



# UNITED STATES COAST GUARD

## REPORT OF INVESTIGATION INTO THE

### LOSS OF LIFE ONBOARD THE WORKBOAT LITTLE G (MC954372) WHILE TRANSITING THE ALABAMA RIVER NEAR CLAIBORNE, AL ON JUNE 16, 2023



MISLE ACTIVITY NUMBER: 7717011

U.S. Department of  
Homeland Security

United States  
Coast Guard



Commandant  
United States Coast Guard

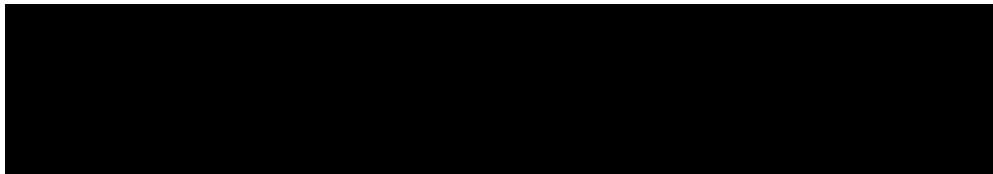
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Washington, DC 20593-7501  
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16732/IIA # 7717011  
15 June 2026

**SINKING OF THE UNINSPECTED WORKBOAT LITTLE G (CG1818164) AND  
SUBSEQUENT LOSS OF ONE LIFE WHILE HOLDING A DECK BARGE AGAINST  
THE EAST BANK OF THE ALABAMA RIVER IN THE VICINITY OF MILE  
MARKER 9 NEAR TENSAW, ALABAMA ON JUNE 16, 2023**

**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  
Office of Investigations & Casualty Analysis (CG-INV)



16732

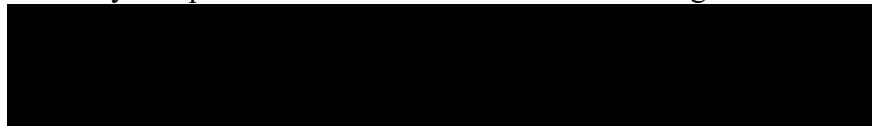
**LOSS OF LIFE ONBOARD THE WORKBOAT LITTLE G (MC 954372) WHILE  
TRANSITING THE ALABAMA RIVER NEAR CLAIBORNE, AL ON JUNE 16, 2023**

**ENDORSEMENT BY THE COMMANDER,  
COAST GUARD HEARTLAND 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. I extend my deepest condolences to family and friends of the mariner who lost his life.
2. It is noted that while U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) readings provide gauge height and discharge volume, they do not provide localized current velocity. To mitigate this data gap, mariners are encouraged to supplement on-site observations with available river gauge predictions to better anticipate current-related risks during voyage planning.
3. The risk of engine room down flooding is significantly increased when non-watertight doors are left in an open position. This office notes similar instances of engine room down flooding due to doors being propped open on inland-certificated towing vessels specifically. Maintaining these closures is a critical safety practice to prevent uncontrollable ingress of water.
4. This office acknowledges the variety of environmental and vessel design conditions that contributed to this tragedy. Workboats of this type are not designed to operate in strong currents, and the river's velocity increased due to a significant volumetric increase from 20,000 to 44,700 cubic feet per second in a span of approximately 10 hours. Further, adding 500 gallons of diesel fuel (approximately 3,550 pounds of additional weight) decreased the vessel's freeboard, which increased the probability of deck flooding.
5. The report contains 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.



Captain, U.S. Coast Guard  
Chief of Prevention  
Coast Guard Heartland District  
By Direction



16732  
18 December 2025

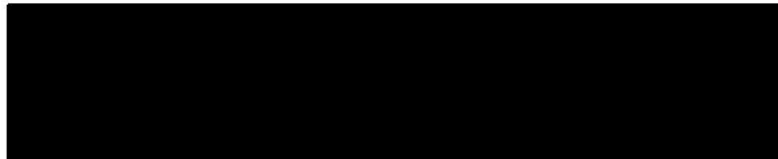
**LOSS OF LIFE ONBOARD THE WORKBOAT LITTLE G (MC 954372) WHILE  
TRANSITING THE ALABAMA RIVER NEAR CLAIBORNE, AL ON JUNE 16, 2023**

**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. The loss of life was a tragic and preventable accident. I offer my sincere condolences to the families 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.



