

UNITED STATES COAST GUARD

ADDRESS REPLY TO:



MVI

FILE: 31 August 1955

(LIBERTY - a-12 Bd)

Commandant's Action

on

Marine Board of Investigation; broaching of M/B LIBERTY, entrance to Bodega Bay, California, 10 May 1955, with loss of life

1. Pursuant to the provisions of Title 46 C.F.R. 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. In the afternoon of 10 May 1955 the inspected passenger motorboat LIBERTY, of 25 g.t. and 64 feet, 6 inches length, with eleven passengers and two crew members on board, was returning to Bodega Bay, California, from a fishing excursion at sea. The wind was northwest, force 2, visibility clear, swells west northwest approximately 8 feet high. When rounding Bodega Head for entrance into the Bay, a large swell overtook the LIBERTY and broke into a comb on the after half of the vessel, causing her to broach and sweeping seven persons into the sea. No other swells were seen to break in the vicinity either before or after the casualty. The fishing motorboat LIBERTY was in close proximity to the passenger motorboat LIBERTY at the time the casualty occurred and picked up the seven persons washed overboard, but unfortunately in the twenty minute rescue operation, three of the passengers washed overboard lost their lives by drowning. After the rescue operations, the fishing vessel LIBERTY towed the motor passenger vessel LIBERTY into port.
3. The Findings of Fact, Conclusions, and Recommendations of the Marine Board of Investigation convened to investigate subject casualty are approved.

[REDACTED]

J. A. HIRSHFIELD
Rear Admiral, U. S. Coast Guard
Acting Commandant

REPORT

of a

BOARD OF INVESTIGATION

convened at

Appraisers Building, 630 Sansome Street
San Francisco, California

By order of

The Commandant, U. S. Coast Guard

To inquire into and investigate the broaching of the motorboat
LIBERTY while crossing the bar at the entrance to Bodega Bay,
California, on 10 May 1955, with loss of life.

From: Marine Board of Investigation
To: Commandant (MWI)
Via: Commander, 12th Coast Guard District (m)

Subj: Broaching of M/B LIBERTY, entrance to Bodega Bay, California,
10 May 1955, with loss of life.

1. Pursuant to authority vested by R.S. 4450, as amended, and regulations thereunder, the record of the Marine Board convened to investigate subject casualty is forwarded herewith.
2. The Marine Board met on 16 May 1955 at Sonoma, California and again on 19 May 1955 at the Office of the Commander, Twelfth Coast Guard District, Marine Inspection Office, 630 Sansome Street - Room 421, San Francisco, California, and in accordance with paragraph 2 of Commandant (MWI) letter dated 17 May 1955, File (LIBERTY - a-12 Bd), the Marine Board upon conclusion of the investigation, makes the following Findings of Fact, Conclusions and Recommendations:

FINDINGS OF FACT

1. On 10 May 1955 at about 1530 hours, PDT, a casualty occurred to the M/B LIBERTY O.N. 217395 when it was struck by a large breaking wave while at a position about 700 yards west of Bodega Rock, (USC & GS Chart 5603). This casualty resulted in damage to the port engineroom deckhouse and loss of life by drowning of three (3) passengers on the LIBERTY, namely, Mr. Chelso Pedroncelli, Mr. Peter Mancuso, and Mr. Curtis W. Rich.
2. The LIBERTY, O.N. 217395, 25 gross tons, 64'6" in length, and 12'10" beam is owned and operated by Mr. [REDACTED] of Bodega Bay, California. This passenger motorboat is used as a party fishing boat operating out of Bodega Bay, California. It was built of wood at Stockton, California in 1918, and completed its last annual inspection at Bodega Bay, California on 26 August 1954. The certificated route of the M/B LIBERTY is for Bodega Bay; also to sea not exceeding 15 miles from Bodega Head, during daylight hours only. This vessel has five watertight bulkheads, and is powered by two 225 HP Sterling gasoline engines which operate through planetary reduction gears to two propeller shafts. The total number of persons allowed is thirty-two.
3. The weather conditions at the time of the casualty were: wind, N.W. force 2; visibility clear; swells WNW approximately 8' high.

FINDINGS OF FACT (Continued)

4. The operator and master of the LIBERTY, [REDACTED], was operating under authority of his motorboat operator's license [REDACTED] issued to him at San Francisco, California on 15 September 1953. He took a fishing party of 11 passengers and two crew men from Bodega Bay at approximately 0700 on the date of the casualty. Passengers paid \$5.00 per person for the day's fishing. The vessel proceeded through the passage north of Bodega Rock and then to fishing grounds up the coast off Fort Ross. No rough seas or strong winds were encountered. On the return to Bodega Bay the vessel cruised at approximately 12 knots. The size of the northwesterly swells increased, but the boat was running with the swells and was riding easily. None of the passengers or crew felt any concern for any imminent danger. The master permitted the engineer, [REDACTED] to navigate the vessel on several occasions on the return to Bodega Bay. Though Mr. [REDACTED] has no motorboat operator's license, he has 26 years experience on fishing vessels.

