



TREASURY DEPARTMENT
UNITED STATES COAST GUARD

Address reply to:
COMMANDANT
U.S. COAST GUARD
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20226

MVI-3
5943/TWO GEORGE'S
A-7 B4
26 JAN 1965

Commandant's Action

on

Marine Board of Investigation; capsizing of the
M/B TWO GEORGE'S off South Lake Worth Inlet,
Florida, on 25 March 1964, with loss of life

1. The record of the Marine Board of Investigation convened to investigate subject casualty together with the findings of fact, conclusions and recommendations, has been reviewed.
2. The TWO GEORGE'S, O.N. 269648, is a twin screw, single deck, wood hull vessel, 60 feet in length, of 11 gross tons and used as a party fishing boat carrying passengers for hire. The vessel had a valid Coast Guard Certificate of Inspection with no deficiencies outstanding. It was manned with sufficient personnel, was properly equipped and was in a sound, stable and seaworthy condition.
3. South Lake Worth Inlet is a channel dredged through the beach from Lake Worth to the ocean. It varies between 100 feet and 200 feet in width and has a depth of between 5 and 6 feet. There are two concrete jetties on the oceanside which extend about 40 feet out from the beach. About 200 yards offshore from the jetties there is a sand bar. The depth of water over the bar is about 7 feet. Because the inlet is narrow and shallow and a bar exists immediately offshore, easterly seas, swells, and wind conditions cause seas to break across the bar and restrict its navigability. When the tide is ebbing, strong currents flowing out of the inlet combine with the swell and sea conditions and make crossing the bar hazardous.
4. There are about 50 charter boats and party fishing boats operating out of South Lake Worth Inlet. The Master makes the decision as to whether or not the bar can be safely crossed. The procedure for crossing the bar and entering the inlet from seaward varies with each operator depending upon his experience and the boat's capabilities. In general, the operator will approach the bar area and slow or stop his vessel in a safe area just beyond the breaker line. In this position, he can evaluate the sea conditions and the period of the swells and select the most favorable moment to cross the bar.



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5. When the casualty occurred, the wind was from the southeast Force 5, the sea from the southeast at approximately 4 to 6 feet in height with an easterly swell estimated to have been about 5 feet in height. The tide was ebbing, high tide having occurred at about 0616 with low tide to occur at 1241. On the bar the surf was cresting at between 8 and 10 feet, occasionally increasing to between 12 and 15 feet.

6. On 25 March 1964, the TWO GEORGE'S departed South Lake Worth Inlet at about 0805, on the first of three usually scheduled daily trips for the fishing grounds offshore. There were three crewmembers and seventeen passengers on board. The outward passage over the bar was made without difficulty.

7. At about 1130, the motorboat TWO GEORGE'S in company with the motorboat SEA MIST, a 60 foot long inspected passenger vessel, and the MART JEAN TOO, a 63 foot long inspected passenger vessel left the fishing area to return to port. The vessels approached the bar with the SEA MIST in the lead followed by the TWO GEORGE'S which was followed by the MART JEAN TOO. The SEA MIST slowed as it approached the bar but did not stop, and when conditions were favorable crossed the bar without difficulty. The engines of the TWO GEORGE'S were slowed while waiting for the SEA MIST to enter. As soon as the SEA MIST was clear of the bar, the operator of the TWO GEORGE'S placed the engines at about 2/3 speed ahead and started in. The operator of the TWO GEORGE'S was apparently unaware of the dangerous situation developing until the engines began to labor, and upon looking astern, he saw a large wave estimated to have been 15 to 18 feet in height, about 25 feet astern. As the wave overtook the vessel, the stern was raised until the propellers and rudder were out of the water. With the vessel out of control, the bow veered to starboard and the boat broached on the face of the wave and capsized.

8. After the TWO GEORGE'S capsized, the MART JEAN TOO crossed the bar and the SEA MIST returned from inside the inlet to attempt to rescue survivors. Smaller vessels soon joined the search and within 45 minutes the last survivor was safely ashore. As a result of this casualty, the lives of four passengers were lost, and a fifth is missing and presumed to be lost.

REMARKS

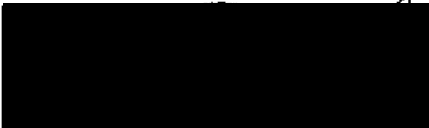
1. Concurring with the Board, it is concluded that this casualty occurred as the result of the TWO GEORGE'S being on or in the vicinity of the bar at the moment when the sea, swell and tide conditions combined to create a wave capable of broaching and capsizing the vessel.

