



National Transportation Safety Board

Washington, D.C. 20594

Marine Accident Brief

Accident No.: DCA-04-MM-020

Vessel: U.S. Passenger Vessel *LeConte*, O.N. 555601, IMO No. 7318925, registered length 217.5 feet, overall length 235 feet, 328 gross tons (domestic), 3,124 tons (International Tonnage Convention [ITC]), inspected, built in 1973

Accident Type: Grounding

Location: Cozian Reef, about 30 miles north of Sitka, Alaska (latitude 57°34' N, longitude 135°26.05' E)

Date: May 10, 2004

Time: 0955 local

Owner: State of Alaska

Property Damage: \$3 million

Injuries: Passengers 1

Complement: Crew 23
Passengers 8
Vehicles 15

Accident Description

The Alaska Marine Highway System ferry *LeConte* was en route from Angoon to Sitka, Alaska, when it ran aground on Cozian Reef, a well-marked navigation hazard about 30 miles north of Sitka, Alaska (see figure). The navigation watch was attempting to navigate an alternative route that was more scenic. The weather was good and visibility was clear.

The normal planned route would have taken the vessel outside of Otstoia, Elovoi, and Krugloi islands and about 0.5 mile north of the grounding site on Cozian Reef. As the vessel approached its originally planned turn, it was proceeding on a north-northwesterly course conforming to the general axis of the section of Peril Strait lying approximately 0.75 nautical mile northeast of Duffield Peninsula, on the north corner of Baranof Island. A short time before arriving at the position of the turn, the master arrived on the bridge and discussed altering the voyage plan to pass inside Otstoia Island. About the time the master decided on this routing change, a tow, consisting of the tug *Western Mariner* towing a freight barge, was observed proceeding easterly out of Deadman Reach and then making a right course change that resulted in a meeting situation with the *LeConte*.

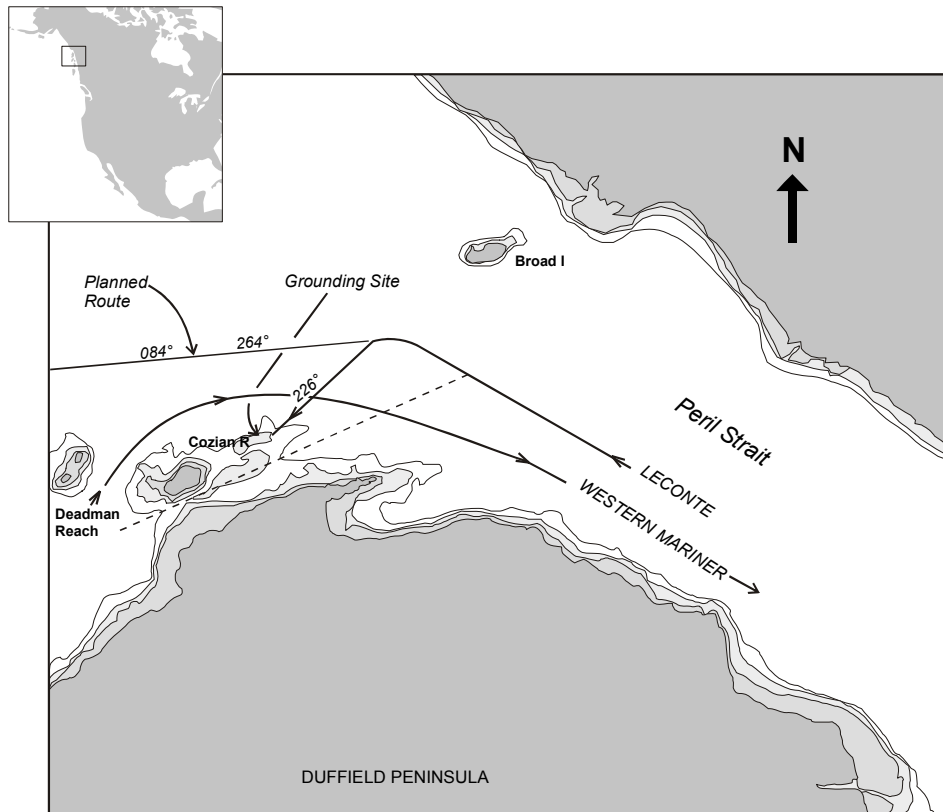


Figure. Accident site showing routes of *LeConte* and *Western Mariner*. Dashed line duplicates solid line (labeled 245) found on *LeConte* navigation chart during investigation. Line could be acceptable routing inside Cozian Reef and Otstoa Island.

The captain of the *Western Mariner* stated that no passing signals were exchanged between his vessel and the *LeConte* because it was a normal meeting with adequate room for both vessels. The *Western Mariner* captain estimated that his track passed about 0.2 mile from the Cozian Reef daymark. The captain estimated that when the two vessels met, the *LeConte* was almost abeam of Broad Island. He stated that after the *LeConte* passed by, he observed the *LeConte* execute a left turn and pass astern of his tow, and he assumed that the *LeConte* was taking the reverse of the same path that he had followed through Deadman Reach.

After clearing the *Western Mariner* tow, the chief mate turned the *LeConte* to a course of 226°. Neither the chief mate nor the master recognized that the 226° course headed the vessel to the right of the daymark for Cozian Reef and on a course toward the reef. The vessel, steering a course of 226° at about 15.5 knots, grounded on Cozian Reef about 0955. The captain of the *Western Mariner* did not observe the grounding.

Vessel Damage. The *LeConte* experienced extensive hull damage, consisting of a 40-foot-long by 1-foot-wide tear in the hull on each side of the keel, which resulted in serious flooding. Flooding occurred in the bowthruster compartment, forward port and starboard voids, salt water tank, MSD¹ space bilge, and No. 5 void. The vessel listed to port 8° and remained grounded until vehicles and fuel were removed so that it could be refloated.

Human Factors. The 96-hour work/rest history for the chief mate disclosed that he had a sleep deficit because of work performed off watch, while standing a 6-hour watch regimen. The master's 96-hour work/rest history indicated that he had obtained more rest than the chief mate, but that his rest periods were numerous and brief, amounting to about 4-hour periods because of the need to be on the bridge during arrivals and departures of the vessel.

Passenger Injury. One passenger suffered bruises during the lowering of the starboard lifeboat. The side of the lifeboat briefly got caught on the sponson because of the list. Continued lowering of the lifeboat caused it to heel over until the amount of heel freed the side of the lifeboat. As the lifeboat suddenly righted itself, some passengers were thrown about inside the lifeboat.

The passengers were transferred from the lifeboats to vessels that responded to the *LeConte*'s Mayday call and taken ashore.

Probable Cause

The National Transportation Safety Board determines that the probable cause of the grounding of the *LeConte* was the failure of the master and the chief mate, who was conning the vessel, to recognize that the course selected by the chief mate would cause the vessel to pass on the wrong side of the navigation daymark for Cozian Reef and to pass over the reef. Contributing to the loss of awareness of the navigation situation was the fatigue of the conning officer, the chief mate, who had a significant sleep deficit because of work accomplished off watch in addition to standing a 6-hour watch routine.

Adopted: July 28, 2005

¹ Marine sanitary device, an onboard sewage treatment system.