Michael O. Vega  
Captain, U.S. Coast Guard  
Officer in Charge, Marine Inspection  
Mobile, Alabama

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



16732  
18 December 2025

## **LOSS OF LIFE ONBOARD THE WORKBOAT LITTLE G (MC 954372) WHILE TRANSITING THE ALABAMA RIVER NEAR CLAIBORNE, AL ON JUNE 16, 2023**

### **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

On the morning of June 14, 2023, the uninspected workboat LITTLE G (MC954372) departed a job site near Alabama River mile marker (MM) 122 for a multi-day transport of an uninspected crane barge to the MC Marine shipyard in Chickasaw, AL. During this voyage, the LITTLE G was manned by a Master and two deckhands who were responsible for the safe navigation of the vessel and subsequent tow.

On June 15, After two full days of transiting along the Alabama River, the LITTLE G was positioned along the east bank, facing south, for the night. One of the forward spuds was deployed, and the crew retired for the evening. By morning, the crew discovered that the tow configuration had shifted overnight, resulting in the LITTLE G and barge sitting perpendicular to the riverbank. To correct this, the Master broke the tow and pushed the LITTLE G against the southern side of the barge, rotating the barge clockwise back into alignment along the east bank. Once the tow was realigned, the Master repositioned the LITTLE G against the north end of the barge.

While in this position, the LITTLE G began taking on water over the stern at an uncontrollable rate. The Master attempted to maneuver the vessel out of danger, but all efforts proved unsuccessful, and the LITTLE G began to sink. Prior to the wheelhouse becoming fully submerged, the Master jumped into the water and reached for a life ring that the deckhands, who were situated on the barge, had thrown toward him. As the deckhands began pulling him toward the barge, the line separated, and the current forced the Master against the barge before pulling him underneath it. Near the Master's last known location, the LITTLE G remained partially submerged, with its engines still running, for approximately ten minutes before fully sinking.

The Master's body was recovered hours later by first responders approximately 100 yards south along the riverbank. A coroner's report revealed the cause of death to be strikes from a propeller. The LITTLE G was discovered underneath the barge. The vessel was eventually salvaged and transported back to a company shipyard to undergo repairs, which would eventually bring the vessel back into full service.

As a result of its investigation, the Coast Guard determined that the initiating event for this incident was flooding over the stern of the vessel. The subsequent events that followed were 1) the master entering the water, 2) the sinking of the vessel, and 3) the master's loss of life. Causal factors contributing to this casualty were: 1) Improper ship handling, 2) Untimely abandoned ship efforts, and 3) Failure to don a Personal Flotation Device.



16732  
18 Dec, 2025

## **LOSS OF LIFE ONBOARD THE WORKBOAT LITTLE G (MC 954372) WHILE TRANSITING THE ALABAMA RIVER NEAR CLAIBORNE, AL ON JUNE 16, 2023**

### **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 4.09, and under the authority of Title 46, United States Code (USC), Chapter 63. Under 46 USC § 6308, no part of a report of a marine casualty investigation, including its findings of fact, opinions, recommendations, deliberations, or conclusions shall be admissible as evidence or subject to discovery in any civil or administrative proceedings, other than an administrative proceeding initiated by the United States.

1.2. Phelps Dunbar, LLP was designated as the party-in-interest in this investigation in accordance with 46 CFR Subsection 4.03-10.

1.3. The U.S. Coast Guard (USCG) was the lead agency for all evidence collection activities involving this investigation.