2. Further concurring with the Board's conclusions, it is considered that the placing of the vessel in such position constitutes evidence of inattention to duty on the part of the operator. The confused sea condition on the bar necessitated cautious evaluation of the bar conditions, good seamanship and experienced boat handling. He was aware that there was an easterly swell estimated at about 5 feet in height. He was also aware that an easterly swell could create dangerous surf conditions on the bar. As stated by the Board, "It is inconceivable that a proper scrutiny of the conditions to seaward by the operator while hove to, off the bar, would not have revealed the presence of this swell prior to committing the vessel to the bar."

3. The Board's conclusion that the operation of party and charter boats out of South Lake Worth Inlet on a scheduled basis without regard to the stage of the tide and accompanying current subjects passengers to unnecessary hazards is concurred in. A continuing study of the operation of certificated passenger vessels which regularly use the inlet is being made to determine under what special conditions, if any, they should be permitted to continue operation.

4. Concurring with the Board's recommendations, copies of this report will be forwarded to the South Lake Worth Inlet Commission, the U. S. Army Corps of Engineers and the U. S. Attorney having jurisdiction for consideration and such action as is deemed appropriate.

5. Subject to the foregoing remarks, the record of the Marine Board of Investigation is approved.



E. J. FOLARD
Admiral, U. S. Coast Guard
Commandant

1 September 1964

From: Marine Board of Investigation
To: Commandant (MVI)

Subj: M/B TWO GEORGES, O.N. 269648; capsizing off South Lake Worth Inlet, Florida on 25 March 1964, with loss of life

FINDINGS OF FACT

1. On 25 March 1964 at about 1150 hours, the M/B TWO GEORGES, while returning from an offshore fishing trip, capsized while attempting to cross the bar offshore from the South Lake Worth Inlet, commonly known as Boynton Inlet. As a result of the capsizing four persons died and one disappeared.
2. The TWO GEORGES is a single deck party fishing boat, certificated by the Coast Guard for the carriage of 49 persons. The vessel is described as a cockpit boat. The deck being recessed 36" beneath the cap rail or in effect, giving the deck a 36" bulwark around the entire boat. The TWO GEORGES is 60 feet in length, 16.5 feet in breadth and 2.4 feet in depth, 11 gross and 7 net tons. The hull is wood, the bottom being cross planked with long leaf yellow pine, approximately 2" in thickness, the side longitudinally planked with cedar of approximately 2" thickness and the keel consisting of a single 12" x 12" x 58' timber of Douglar fir. The hull shape is a modified V-bottom known as a Chesapeake Deadrise type boat. The boat is powered by two 6-70 G. M. Diesel engines rated at 225 h.p. each and with a clean bottom, could attain speeds of near 20 mph over a measured mile, however, average cruising speed is approximately 15 mph. The engines are directly controlled from the pilot house which is raised approximately 4½ feet above the deck with windows on all sides of the pilot house allowing the operator to see in most any direction. The owner of the TWO GEORGES was Mr. [REDACTED] of [REDACTED].
3. The TWO GEORGES was last inspected for certification on 11 September 1962, and was re-inspected on 3 October 1963. She was last examined on drydock on 27 September 1963. The foregoing inspections and drydock examination were conducted by the Marine Inspection Office, Miami, Florida. The vessel was found satisfactory in each case and no deficiencies were outstanding at the time of the casualty.
4. The operator of the TWO GEORGES, James Stevens is licensed by the Coast Guard and possessed an ocean operator's license, No. [REDACTED] issue No. 1, issued at Miami, Florida on 5 May 1959 for the Atlantic Ocean and Gulf of Mexico, not more than 75 miles from shores of the U. S. between Cape Hatteras, North Carolina and Flamingo, Florida. In addition, Mr. Stevens possessed an expired motorboat operator's license, No. [REDACTED] for the navigable waters of the U. S., issue No. 2, issued in May of 1955.

