

UNITED STATES COAST GUARD

Address Reply to:
COMMANDANT
U.S. COAST GUARD
WASHINGTON 25, D. C.

31 March, 1950
FILE:
MIV(CG-MIN-GHS-2/4
WOOD DUCK II a-7)

From: Chief, Merchant Vessel Inspection Division
To: Commandant
Via: Chief, Office of Merchant Marine Safety

Subj: Marine Board of Investigation; Explosion and fire Motorboat
WOOD DUCK II on 9 January, 1950 resulting in loss of life

1. Pursuant to the provisions of Title 46 C.F.R. Part 136, the record of the Marine Board convened to investigate subject casualty, together with the Findings of Fact, Opinion and Recommendation, has been reviewed and is forwarded herewith.

2. The motorboat WOOD DUCK II, 14 gross tons, 36' 7" in length, 12' 3" in beam, built in 1944, powered by two gasoline engines, was employed in the so-called charter fishing business in the Miami area. On the morning of 9 January, 1950, the WOOD DUCK II took on gasoline fuel during which there was a considerable spillage and apparently a leakage from an emergency gasoline tank. This vessel departed from Key Largo, Florida at approximately 1120 hours and after proceeding $1\frac{1}{2}$ miles to sea, exploded, drifted to shore and burned to the water's edge. The weather conditions at the time of this casualty were clear sky, choppy sea with an Easterly wind at 35 miles per hour.

3. As a result of this casualty the following person lost his life.

Charles K. Green, Owner and Master

4. The Board made the following Findings of Fact:

"(1) The charter fishing boat WOOD DUCK II, official number 246461, exploded, burned, and sank on 9 January, 1950, which casualty resulted in the death of Mr. Charles K. Green, master and owner.

(2) The WOOD DUCK II, was a documented charter fishing boat of 14 gross tons, 10 net tons, 36' 7" in length, 12' 3" beam, 4' 5" draft, built in 1944 in Miami, Florida, gasoline propelled, twin screws, owned and operated by Mr. Charles K. Green, 2945 S.W. Street, Miami, Florida.

(3) The weather at the time of the casualty was: Sky clear, sea choppy, Easterly wind at 35 mph, visibility good.

(4) The WOOD DUCK II, departed Miami, Florida, on 6 January, 1950, with Mr. Green as Master, Mr. [redacted] mate, Mrs. [redacted] of the master, and Mr. & Mrs. [redacted].

(5) On the evening of 6 January, 1950, the party arrived at Ocean Reef Club, Key Largo, Florida, where they obtained rooms. On the morning of 7 January, the party left Ocean Reef Club to go deep sea fishing, but because of rough water, returned to the club. On 8 January, the party did not go out because of the weather. On the morning of 9 January, the motors were started and the WOOD DUCK II proceeded approximately 100 yards to the fuel pumps for refueling. The main tanks, which were of standard make and located on the stern, were filled. These tanks were properly equipped with vent pipes and were filled through a fill line on the outwalk. The emergency tank, which was of 30 gallon capacity, was also filled. This tank was a rectangular tank, of U.S. standard gauge number 20 or .037" thick metal, 12" X 14" X 32 1/4" with single locked joints on each side of both the top and bottom of the tank. In these locked joints there were two 1/8" rivets, and it is believed these joints had apparently been soldered, but owing to the extreme heat when the vessel burned, no trace of solder was found on any of the joints. The top of the tank, in one corner, had a cast iron fitting riveted to the tank with a 2" pipe thread hole for filling purposes. On the bottom there was a similar type fitting 1/2" in diameter, which was undoubtedly for a feed line. There was also a 1/2" hole in the top for a vent pipe. This tank was located in the forward part of the cabin, port side, directly over an electric bilge pump, and a short distance forward of the engine. This tank had not been used between August, 1949, and the time it was filled on the morning of the 9th. There was a valve in the feed line on the bottom of the tank according to the testimony of Mr. [redacted], which was not checked to see if it was open or closed. After the vessel refueled, Mr. & Mrs. [redacted] decided to return to Miami by automobile. The vessel departed Ocean Reef Club, at approximately 11:20 a.m., with the following persons on board: Mr. & Mrs. [redacted] and Mr. [redacted]. The vessel proceeded to sea, and after passing the east end of the jetty, well clear thereof, it turned north towards Miami. All three persons on board were on the flying bridge, where spray was being taken from the approximate 9' waves. Due to rough weather, Mr. [redacted] went below in the cabin where he laid down on the seat over the port engine. A short time afterwards an explosion occurred, which blew Mr. [redacted] partly through the port window. This explosion was, according to Mrs. [redacted] testimony, apparently near or slightly in front of the port engine, as the port seat over the engine was blown up in the middle and she further stated that she could look down through same into the bilge and see the flames. An attempt was made to reach the fire extinguishers which was unsuccessful. All of the life preservers were stowed below in the bow. In

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view of the fact it was feared the tanks would explode, the party abandoned the vessel; Mr. [redacted] leaving first, followed by Mrs. [redacted] and later by Mr. Green, none of them wearing life preservers. Mrs. [redacted] and Mr. [redacted] were rescued after approximately 30 minutes in the water, and Mr. Green a short while afterwards, floating head downwards. The party was taken ashore with artificial resuscitation being given Mr. Green enroute, with no success. A doctor was called, who upon arrival pronounced Mr. Green dead as a result of drowning.

(3) The vessel drifted in to shore where it burned to the water's edge, and was a total loss. The damage was estimated at \$20,000.00. Mrs. Green and Mr. Albury suffered no permanent injuries."

5. The Board expressed the following Opinion:

"It is the opinion of the board this casualty was caused by a leak in the emergency tank creating gasoline fumes in the bilge, which were ignited by a spark from the electrical bilge pump or the port motor."

6. The Board made the following Recommendation:

"It is recommended that no further action be taken in this case other than publication in the "Proceedings in the Merchant Marine Council."

REMARKS

7. The Findings of Fact and opinion of the Board should have included information as to whether the subject vessel was in conformance with the applicable safety requirements of the Act of April 25, 1940 and the regulations thereunder. Precise information so far as ascertainable should have been included in the record with respect to the relationship of the adequacy or inadequacy of ventilation requirements as specified in 46 C.F.R. 26.5-1 to the probable cause of the explosion. Similar information should have been submitted as to whether or not noncompliance with 46 C.F.R. 26.2-2 requiring life saving devices to be placed in a readily accessible location, caused or contributed to the loss of life of the master of the vessel. In view of the inaccessible location of the life saving devices on the subject vessel, vessels of similar type, engaged in the recreation sport fishing trade in the carriage of passengers for hire, should be checked to determine that all life saving and fire fighting devices are so placed as to be readily accessible in conformance with the regulations contained in 46 C.F.R. Subchapter C.

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8. Due to the lack of precisely detailed facts concerning the cause of the subject casualty, particularly in relation to applicable safety regulations, it is not deemed that sufficient information is contained in the record of subject casualty to warrant its publication in the Proceedings of the Merchant Marine Council as recommended by the Board.

9. Subject to the foregoing remarks, it is recommended that the report of the Marine Board of Investigation be approved.

/s/ Edw. C. Cleave

EDW. C. CLEAVE

17 April, 1950
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From: Chief, Office of Merchant Marine Safety
To: Commandant

Forwarded, recommending approval.

/s/ H. C. SHEPHEARD
H. C. SHEPHEARD

APPROVED. 18 April 1950

/s/ MERLIN O'NEILL
MERLIN O'NEILL
Vice Admiral, U.S. Coast Guard
Commandant