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

#### **2. Vessel Involved in the Incident**



Figure 1. LITTLE G post salvage at MC Marine Shipyard, Chickasaw, AL. (June 30, 2023/Sector Mobile IO)

|                                                                        |                              |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------|
| Official Name:                                                         | LITTLE G                     |
| Identification Number:                                                 | MC954372 (Unofficial)        |
| Flag:                                                                  | United States                |
| Vessel Class/Type/Sub-Type                                             | Workboat                     |
| Build Year:                                                            | 2021                         |
| Length:                                                                | 25' 8" (L.O.A)               |
| Main/Primary Propulsion: (Configuration/System Type, Ahead Horsepower) | 700 HP                       |
| Owner:                                                                 | MC Marine LLC<br>Mobile, AL  |
| Operator:                                                              | MC Marine, LLC<br>Mobile, AL |

### 3. Deceased, Missing and/or Injured Persons

| Relationship to Vessel | Sex  | Age | Status   |
|------------------------|------|-----|----------|
| Master                 | Male | 64  | Deceased |

### 4. Findings of Fact

#### 4.1. The Incident:

4.1.1. On June 14, 2023, the LITTLE G departed a job site near MM 122 for a multi-day transit on the Alabama River, enroute to the MC Marine shipyard in Chickasaw, AL. The LITTLE G was pushing ahead a crane barge and section of "Flexifloat", hereafter referred to as the "barge".



Figure 2. Crane barge and Flexifloat along the east bank. (June 16, 2023/Sector Mobile IO)



Figure 3. Flexifloat along the east bank. (June 16, 2023/Sector Mobile IO)

4.1.2. The crew of the LITTLE G consisted of a Master and two Deckhands, hereafter referred to as “Deckhand 1” and “Deckhand 2”.

4.1.3. During vessel transits, the Master remained at the helm while the Deckhands stood watch at the forward part of the barge.

4.1.4. The LITTLE G and accompanying barge transited during daylight hours only, eventually spudding down along the riverbank at 1700 on the evening of June 14, 2023.

4.1.5. The following morning, June 15, 2023, the vessel departed at 0800 to continue the southbound transit before eventually stopping at 1800 near MM 9. The LITTLE G and accompanying barge pushed up against the east bank with the stern of the vessel on the north end and forward most part of the barge to the south. The forward spud was the only spud lowered at this time.

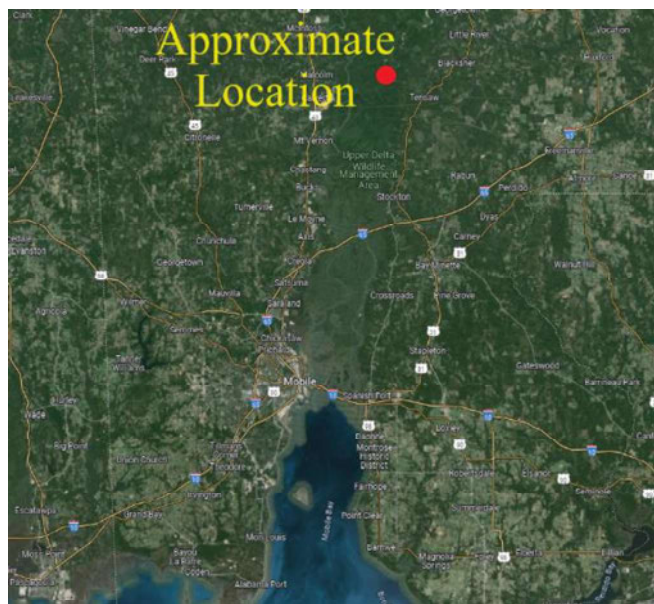


Figure 4. Approximate location of the vessel in relation to Mobile, AL. (Google Maps)