5. The following persons were on board and survived:

[REDACTED], Captain

[REDACTED], Mate

[REDACTED] Mate

[REDACTED], Passenger

[REDACTED], Passenger

[REDACTED], Passenger

[REDACTED], Passenger

[REDACTED] Passenger

[REDACTED], Passenger

[REDACTED], Passenger

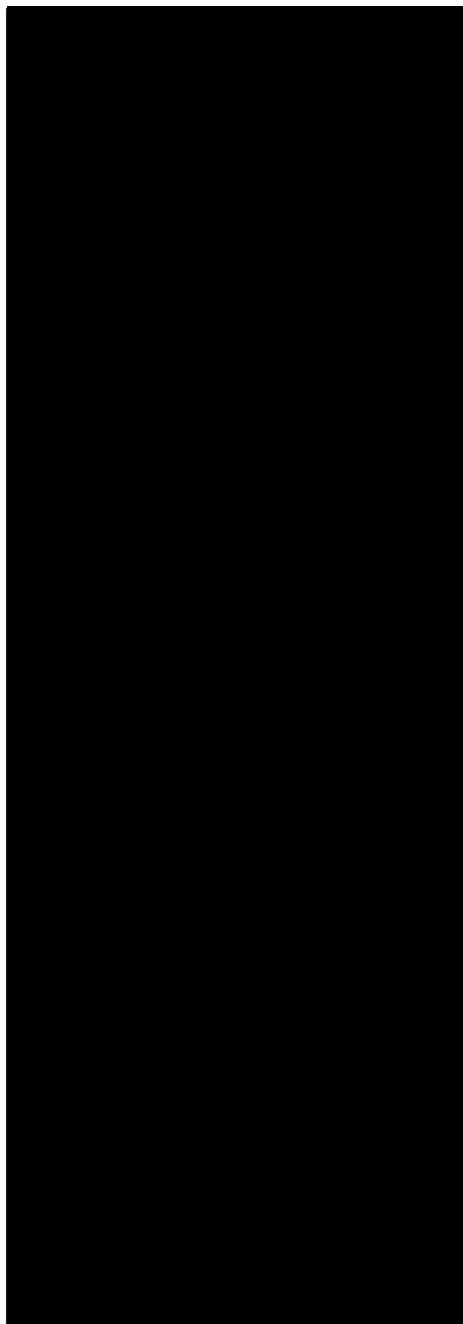
[REDACTED], Passenger

[REDACTED], Passenger

[REDACTED], Passenger

[REDACTED], Passenger

[REDACTED], Passenger



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6. The following persons were passengers on board and are deceased:

Ernest Jefferies, Passenger

Louis Paletta, Passenger

Harry L. Williams, Passenger

Mary Agnes Whitman, Passenger

7. The following person was a passenger on board and is missing:

[REDACTED] Passenger

8. The following person was a passenger on board and was incapacitated for more than 72 hours:

[REDACTED], Passenger

9. Weather at Lake Worth Lifeboat Station on the morning of 25 March 1964 was as follows:

0400
0800
1200

Wind S.E. Force 2
Wind S. Force 1
Wind S. Force 5

10. Weather at West Palm Beach Airport on the morning of the casualty was as follows:

0800
0900
1000
1100
1200

Wind 150°T at 7 mph
Wind 150°T at 17 mph
Wind 140°T at 10 mph
Wind 140°T at 9 mph
Wind 150°T at 18 mph

11. Captain Stevens and Mate [REDACTED] estimated the winds in the South Lake Worth Inlet Area that morning to be east to east-south-east at from 12 to 14 mph.

12. High tide occurred in the South Lake Worth Inlet Area about 0616 EST and low tide at about 1241 EST.

13. Official notice is taken of a discussion of a Hydraulic Model Study of the Inlet, 1964, made by the Engineering and Industrial Experiment Station, College of Engineering, University of Florida, Gainesville, Florida, dated 1 April 1964. The following description of the Inlet is taken from this discussion.

a. South Lake Worth Inlet is a dredged cut through the outside beach between South Lake Worth and the Ocean. The cut was originally made as an outlet for drainage purposes to alleviate the stagnant condition of the water in the lake. The cut is approximately 200 feet wide and narrows to a width of 100 feet where it is crossed by an automobile and foot bridge for Highway 1A. Depth of water in the cut is approximately 5-6 feet. On the ocean side from the bridge outward the cut is bounded by two concrete jetties which extend approximately 300 feet from the bridge. The jetties extend approximately 40 feet out from the beach. On the lake side the cut is bounded by two steel and concrete seawalls. The southern wall extending 350 feet west of the bridge and then south to a marina. The northern wall extends approximately 800 feet west almost to the Intracoastal Waterway.

b. On the outer end of the northern jetty on the ocean side is a sand pumping station. This station is used to pump sand which would normally fill the mouth of the inlet and render it not navigable and defeat its purpose as a drainage outlet. Approximately 800 feet offshore from the jetties is a bar which extends in a general south-southeast - north-northwest direction directly off the Inlet and which curves around running almost perpendicular to the beach just north of the north jetty and runs approximately parallel to the beach south of the south jetty. Depth over the bar is approximately 7 feet, however, the bar is constantly shifting and depth varies somewhat.