5. When the vessel was rounding Bodega Head, the master was on the after deck making financial arrangements with Mr. Mancuso and Mr. [REDACTED]. He had yet to decide whether to proceed through the channel north of Bodega Rock or to pass south of Bodega Rock. It appeared that there were heavy swells in the north passage. Therefore, prior to the casualty, the vessel's course was maintained at 090° magnetic which track would pass close to the Flashing Red Buoy "2", SSE of Bodega Rock. Approximately 1530, two large swells passed under the LIBERTY without causing it to veer off course. Several persons including the helmsman then glanced aft and saw a much larger swell overtaking and starting to lift the boat. In spite of the helmsman's desperate efforts to maintain course, the boat veered to starboard down the face of the swell. The crest broke over into a comb and crashed onto the after half of the boat. This swept seven men into the sea and broached the LIBERTY. In broaching, the vessel heeled violently to port. At this time the side of the engineroom deckhouse became submerged and then buckled. The water which then entered the engineroom flooded the engines stopping them. No other swells were seen to break in that vicinity either before or after the casualty.

6. The fishing boat LIBERTY, O.N. 217450, was underway approximately 200 yards from the party fishing boat and came to the rescue immediately. All of the seven who had been washed overboard were taken aboard the fishing boat by its operator, Mr. [REDACTED] and his two-man crew. Three of these persons had drowned during the twenty minute rescue operation. The party fishing boat LIBERTY was then taken in tow to Bodega Bay, California.

FINDINGS OF FACT (Continued)

7. The following witnesses were interviewed:

Mr. [REDACTED]	- rescued fisherman
Mr. [REDACTED]	- rescued fisherman
Mr. [REDACTED]	- rescued fisherman
Mr. [REDACTED]	- rescued deck-hand of the LIBERTY
Mr. [REDACTED]	- fisherman
Mr. [REDACTED]	- fisherman
Mr. [REDACTED]	- fisherman
Mr. [REDACTED]	- fisherman
Mr. [REDACTED]	- fisherman
Mr. [REDACTED]	- master of the party fishing boat LIBERTY
Mr. [REDACTED]	- engineer of the LIBERTY
Mr. [REDACTED]	- master of the rescue vessel LIBERTY
Mr. [REDACTED]	- deckhand
Mr. [REDACTED]	- deckhand

CONCLUSIONS

1. At approximately 1530 PDT, 10 May 1955, the M/B LIBERTY O.N. 217395 was struck by a large wave which broke over the starboard quarter. This party fishing boat, carrying eleven passengers and a three-man crew had shown no unseaworthy characteristics in riding the overtaking eight foot swells. One exceptionally large swell broke into a comb and engulfed the after section of the vessel sweeping seven men into the sea. It is apparent that no sea or wind conditions could have forewarned the master or helmsman of the M/B LIBERTY of the possibility that such a casualty might occur. As stated in the testimony, none aboard felt any sense of danger until it was too late to take any remedial action. At this time the master of the boat was on the afterdeck, but the boat was being navigated by a competent seaman of wide experience. Sufficient lifejackets were aboard for all passengers, but, none of the passengers or the crew felt the sense of danger that would motivate them to ask for or to wear one. It is of little importance that after the casualty all hands might concede that they should have been wearing the life preservers. However, it is only by the wearing of life preservers that the effect of this casualty could have been minimized.

2. At the time of the casualty, the side of the engineroom deckhouse buckled. Sea water entered the machinery space and shorted out the engine ignition systems. The vessel then had to wait for the fishing boat LIBERTY to rescue the four survivors, the three deceased, and then take the party fishing boat in tow. Because of the damage suffered by the LIBERTY, her Certificate of Inspection was returned to the OCMI, San Francisco until such time as repairs are made and the vessel is again inspected and found to be seaworthy.

3. Normal boat handling procedures were exercised by the master and the crew of the LIBERTY both before and after the casualty. Therefore, in view of the unusual circumstances indicated at the time of this casualty, it is apparent that there was no negligence or inattention to duty on the part of the master or any of the crew of the M/B LIBERTY which could be charged and proved in violation of R.S. 4450, as amended.

4. No personnel of the Coast Guard or any other government agency contributed to the casualty.

RECOMMENDATION

1. Since there is no evidence to indicate that there was any negligence on the part of the master or the crew of the M/B LIBERTY which contributed to causing the casualty, it is apparent that no further action is indicated by the Board of Investigation. Therefore, it is recommended that this case be closed.

[REDACTED]
HARRY L. MORGAN
Commander, U. S. Coast Guard
Chairman

[REDACTED]
MAURICE D. MELANPHY
Commander, U. S. Coast Guard
Member

[REDACTED]
ROBERT P. CHIRNSIDE
Lieutenant, U. S. Coast Guard
Member and Recorder