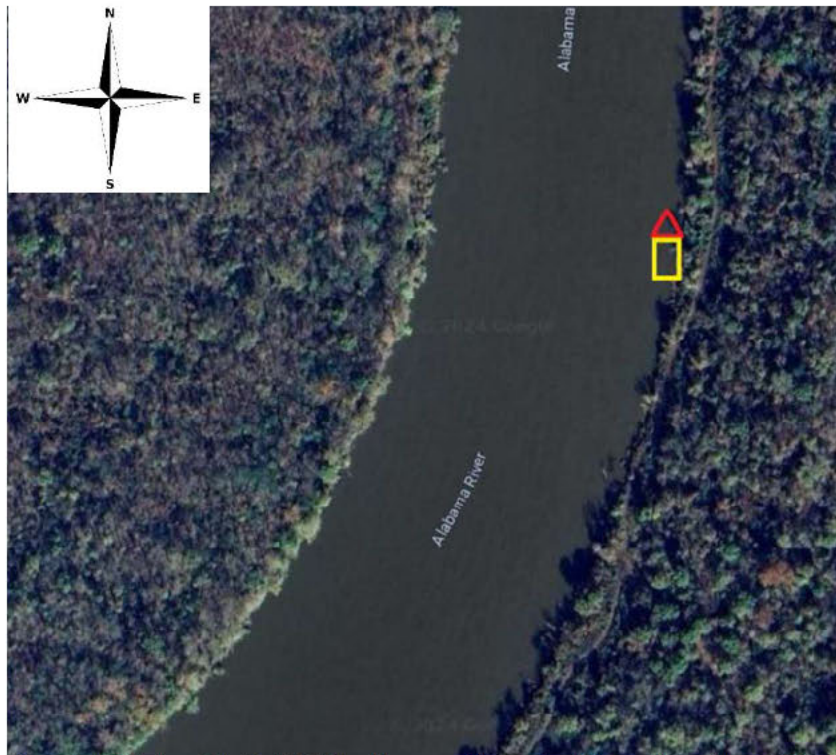


Figure 5. Aerial view of the LITTLE G and barge position on the Alabama River. (Google Maps)

4.1.6. At 0400, June 16, 2023, Deckhand 1 awoke and discovered the vessel and barge shifted perpendicular to the bank, with the stern of the LITTLE G now positioned in the center of the river. Deckhand 1 then went back to sleep. The Master was not notified at this time.

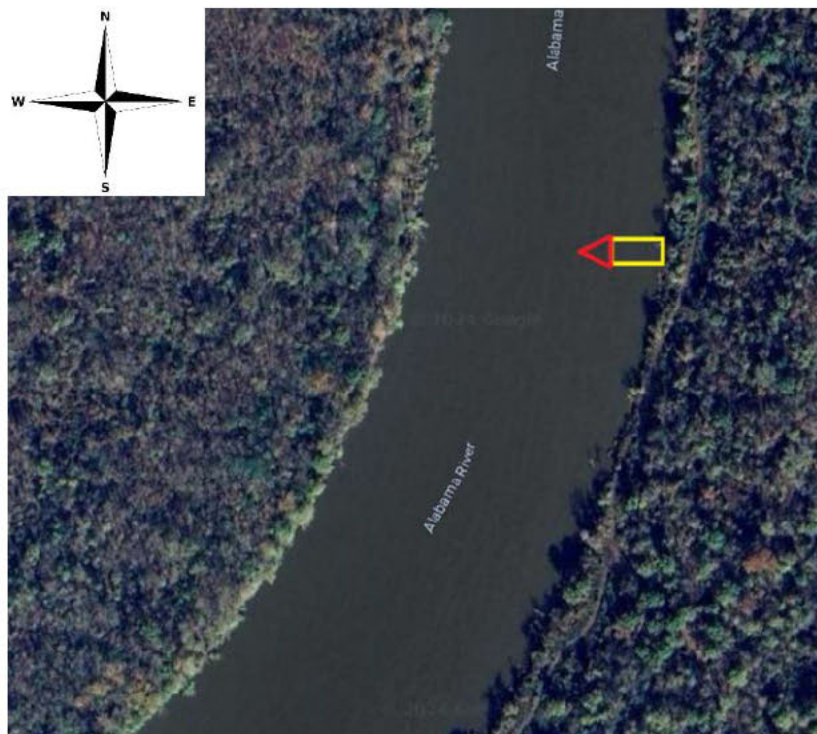


Figure 6. Aerial view of the LITTLE G and barge shifted in a perpendicular position on the Alabama River. (Google Maps)

4.1.7. Two hours later, at 0600, the Master's alarm went off, awakening the entire crew. Upon awakening, the crew discovered the change in vessel positioning and began discussing how to best address the situation. The mood was calm at this juncture, with the Master even taking the time to brew and drink a cup of coffee.

4.1.8. Eventually, the Master ordered Deckhand 1 to add 500 gallons of diesel to the LITTLE G. While Deckhand 1 was adding fuel, the Master proceeded to the wheelhouse. Upon completion of this evolution, Deckhand 1 returned to the barge.