14. During the height of the tourist season there are approximately 7 to 9 party fishing boats and 45 to 50 charter boats based in this area. Potentially all of these boats could use the inlet in a single day, some making as many as three round trips per day. Many of these boats are operating on essentially the same schedule. In addition to this traffic load are the numerous private pleasure craft in the area.

15. The U. S. Coast Pilot No. 4, Cape Henry to Key West states, "only small boats with local knowledge use this cut, (South Lake Worth Inlet) and then only at or near slack water. Currents through it have great velocity, and with easterly wind, it is impassable on account of breakers at the entrance". It is noted that the party boats using the inlet pay little or no attention to tides or current conditions but operate strictly on a schedule. In addition the charter boats may be operated on a schedule or when a charter appears to make a trip or wishes to return from a trip and consequently these boats also pay little or no attention to tide or current. Further, it is not likely that visiting pleasure craft pay any attention to tide or current.

16. The party boats generally have three scheduled trips daily. A morning trip at 8:00 A.M. returning at noon, an afternoon trip at 1:00 P.M. returning at 5:00 P.M. and an evening trip at 7:00 P.M. returning at 11:00 P.M. The decision as to whether or not the boat makes a scheduled trip is generally within the Captain's discretion although the decision at times may be a concurrence between the Captain and owner.

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17. On 25 March 1964 at about 0805 hours EST, the M/B TWO GEORGES departed the Two Georges Marina, Boynton Beach, Florida for the fishing grounds offshore and to the south of South Lake Worth Inlet. The trip out through the inlet was routine, the tide had begun to fall and the current was ebbing. Some spray came aboard when the vessel was at the mouth of the inlet and while crossing the bar. The outward passage was considered normal. The bar was described as being sloppy, a term apparently used to describe the bar when it would be uncomfortable but not dangerous. Bar conditions although referred to as being sloppy were still considered to be a little better than average.

18. Conditions outside the bar were described as a little better than average; seas being about 2 to 3 feet in height and the swell about 5 feet in height.

19. On the morning of 25 March 1964, the charter boats out of Boynton Beach fished the same area and departed for the return trip at about the same time. The first of the boats to arrive off the Inlet was the SEA MIST, operated by James Lunsford. The second was the TWO GEORGES and following the TWO GEORGES was the MART JEAN TOO, operated by Harry Lawson.

19. The procedure for crossing the bar and entering the inlet varies, each operator going on his own experience. The following is a description of the procedure in general:

a. The operator will approach the bar area and when about 100 yards from the bar will slow to idling speed. The purpose for slowing is to allow the operator to line up correctly to cross the bar in the best water. Due to the fact that the bar is always shifting the area in which the best water lies is also constantly shifting. In addition the operator while slowed down or, as the case may be, actually hove-to or circling in this area, he will count the swells and ascertain the grouping of the larger swells and the intervals between groups. When the operator has ascertained the interval and grouping and is lined up correctly he will pick one group of large swells and as the last large swell passes, he will start across the bar. Some operators attempt to stay on the back of the last large swell in a group. The interval between the groups of large swells is called a slick and the foregoing procedure is termed coming in on a slick. The length of time spent lining up and looking over the swells varies with bar conditions and in most cases the operator is aware of the sequence of swells before arriving at the bar.

20. On the 25th of March when the SEA MIST arrived at the bar, Captain [REDACTED] slowed as he approached the bar but did not stop and when he was lined up proceeded across the bar without particular attention to the swells. When the SEA MIST had started across the bar, Captain Stevens in the TWO GEORGES had already slowed down and was lining up. Captain Stevens states he looked astern and had determined the sequence of the swells. At about the time the SEA MIST reached the jetties, Captain Stevens had picked his spot and had started in. At this time Captain [REDACTED] in the MART JEAN TOO was slowed down just to seaward of the TWO GEORGES awaiting her passage over the bar. Just before arriving at the bar, Mr. [REDACTED] claims to have sighted a wave

