UNITED STATES COAST GUARD
WASHINGTON, D. C.

From: Chief, Merchant Vessel Inspection Division
Via: Commander

Subj: Marine Board of Investigation; stranding of SS 10-2-1604 (OPT: IST), on New Jersey shore, on or about 6 December 1952, with loss of life

1. Pursuant to the provisions of Title 46 U.S.C., Part 136, the record of the marine board convened to investigate the subject casualty, together with its findings of fact, conclusions and recommendations, has been referred as follows forwarded herewith.

2. On 6 December 1952, the SS 10-2-1604 (OPT: IST), a steel hull, deep keel, sloop rigged ketch, built in 1952 in Hamburg, Germany, length 56' 8", beam 14' 5", draft 8' 0", equipped with a diesel auxiliary engine, departed from City Island, New York, N.Y., for Baltimore, Maryland, with four persons on board. While en route some bad weather was encountered but none of it severe, and at 0745 on 6 December 1952, the SS 10-2-1604 was sighted aground in Brigantine Inlet at the mouth of Brigantine Channel, New Jersey. The bodies of three persons from this vessel were later found dead and the owner/anchor has not been found but is presumed to have lost his life. The known dead are:

Charlotte La Burge
Stephen D. La Burge, 3rd
John C. Aberg, Jr.

Missing and presumed dead:

3. The Board made the following Findings of Fact:

"1. At 0745 CST, 6 December, 1952, a sailing vessel, later identified as the auxiliary ketch OPT: IST, 10-2-1604, which was on route from City Island, New York, N.Y., to Baltimore, Maryland, with four (4) persons aboard, was discovered apparently grounded in Brigantine Inlet at the mouth of Brigantine Channel, New Jersey in latitude 39° 26' 30" north, longitude 74° 19' 30" west. The vessel was found to be abandoned, but three bodies were discovered along the beach at the northern end of Brigantine Island."
"2. Missing and presumed dead is the owner, who has been identified as:

Stephen L. Le Barge, Jr., Age

The known dead are:

Charlotte Le Barge, Age [redacted] wife of owner
Stephen B. Le Barge, 3rd, Age [redacted] son of owner
John R. Wershaw, Jr., Age [redacted] guest

"3. No damage was sustained by the vessel's hull or fittings with the exception of minor damage to the guard rails on deck. Interior appointments and the auxiliary engine were damaged to a limited extent by water that had entered the vessel through the open companionway.

"4. The CPTA IST Certificate of Award no. 1011604, is a steel hull, deep keel, marconi rigged k.t.s., built in 1931 in Hamburg, Germany; length 56' 6", beam 14' 5", draft 3' 6" and is equipped with a 45 horse power diesel auxiliary engine. The owner of the vessel is Stephen L. Le Barge, [redacted]

"5. At 1130 EST, 4 December, 1952, the CPTA IST was observed to depart from Antwerp Yacht Yard, City Island, New York, N.Y. by Philip A. S. Lewis, yard superintendent. To his knowledge the boat was on route to Baltimore, Maryland and those aboard were:

Stephen L. Le Barge, his wife, a young man and a 10 year old boy. Since there are no known survivors or other witnesses nothing further is known concerning the events of the voyage.

"6. The weather between Sandy Hook and Brigsantine beginning at noon on 4 December, 1952 was cloudy with waves running 10 to 15 knots, increasing to 20 knots by midnight. Seas were moderate with 8 foot swells reported at Brigsantine Light Vessel. By noon on 5 December, the wind had increased to nearly 40 knots from the southeast with rain and fog throughout the day. Rough seas were reported during the period and 10 foot swells were recorded at
26 February 1953

(35 ft. 1694 C.P.L.HST) 2-3 scd

Anchored light vessel. The weather moderated by 0600 6 December, when winds were west 15 to 20 knots and seas and swells were slight. Small craft warnings were displayed at 0400, 4 December, south of New York, N.Y. to Cape Hatteras and at 1100, 5 December from Block Island, N.Y. to Cape Sable, N.S.