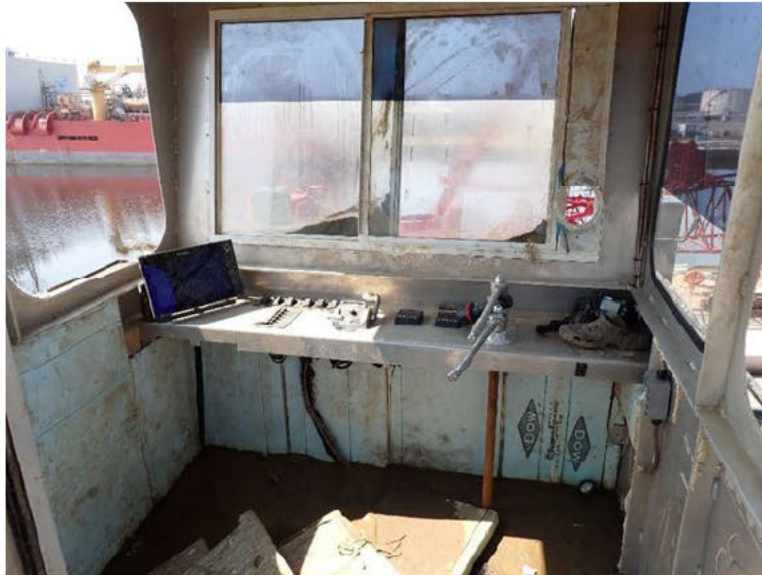


Figure 7. Wheelhouse of the LITTLE G post salvage at MC Marine Shipyard (June 30, 2023/Sector Mobile IO)

4.1.9. The Master then positioned the LITTLE G to push up against the starboard side (south side) of the perpendicular barge, with the intent of pushing it northward in a clockwise rotation back against the east bank of the river.

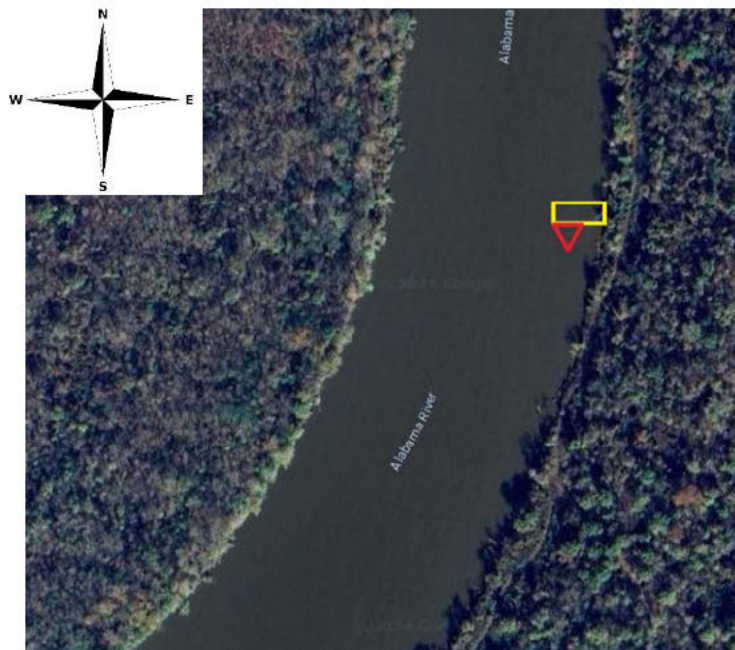


Figure 8. Aerial view of the LITTLE G pushing the starboard side of the barge. (Google Maps)

4.1.10. With the barge back in its original position, the Master then attempted to maneuver the LITTLE G's stern back to the north.

4.1.11. Once the LITTLE G was pushed up against the barge with the port side abreast the east bank, Deckhand 1 secured a towing line from the barge to the forward cleat of the LITTLE G.

