

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD
WASHINGTON, D.C.

AI 4

277-153

ISSUED: December 31, 1981

Forwarded to:
Admiral John B. Hayes
Commandant
U.S. Coast Guard
Washington, D.C. 20593

SAFETY RECOMMENDATION(S)

M-81-91

On November 25, 1980, a 22-foot U.S. sailboat, the MR. B, grounded near Punta Chivata, Mexico, in the Golfo de California. The MR. B was one of five boats participating in a juvenile delinquent rehabilitation program sponsored by Vision Quest National, Limited of Tucson, Arizona. Three of the nine persons aboard the boat died; the other six are missing and presumed dead. The estimated loss of the boat was \$7,000. ^{1/}

About 0825 on November 26, 1980, the MR. B was located from the air by the expedition leader in position 27°05.7'N, 111°59.8'W, about 1 mile northwest of Punta Chivata, Baja California Sur, Mexico. At 1530, the U.S. Consular Agent in Mulege, Mexico, notified the U.S. Coast Guard (USCG) Rescue Coordination Center (RCC) in San Diego, California. The actual USCG search effort was handled by the RCC in Long Beach, California. About 0030 on November 27, RCC Long Beach requested a HH-3F helicopter from USCG Air Station San Diego and a C-130 aircraft from USCG Air Station Sacramento. At 0140, the USCG requested the U.S. Embassy in Mexico City, Mexico, to obtain permission from Mexican authorities to send USCG aircraft into Mexico. At 0630, Mexican authorities granted approval for the helicopter to fly into Mexico but not the C-130 aircraft. At 1833, the C-130 aircraft was granted approval to enter Mexican airspace. The helicopter got underway at 1001 for Yuma, Arizona, to refuel before heading for Hermosillo, Mexico. It arrived in Hermosillo at 1744. The C-130 got underway at 0510 on November 28 and arrived on scene at 0810. The C-130 searched for 6.6 hours and then departed for San Diego at 1445. The helicopter took off from Hermosillo at 0947, but because of a mechanical problem, never conducted any searches and returned to Hermosillo. Because of the limited availability of USCG aircraft, no further searches were conducted. A C-130 aircraft delivered repair parts to the helicopter in Hermosillo on December 1 but returned immediately to the United States without conducting an air search for the MR. B.

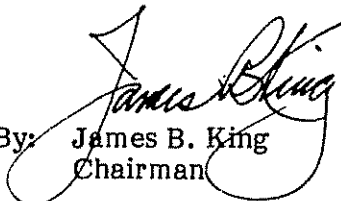
^{1/} For more detailed information, read Marine Accident Report--"Grounding of U.S. Sailboat MR. B, near Punta Chivata, Mexico, November 25, 1980" (NTSB-MAR-81-13).

The Safety Board believes that Vision Quest personnel made every reasonable effort to locate the MR. B once they started searching. Local Mexican authorities and the Mexican Navy provided support in searching for survivors. However, the clearance measures which caused the delay the USCG experienced in getting permission from Mexican authorities to send search aircraft into Mexican territory needs improvement. The delay resulted in the USCG search beginning on November 28 instead of November 27. When the lives of U.S. citizens are at stake and time is of the essence, the USCG through the U.S. State Department should establish a permanent agreement with Mexican authorities to permit USCG search and rescue aircraft to enter Mexican territory with a minimum delay.

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

Through the U.S. State Department, improve its working relationship with Mexican authorities to permit the timely entry of Coast Guard rescue aircraft into Mexican territory when a U.S. boating accident occurs in Mexican waters and the lives of U.S. citizens are at stake.
(Class II, Priority Action) (M-81-91)

KING, Chairman, DRIVER, Vice Chairman, and GOLDMAN and BURSLEY, Members, concurred in this recommendation. McADAMS, Member, did not participate.


By: James B. King
Chairman