Log M-323A

National Transportation Safety Board

Washington, D.C. 20594

Safety Recommendation

Date: November 20, 1986
In reply refer to: M-86-119

Admiral Paul A. Yost
Commandant
U.S. Coast Guard
Washington, D.C. 20593

On October 28, 1985 about 1615, the U.S. lift boat A.M. HOWARD departed Hopedale, Louisiana, with a master and three industrial persons aboard, and entered the Mississippi River Gulf Outlet Canal en route to Breton Sound. The master stated that the winds were 15 to 25 mph, the seas were 3 to 4 feet in height and intermittent rain squalls were passing through the area. Hurricane Juan was located in the Gulf of Mexico west of the Mississippi River. Several hours later engine problems caused the master to shut down the starboard engine. Shortly thereafter, the master was told that Hurricane Juan was moving eastward and he decided to return to Hopedale. While turning the lift boat in the canal, it grounded on the southwest side near Light No. 61. The master backed the vessel off the ground and proceeded inbound. Several hours later the vessel rolled to starboard and sank. The master exited the pilothouse as the vessel sank and was rescued by a passing towboat. The three industrial persons, located in the deckhouse, went down with the vessel and drowned. 1/

The master of the A.M. HOWARD did not appreciate the seriousness of the grounding nor the danger it posed to the vessel. He failed to monitor or to have the engineer monitor the void at frequent intervals, as safe operating procedures would dictate, for signs of flooding which would have led to detection of the flooding. He had operated the A.M. HOWARD for about 63 days and he did not have formal classroom training in lift boat operations, navigation, and stability. The vessel's owner provided on-the-job training for crewmembers prior to assigning them to operate the vessels; however, this was not supplemented with operation manuals on all information necessary for the safe operation of the vessel. The master of the A.M. HOWARD had not been trained in and did not know about many aspects of the safe operation of the vessel. Further, an engineer with no formal training in vessel operation or stability loaded the deck cargo. It was the master's usual policy to follow the directions of the engineer or contractor, consequently he allowed them to determine when the vessel should operate. The master also depended on his supervisor shoreside to aid him in deciding if the vessel could operate safely and a mechanic shoreside to assist in the operation of the engines. The master did not make many decisions for which he was responsible. He relied on persons not trained in vessel operations, persons not familiar with the vessel's limitations and characteristics, and persons not on or near the vessel to make decisions as to the safe loading and/or operation of the lift boat. Although the master was responsible for the safety of the industrial personnel aboard, he was not able to make proper decisions

1/ For more detailed information, read Accident/Incident Summary Report--"Sinking of the U. S. Lift Boat A.M. HOWARD in the Mississippi River Gulf Outlet Canal, about 1/4 nmi east-southeast of Light No. 87 on October 28-29, 1985" (NTSB/MAR-86/02/SUM).

pertinent to the safe operation of the vessel because he was not given adequate training and directives. The master had informed the industrial personnel of the location of the life preservers, however an abandon ship drill or more extensive safety orientation would have ensured that they knew the location of and how to properly use all safety equipment aboard the lift boat. The Safety Board believes that owners of lift boats should provide their masters with formal training and detailed operation manuals which include information on vessel loading procedures and deck load restrictions, jacking procedures, inspections of unmanned engine spaces, the weather conditions under which the vessel can safely operate, and the importance of briefing the industrial persons aboard on the vessel's safety equipment.

The master of the A.M. HOWARD lacked basic knowledge required for the safe operation of the vessel and had received no formal training in vessel navigation or stability. A licensing requirement which includes testing the candidate's knowledge of vessel operations and safety, such as stability, navigation, and emergency procedures would ensure the initial attainment of a minimum level of knowledge for operators of these vessels. The Safety Board believes that the establishment of minimum qualifications to be met by a licensing requirement would lead to safer operation of lift boats.

As a result of its investigation of the capsizing of the Lift Boat AMAY S, 2/ the Safety Board on October 1, 1985, recommended that the U.S. Coast Guard:

M-85-113

> Seek legislative authority to license the persons-in-charge of miscellaneous vessels, such as lift boats, which are engaged in outer continental shelf activities and which are not currently required by existing legislation to be operated by a licensed officer or operator.

In response to Safety Recommendation M-85-113, on May 7, 1986 the Coast Guard stated:

> The intent of the above recommendation is concurred with. The Outer Continental Shelf Lands Act provides authority for establishing safety standards as recommended. A comprehensive study of the operations and safety records of offshore service vessels, including lift boats, has been initiated under a current rulemaking effort, CGD84-098 (Revision of the Regulations on Outer Continental Shelf Activities). This study will determine whether there is a need to: (1) develop stability criteria, (2) require operating manuals, and (3) upgrade the requirements for lifesaving equipment of these vessels, and, if so, whether they can be satisfactorily addressed under the authority of the Outer Continental Shelf Lands Act Amendments of 1978 or, in a more comprehensive manner under different statutory authority. The study will also be used to determine the licensing and manning requirements necessary for such vessels and the need for further legislative action, if authority is not currently available under existing law.

2/ Marine Accident Report--"Capsizing of the U.S. Self-Propelled Lift Boat AMAY S while under tow of the U.S. Coast Guard Cutter POINT HOPE, Gulf of Mexico, October 17, 1984" (NTSB/MAR-85/10).

On July 30, 1986, the Safety Board stated:

> The Safety Board is pleased that the Coast Guard will include in its current rulemaking effort, CGD 84-098, a study which will determine the need for implementing the requirements of Safety Recommendations M-85-112 through -115. These recommendations will be held in a category of "Open--Acceptable Action" pending the results of this regulatory project.

A review of data on lift boat casualties from the Coast Guard's file and past Safety Board reports indicate that 42 accidents involving 35 different lift boats have occurred from 1978 to November 1985. The lift boats ranged in size from 50 to 300 feet in length and from 35 to about 3,000 gross tons. Fifty percent of the 12 lives lost in these accidents were losses on vessels not operating on the Outer Continental Shelf. 3/ Thirty-eight percent of the 37 casualties of known locations occurred in waters other than on the Outer Continental Shelf. Consequently, the Safety Board believes that as the Coast Guard continues its study of lift boat casualties, it will find that many of these accidents and losses have occurred in waters other than on the Outer Continental Shelf, and that for the safety of all persons aboard lift boats, there is a need to establish licensing requirements for the persons-in-charge of all lift boats.

Therefore, the National Transportation Safety Board recommends that the U.S. Coast Guard:

> Require that lift boats, whether operating on the Outer Continental Shelf or elsewhere, be operated by a licensed officer or operator. (Class II, Priority Action) (M-86-119)

Also as a result of its investigation, the Safety Board issued Safety Recommendations M-86-116 through -118 to Cardinal Wireline Specialists, Inc., and M-86-120 and -121 to the Offshore Marine Service Association.

By: Jim Burnett
Chairman

3/ Submerged land areas beyond 3 geographical miles (or 9 miles in the cases of Florida and Texas) from the coasts of the United States, which are subject to the jurisdiction of the Federal government. Federal jurisdiction extends to a minimum of 200 nmi from the coastlines.