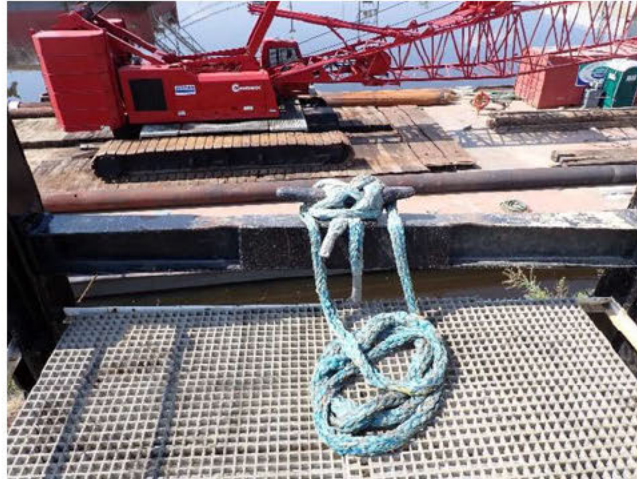


Figure 9. LITTLE G forward cleat. (June 30, 2023/Sector Mobile IO)

4.1.12. Shortly after affixing the towing line, water began rushing over the stern of the LITTLE G. The Master immediately ordered Deckhand 1 to remove the towline, to which Deckhand 1 replied that he believed it would make matters worse. The Master insisted, and Deckhand 1 eventually obliged.

4.1.13. After removing the towing line, flooding over the stern of the LITTLE G reportedly increased.

4.1.14. As the flooding over the stern of the LITTLE G continued, the barge simultaneously began shifting back to a perpendicular position.

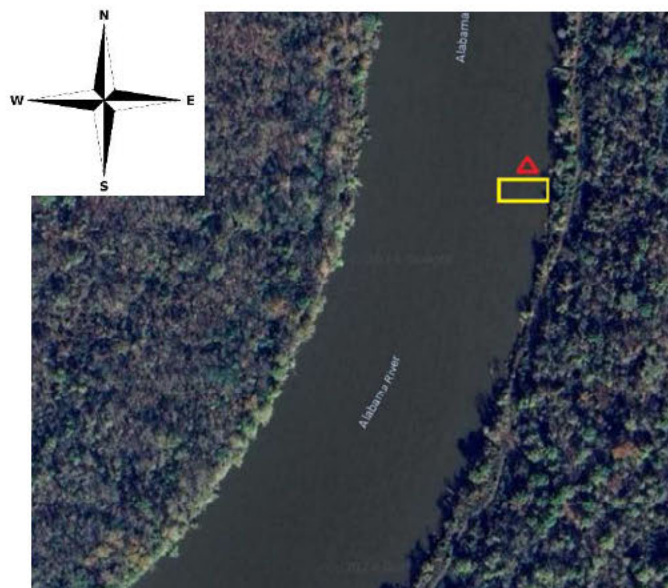


Figure 10. Aerial view of the LITTLE G position to the north of the perpendicular barge. (Google Maps)

4.1.15. Both deckhands felt the LITTLE G was irrecoverably sinking and repeatedly yelled for the Master to abandon ship.

4.1.16. The LITTLE G was then involuntarily pushed up against the barge with all, but the wheelhouse submerged.

4.1.17. Just as the wheelhouse began to submerge, Deckhand 2 threw a life ring near the sinking vessel. The Master then exited the wheelhouse, entered the water, and grabbed hold of the life ring.

4.1.18. At 0650, the deckhands began pulling the Master towards the barge. As the Master was being retrieved, the line attached to the life ring parted. The Master was then forced by the river current up against and then underneath the barge. He was not wearing a PFD.

4.1.19. After the Master was swept underneath the barge, the LITTLE G remained partially submerged for 10 minutes before eventually sinking. The vessel's engines could reportedly be heard running during the entirety of this 10-minute period.

4.1.20. At some point, between the time the Master was forced under the barge and the LITTLE G sinking, the Master sustained multiple propeller strikes to the body, resulting in a loss of life.

4.1.21. Recognizing that the Master had not resurfaced, Deckhand 1 called 911 to report the incident. By 0659, Deckhand 1 contacted the owner of MC Marine to report the incident, who in turn contacted Coast Guard Sector Mobile approximately 20 minutes later.

4.1.22. Alabama Law Enforcement Agency Marine Patrol and a Coast Guard Marine Investigator arrived on scene at 1116. At this time, the barge remained in a perpendicular position to the east bank, and the whereabouts of the Master and the LITTLE G remained unknown.



