search efforts.

6.2. Evidence of Act(s) or Violation(s) of Law by Any Coast Guard Credentialed Mariner Subject to Action under 46 U.S.C. Chapter 77: There were no acts of misconduct, incompetence, negligence, unskillfulness, or violations of law by a credentialed mariner identified as part of this investigation.

6.3. Evidence of Act(s) or Violation(s) of Law by U.S. Coast Guard Personnel, or any other person: There were no acts of misconduct, incompetence, negligence, unskillfulness, or violations of law by a mariner identified as part of this investigation.

6.4. Evidence of Act(s) Subject to Civil Penalty:

6.4.1. Vessel Operator: The actions described in paragraph 4.2.1, represent a violation of 46 USC 12131 for a documented vessel not being placed under the command of a citizen of the United States.

6.4.2. Vessel Owner: The actions described in paragraph 4.2.1., represent a violation of 46 USC 8103 for more than 25 percent of the total number of unlicensed seamen on the vessel being aliens lawfully admitted to the United States for permanent residence.

6.5. Evidence of Criminal Act(s): There was no evidence of criminal acts identified as part of this investigation.

6.6. Need for New or Amended U.S. Law or Regulation: This investigation identified no matters needing new or amended U.S. law or regulation.

7. Actions Taken Since the Incident

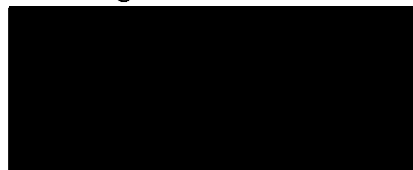
- 7.1. The Coast Guard issued a Notice of Violation to the Vessel Operator for a documented vessel not being placed under the command of a citizen of the United States as required by 46 USC 12131.
- 7.2. The Coast Guard issued an Administrative Civil Penalty (Class I) to the Vessel Owner for more than 25 percent of the total number of unlicensed seamen on the vessel being aliens lawfully admitted to the United States for permanent residence.

8. Recommendations

8.1. Safety Recommendation: There were no proposed actions to add new or amend existing U.S. laws or regulations, international requirements, industry standards, or U.S. Coast Guard policies and procedures as part of this investigation.

8.2. Administrative Recommendations:

8.2.1. Recommend this investigation be closed.



Chief Warrant Officer, U.S. Coast Guard
Investigating Officer