71. The C.P.L.HST was first sighted at 0745, 6 December, 1952 by凭借blessing x, xx, have says of the Brigantine Police from a position on the beach approximately two miles from the northern tip of Brigantine Island. The incident was reported by radio to police headquarters and relayed to the coast guard Lifeboat Station, Atlantic City, N.J. Later that morning three bodies were discovered washed out along the beach from the northern tip of Brigantine Island to a point one mile south. Discovery of the first and southernmost body, which was that of Mr. LaBarge, was made at 1100 by [Redacted] while walking up the beach towards the C.P.L.HST. He returned to his home to notify the police and together with them returned to discover the body of Ahlburg 300 yards further up the beach and the body of young LeBarge at the northern tip of the island. The vessel's 12 foot dingy was discovered washed and partly filled with sand near the body of the LaBarge boy. A pair of oars and a short boat hook were also found along the beach as were three (3) expanded hand type blue rockets of German manufacture.

8. Ahlburg's body was face up clothed in dungarees and a heavy leather jacket. He wore a yellow "Life West" type life jacket of foreign manufacture which required inflating by mouth. The jacket was not inflated when the body was discovered. Inside the jacket was a watertight bag containing two unexpanded German hand type red flares and several matches.

9. Mrs. LaBarge and her son were face down and each wore a cork, block type life preserver of foreign make that had slid up over their heads. Both bodies were heavily clothed.

10. Shallow water prevented the Coast Guard boat from Little Egg Lifeboat Station from going alongside when it arrived on the scene at 1200 on 6 December, however at [Redacted] USCG and [Redacted] USCG, boarded the vessel from a pulling boat brought by truck to the area from Atlantic City. After determining there were no survivors or other
bodies aboard a general inspection was made. The vessel was list-
ing to starboard about 45 degrees and the masts were breaking
around, but not over the vessel. The binacle cover was found
lying in the cockpit and the compass was observed to be missing.
The mast, which was estimated to be due north and the rudder was hard
right. The main companionway hatch was open and a small burned
area was noticed on the top of the hatch. An expended blue rocket
of the same type as was found on the beach was discovered lying
on deck. The jib was full up and close hauled. The mainsail was a
little more than halfway up, however, the halyard had been cast
off but the halyard reel was jammed preventing the sail from coming
down. The main sheet was slack. The mizzen sail was secured with
cover on, and the boom cracked. Various articles were found afloat
in the cabin and there was some water in the bilges. Before
departure, the vessel at 1430 the jib and mainsheet were lowered to
prevent damage and an envelope and a picture of the vessel were
removed for identification purposes.

"11. The three bodies found on the beach, having been removed to
a mortuary by the Brigantine Police, were examined at 1700, 6
December, by Dr. [Redacted], County Physician, Atlantic
County. According to the Certificate of Death, issued by the
State Department of Health of New Jersey, Ahlberg died by drowning
and Mrs. La Barge and her son died from exposure and exhaustion.

"12. Efforts of the Coast Guard to refloat the CBOGFEST on 6 and
7 December were unsuccessful. On 8 December, [Redacted]
took charge of the vessel under authority of [Redacted], father of the missing
owner. At 1245, 9 December, 1952, the CBOGFEST was refloated by
tug "L. A. SOCON" and towed to Atlantic City.

"13. Inspection of the vessel by the Board disclosed her to be
fully equipped for offshore navigation and piloting, including all
necessary charts and publications for the route from New York to
Baltimore, however no record of navigation was found either on
charts or in the vessel's log.

"14. [Redacted], friends of Stephen La Barge, testified that the La Barges
and Ahlberg arrived at his home from California on 29 November,
1952. On 30 November, the previously arranged purchase of the
OPD 104 was completed and on the evening of 1 December, the party moved aboard the vessel intending to depart for Baltimore, Maryland, at 1000, 2 December. Person____ did not see or hear from them again. From discussions of the intended voyage, Person____ understood that LaBarge planned to stay 10 miles offshore while proceeding under power to Baltimore where he would engage a crew member. Person____ was unable to testify to LaBarge’s ability as a seaman, but was aware that he had served in the “Seabass” during the war and had sailed in small sailboats on the California coast.