Figure 11. ALEA and USCG enroute to the incident scene. (June 16, 2023/ Sector Mobile IO)

4.1.23. At the request of MC Marine, the T/V HAMP UZZELLE (O/N:280046) arrived on scene at approximately 1501 to assist with search and rescue and salvage operations.



Figure 12. T/V HAMP UZZELLE enroute to the incident scene  
(June 16, 2023/Sector Mobile IO)

4.1.24. The HAMP UZZELLE pushed up directly against the starboard side (south side) of the barge and in doing so caused a release of debris and the Master's body from underneath the barge.

4.1.25. Once the Master's body resurfaced, it drifted approximately 100 yards south of the barge along the riverbank where first responders retrieved his body.

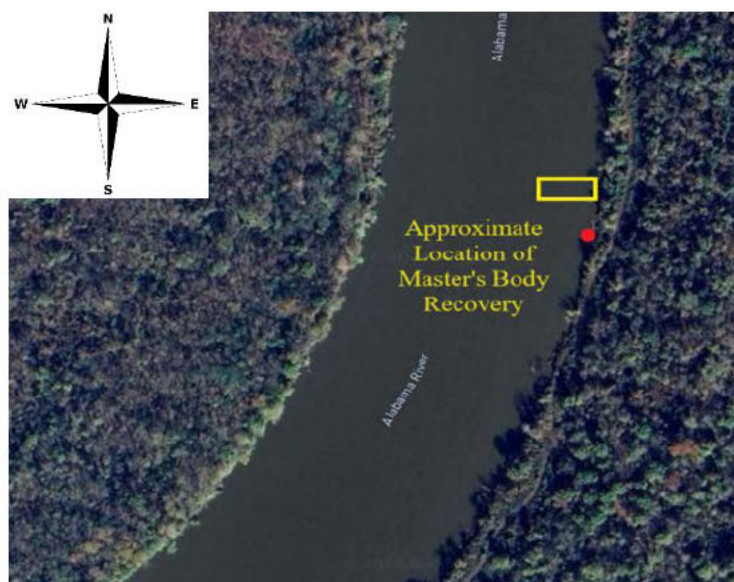


Figure 13. Aerial view of the body recovery in relation to the barge. (Google Maps)

4.1.26. After recovery, first responders identified multiple propeller strikes to the Master's body by way of the LITTLE G's propeller and officially pronounced him deceased.

4.1.27. The LITTLE G was located underneath the barge and eventually resurfaced on June 29, 2023. The vessel was transported to MC Marine shipyard to undergo repairs.

4.1.28. Post marine casualty chemical testing was conducted on all crewmembers except the Master, who was pronounced deceased. All chemical tests came back negative for drugs and alcohol.

#### 4.2. Additional/Supporting Information:

4.2.1. The Alabama Department of Forensic Sciences Toxicology Analysis Report, case # 23ME02381, dated August 21, 2023, listed the cause of death for the Master as, "Propeller chop wounds".



Figure 14. LITTLE G replica (MC Marine, LLC)

4.2.2. The uninspected Towing Vessel LITTLE G is less than 26' in length and not subject to inspection under 46 CFR Subchapter M – Inspected Towing Vessels. The vessel is subject to 46 CFR Subchapter C – Uninspected Vessels.

4.2.3. The LITTLE G was pushing ahead spud/crane barge "JI TWO" barge which carried a Model 99 crane, the MR. KEMO workboat, a generator, fuel tank, storage container, living quarters, and miscellaneous items. Secured to its forward part was a 50' Flexifloat section with multiple fuel tanks and other miscellaneous items.

4.2.4. The LITTLE G operated as an uninspected vessel, as such, no manning nor credentialling requirements applied. The Master had experience operating LITTLE G and worked for MC Marine for over 10 years. Deckhand 1 started working as a deckhand in 2019 and was employed by MC Marine for approximately one year. Deckhand 2 had no experience as a deckhand and began employment with MC Marine on or about the day of departure on June 14, 2023.

4.2.5. Weather conditions around the time of the incident were inclement. A United States Geological River station in Choctaw Bluff, AL, just northeast of the incident location, experienced a steady increase in both river discharge (current) and gage height (depth) from June 15<sup>th</sup> to June 16<sup>th</sup>, 2023. Discharge rose from approximately 20,000 cubic feet per second (ft<sup>3</sup>/s) on June 15<sup>th</sup> to 44,700 ft<sup>3</sup>/s by June 16<sup>th</sup>, indicating a significant increase in water flow. Similarly, the gage height increased from around 4ft to 9.15ft during the same period, reflecting an increase in river depth.