about 60 feet astern of the TWO GEORGES which was overtaking the vessel. Captain Stevens states that he was unaware of the oncoming wave until he noticed the vessel's engines were becoming loaded down and were losing revolutions. On looking astern, Captain Stevens saw a large wave about 25 feet astern of the vessel which he estimated to be about 15 to 18 feet in height. The engines which had been running at about 2/3 throttle were speeded up to full throttle in an attempt to out-run the wave. However, this was not possible. When the wave caught the TWO GEORGES which was headed approximately due west, the stern was raised considerably nearly pitch-poling the vessel at which time she began to broach setting the bow towards the north. The vessel continued to swing towards the north as it was broached on the face of the wave and when nearly broad side to the wave, the vessel capsized.

21. Captain [REDACTED] on the SEA MIST was practically through the inlet at that time when the TWO GEORGES began to broach. Captain [REDACTED] observed the TWO GEORGES begin to broach, but his view was cut off by the bridge before the TWO GEORGES capsized.

22. At about the time the TWO GEORGES started across the bar, Captain [REDACTED] and Mate [REDACTED] on the MART JEAN TOO noticed a large swell between their vessel and the TWO GEORGES. Mate [REDACTED] remarked to Captain [REDACTED] that this was a good size swell and hoped it would not catch Jimmie on the board. [REDACTED] next saw the stern of the TWO GEORGES protruding above the wave. It was not until the wave had passed the TWO GEORGES that it was realized she had capsized.

23. Only [REDACTED] on the MART JEAN TOO and Mr. [REDACTED] claim to have seen this wave at a distance greater than 25 feet astern of the TWO GEORGES. Most witnesses on the vessel were not aware of any danger until the boat broached and they were thrown violently about and submerged in water. Witnesses on shore were not aware of the size of the swell which capsized the vessel until it had commenced to broach.

24. The Captain prior to making his run across the bar had not issued any orders to his mates concerning the readying of the buoyant apparatus for launching, the seating of passengers or the placing of life preservers on the passengers. The life preservers were stored in racks beneath the canopy and the buoyant apparatus were stowed in racks on top of the canopy. Although the canopy disintegrated on striking the water and the buoyant apparatus and most of the life preservers floated free, most of the passengers were not able to utilize them. There is evidence that two life preservers and one ring buoy actually fell into the hands of persons who were on board. The wheelhouse remained intact trapping the Captain and Mate [REDACTED] inside, however, it subsequently broke free of the hull and both persons were able to surface and survive. There is evidence that three persons after being thrown into the water came up beneath the overturned boat, however, each of these persons was able to swim free and surface.

25. Two of the persons who came up beneath the boat were on the bow at the time of the capsizing.

26. The TWO GEORGES after capsizing was lying bottom up and parallel to the shore and swell with the bow to the north.

27. After the capsizing, the MART JEAN TOO immediately crossed the bar and the SEA MIST returned from inside the inlet to attempt to rescue survivors. These boats were soon joined by several of the smaller charter boats which were moored inside the inlet. The MART JEAN TOO and SEA MIST finding it difficult to maneuver in the restricted area between the bar and the beach, soon withdrew and left the rescue operation to the smaller boats. The smaller boats were hampered by a strong northerly setting current which carried the victims into shallow water. Despite these difficulties the boats were able to retrieve several persons from the water and assisted others by throwing lifesaving devices into the water. It was not until approximately 45 minutes after the accident that the last survivor was safely ashore.

28. On the afternoon of 25 March 1964 a line with an anchor and marking buoy was attached to the bow of the TWO GEORGES which still remained afloat in order to prevent the vessel from working inshore. Later another line was placed aboard by the M/B MART JEAN TOO which took a strain and made a large circle towards the west around towards the south, thence east and north. The TWO GEORGES which was still facing north rolled over and righted herself, when the MART JEAN TOO had nearly completed the circle. During this operation the vessel's pulpit was pulled adrift by the tow line. The MART JEAN TOO then went ahead and brought the TWO GEORGES to the surface at which time the M/B CANDIE KID placed a line on the MART JEAN TOO and commenced a tandem tow towards Lake Worth Inlet.

29. Shortly after rounding the sea buoy at Lake Worth Inlet the tow line to the TWO GEORGES parted and the vessel again sank to the bottom in approximately 40 feet of water. On the following day, 26 March 1964, the TWO GEORGES was again raised and towed to a boat yard in Palm Beach where an unsuccessful search was made for the missing person, Jerry Saap.