The Board also heard testimony from fisherman Person____ Person____, who claimed that at 1630 4 December, while fishing in Great Bay, 1 mile south of Fish Island, he sighted the masts and sails of a vessel in a position approximately 1/2 mile south of Little Eg. Inlet Bay “P” (LL 1460). At 0730 on 6 December, while navigating the sloughs north of Brigantine Island Mallard claimed further that he sighted the OPD 104 aground in Brigantine Inlet and recognized it as the same vessel whose masts he had seen on 4 December, 1952.

The Board made the following conclusions:

1. In the absence of any known survivors or of any records of the voyage the cause of the casualty cannot be determined.

2. From the evidence adduced, however, it is considered, that the vessel stranded some time during the morning hours of 5 December, 1952, at or near the position in which it was found and further that the three persons whose bodies were discovered on the beach lost their lives by drowning or exhaustion and exposure in an attempt to reach the shore after the stranding occurred.

3. In establishing the time of stranding it is considered that the maximum average speed of advance possible in the light of weather conditions and design characteristics of the vessel would be eight knots. Since the distance from the point of departure is no less than 97 miles, the earliest possible moment of stranding would be 2330, 4 December, 1952.
74. It is considered unlikely that anyone would trade the comparative safety of the vessel for that of the dinghy unless threatened with impending destruction. There being no evidence of any other danger such as fire or foundering it is presumed that the crew of the vessel breaking up on the shoal promptly abandoned the vessel.

75. The relative positions of the bodies on the dinghy as found on the beach tend to support a conclusion that those three, at least, left the vessel together in the dinghy and such is the belief of the Board. In this connection the opinion of the County Physician that Ahlberg's death occurred 24 hours prior to the other two was rejected since it was apparently based solely on the fact that the bodies of the woman and the boy showed no evidence of having been attacked by animal life as in the case of Ahlberg. The record discloses, however, that Ahlberg's body was found face upward, so that the eaten and decomposed areas lay exposed whereas the bodies of the other two were found face downward, heavily clothed and with the life preservers in both instances covering the head.

76. There is no evidence to indicate the fate of the man, but it is the belief of the Board that he was lost prior to the stranding. Under the circumstances it is considered unlikely that the vessel could have been abandoned had the owner been present. If, on the other hand the vessel was abandoned under his direction, he would undoubtedly have accompanied his wife and child and his body would probably have been recovered with the others.

77. The absence of the compass suggests it was taken in the dinghy when the vessel was abandoned. The presence of more valuable articles aboard the vessel when it was found precludes the possibility that the compass was stolen by an unknown person and the construction of the timbers would have prevented it from being thrown from the vessel by heavy seas.

78. The position of stranding was considered an unfortunate trick of fate. Althoughอบ close, it lies only four miles from the Const Guard lookout tower at Little Eg. Lifeboat Station and just
two miles from the populated outskirts of Brigantine, N.J. While
normally visible in clear atmosphere, the weather such as prevailed
throughout 5 December could completely obscure the area.

"9. For the JPT JST to have been in Little Egg Inlet at 1630,
4 December as suggested by the testimony of the fisherman would have
necessitated an impossible average speed of 18 knots and the
possibility was therefore rejected.

"10. The assistance rendered by the Coast Guard following the
casualty was considered satisfactory in all respects. Although the
time between the receipt of notice thereof and the arrival of the
first Coast Guard unit on the scene was considered to be excessive,
it in no way affected the ultimate result.

"11. It is further considered that the owner of the JPT JST exer-
cised poor judgment either in failing to avail himself of weather
forecasts, or, having done so, for departing on an offshore voyage
in an unfamiliar vessel knowing such weather to exist along the route."

5.

The Board made the following recommendations:

"1. Since the presence of unapproved equipment constituted the
only violation of law and in the absence of any evidence of foul
play, it is recommended no further action be taken and the case
be closed."

6.

It is recommended that the Findings of Fact, Conclusions, and
Recommendations of the Marine Board of Investigation be approved.

/s/ P. A. O'VeDEN

---

FRST O'H;O'S MEMORANDUM OF 26 FEBRUARY 1953

M 2 MARCH 1953

From: Chief, Office of Merchant Marine Safety

For: Commandant

Forwarded, recommending approval.

/s/ H. C. SHEPHERD

APPROVED MAR. 3, 1953

/s/ MERCY O'NEILL

Vice Admiral, U. S. Coast Guard
Commandant