4.2.6. The door leading to the engine room of the LITTLE G was not watertight. It is unknown whether the door was secured shut or open during this incident.



Figure 15. LITTLE G engine room door. (June 30, 2023/LT [REDACTED])

## 5. Analysis

5.1. *Improper Ship Handling.* Water conditions at the time of the incident included steadily increasing water depths and current due to inclement weather. With only one spud engaged and acting as a fulcrum, the current conditions, rising from 20,000 to 44,700 cubic feet per second, with river depth increasing from approximately 4 feet to just over 9 feet, were strong enough to force the vessel in a perpendicular position overnight. The following morning, the Master attempted to hold a corrected position along the east bank, which inhibited the LITTLE G from reacting naturally to the force of the current which would have consequently forced the vessel and barge back to a perpendicular position. In doing so, the stern of the LITTLE G began taking on water in such a rapid manner that subsequent vessel maneuvers to abate sinking were unsuccessful. If the Master chose not to hold the vessel's position

along the east bank, it is likely that the vessel may not have taken on water in such a manner to cause sinking.

5.2. *Untimely Abandon Ship Efforts.* While the Master was trying to maintain the LITTLE G's position along the east bank and prevent further flooding, both deckhands repeatedly urged him to abandon ship. He initially refused but eventually abandoned the LITTLE G as the wheelhouse began to submerge. Had he abandoned earlier, as the deckhands suggested and before the vessel was largely underwater, he may have safely moved from the LITTLE G to the barge. This could have prevented him from entering the water near the operating propellers that ultimately caused his death.

5.3. *Failure to Don PFD.* At the time of the incident, both while operating the LITTLE G and upon entering the water, the Master did not don his PFD. If the Master had donned his PFD, it is possible that he would have remained afloat despite forces of the current. This may have provided the deckhands with more time to retrieve the Master.

## 6. **Conclusions**

### 6.1. Determination of Cause:

6.1.1. The initiating event for this incident was flooding over the stern of the LITTLE G. Causal factors leading to this event were:

6.1.1.1. Improper Ship Handling.

6.1.2. The first subsequent event for this incident occurred when the Master entered the water. Causal factors leading to the subsequent event were:

6.1.2.1 Untimely Abandon Ship Efforts.

6.1.3. The second subsequent event for this incident occurred when the vessel sank. Causal factors leading to the subsequent event were:

6.1.3.1. Improper Ship Handling.

6.1.4. The final subsequent event for this incident occurred when the Master became deceased. Causal factors leading to the subsequent event were:

6.1.4.1. Failure to Don a PFD.

6.2. Evidence of Act(s) or Violation(s) of Law by Any Coast Guard Credentialed Mariner Subject to Action Under 46 USC Chapter 77: This investigation did not identify any evidence of acts by any Coast Guard credentialed mariners subject to action under 46 USC Chapter 77.

6.3. Evidence of Act(s) or Violation(s) of Law by U.S. Coast Guard Personnel, or any other person: This investigation did not identify any evidence of acts or violations of law by U.S. Coast Guard Personnel, or any other person.

6.4. Evidence of Act(s) Subject to Civil Penalty: There was evidence of a violation subject to a civil penalty identified as part of this investigation. Specifically, the owner failed to properly document the LITTLE G in accordance with 46 CFR 67.7.

6.5. Evidence of Criminal Act(s): This investigation did not identify potential violations of criminal law.

6.6. Need for New or Amended U.S. Law or Regulation: This investigation did not identify a need to require new or amend any current laws or regulations.

6.7. Unsafe Actions or Conditions that Were Not Causal Factors: This investigation did not identify any unsafe acts or conditions that were not causal factors.

**7. Actions Taken Since the Incident**

7.1. No actions taken since this incident occurred.

**8. Recommendations**

8.1. Safety Recommendations: No recommendations

8.2. Administrative Recommendations: No recommendations



Lieutenant, U.S. Coast Guard  
Investigating Officer