30. Subsequent examination of the TWO GEORGES on drydock revealed that all the superstructure had been carried away. The side frames on the starboard side had been split in way of the chine and one plank in the sheer and the next below sheer on the port side had been fractured. The port propeller shaft and rudder were slightly bent. There was no way of telling whether the foregoing damage resulted from the original accident or the sinking off Lake Worth Inlet. Inasmuch as the pulpit was broken off during the salvage operations, it is not known whether it had been weakened by striking the water or bottom. However, there were no score marks on the vessel's bow to indicate the vessel had pitch-poled by striking bottom.

31. The beaches were searched the day following the accident and various items had washed up on the beach and were turned over to the Palm Beach County Sheriff Department. However, Mr. [REDACTED] remains missing without trace.

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32. Captain Stevens, when questioned concerning his opinion of the bar and inlet, stated he did not consider either to be dangerous. He further indicated that the bar was a blessing in that the inlet would be much more difficult to traverse if the incoming swells were unchecked.

33. [REDACTED] stated he did not expect an accident of this nature, however, he did expect that someday a boat might strike one of the jetties.

34. At the conclusion of the public inquiry, the Board recommended to the Commander, 7th Coast Guard District that additional investigation be made with a view toward initiating proceedings against Captain James T. Stevens under R.S. 4450. Commander, 7th Coast Guard District concurred and as a result Captain Stevens was charged with inattention to duty and a hearing has been held, however, this hearing has not as yet been concluded.

CONCLUSIONS

1. It is concluded that the M/B TWO GEORGES broached and capsized while attempting to cross the bar offshore from the South Lake Worth Inlet on 25 March 1964.
2. The capsizing resulted in the death of four passengers and the disappearance and presumed death of [REDACTED] also a passenger.
3. The broaching and capsizing was the result of the vessel being on or in the immediate vicinity of the bar when it was overtaken by a swell of such size and traveling at such speed that efforts to avoid broaching and/or capsizing of a vessel of such size as to be able to traverse this bar would be futile and could only result in catastrophe.
4. It is further concluded that the placing of the vessel in such a position is directly attributable to inattention to duty on the part of the operator, Mr. James Stevens, who had apparently been lulled into a state of complacency by the routineness of crossing this bar on an average day, insofar as wind and sea were concerned and consequently failed to properly scrutinize the conditions as to the incoming northeast swell to seaward prior to committing his vessel to the passage over the bar.
5. The practice of laying to in good water off the bar where the vessel is not materially affected by the swell is good seamanship and had the swell which capsized the M/B TWO GEORGES been sighted while in such position, the operator could have remained in this position and rode out the swell with considerably less chance of broaching or capsizing. In considering the size of the swell which capsized the vessel, it is inconceivable that a proper scrutiny of the conditions to seaward by the operator while hove to, off the bar, would not have revealed the presence of this swell prior to committing the vessel to the bar. The complacency of the master is considered to constitute inattention to duty on his part.
6. The operation of party and charter boats in the South Lake Worth Inlet without regard to the stage of tide and accompanying current, but rather on a schedule or on charterers demands undoubtedly subjects passengers to unnecessary hazards.
7. On the trip on which the casualty occurred, the M/B TWO GEORGES is considered to have been properly manned and equipped in a sound stable and seaworthy condition.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. It is recommended that the U. S. Attorney be forwarded a copy of this report for such action as he may deem appropriate.
2. It is recommended that a copy of this report be forwarded to the South Lake Worth Inlet Commission for their perusal and guidance in any future action that they may take under consideration concerning the Inlet.
3. It is recommended that a copy of this report be forwarded to the U. S. Army Corps of Engineers for their perusal and guidance in any future action that they may take under consideration in connection with improvement of the Inlet.
4. It is recommended that serious consideration be given by local authority to restricting the use of the Inlet by passenger carrying vessels to those periods at or near slack water as recommended by the U. S. Coast Pilot No. [REDACTED] and then only under conditions of sea and swell which render the bar and inlet most favorable.
5. It is recommended that the case be closed by the forwarding of the report together with exhibits and enclosures to Headquarters.

[REDACTED]
V. G. NIEBERGALL
Captain, USCG
Chairman, Marine Board

[REDACTED]
W. H. ST. GEORGE
Commander, USCG
Member, Marine Board

[REDACTED]
Lieutenant, USCG
Member and Recorder, Marine Board