



National Transportation Safety Board

Washington, D.C. 20594

MARINE ACCIDENT BRIEF REPORT

Accident Number: DCA-98-MM-029
Vessel: U.S. Fishing Vessel *Evanick*, O.N. 956903, 50 feet long, 36 gross tons, built in 1990 at Seattle, Washington, of fiber-reinforced plastic, uninspected
Owner: Evanick Corporation
Operator: Carl Van Valkenberg
Accident Type: Capsizing
Location: 130 nautical miles southwest of Kodiak, Alaska, in the Shelikof Strait, 56-54N Latitude, 156-06W Longitude
Date: April 25, 1998
Time: Between 0730 and 1128 local (Alaska daylight time)
Property Damage: \$250,000
Injuries: Four fatalities
Complement: Four

Description of the Accident

Between 0700 and 1128¹ on April 25, 1998, the fishing vessel *Evanick*, with four crewmembers, capsized in the Shelikof Strait while en route to fishing grounds near Togiak, Alaska. About 1335, U.S. Coast Guard search and rescue aircraft, responding to a distress signal from the vessel, located the *Evanick* floating in a capsized condition. There were no signs of the crew. In subsequent search operations spanning 2 days, no crewmember of the *Evanick* was found.

The *Evanick*, a purse seiner² fishing vessel, had undergone maintenance and repairs during a drydock period in early March 1998 in Seattle, Washington. Later that month, the vessel had received a Coast Guard dockside safety examination in Kodiak, Alaska. At the time of this examination, inspectors from Marine Safety Detachment (MSD) Kodiak and a private marine surveying firm reported that the vessel was in good condition and was extremely well maintained. The *Evanick* master, an experienced fisherman, had developed a reputation in the local marine community as a competent master.

¹ All times in this report are Alaska daylight time, based on a 24-hour clock.

² Purse seiners are typically 55 to 58 feet long and have a large net, usually piled on the stern; a large seine skiff, either towed or pulled up on the stern; and a power block, which is a hydraulically powered pulley, usually located on the end of the boom, but sometimes lowered to the deck for traveling.

On April 24, 1998, in preparation for the 650-mile voyage to the herring fishing grounds near Togiak, the *Evanick's* 17-foot-long, 5,000-pound skiff, which was used for handling the fishing nets, was stowed on the vessel's after deck. This stowage configuration raised the vessel's center of gravity, reducing its stability.

The *Evanick* departed Kodiak about 1400 in the company of another fishing vessel, the *Captain Kidd*, which was also bound for Togiak. The *Captain Kidd* had a slightly different course and speed, and it separated from the *Evanick* during the night. The operator of the *Captain Kidd* maintained occasional radio contact with the *Evanick* until about 0700 on April 25. During the 0700 radio communication, the *Evanick* did not report any problems.

The *Evanick* and the *Captain Kidd* were on a southwesterly course, and the wind and sea were on their stern quarters. The master of the *Captain Kidd* stated that during the morning of April 25, he became concerned about the poor weather conditions and believed that the following seas being experienced were especially hazardous. At 0910 on April 25, the National Weather Service issued a gale warning for the area. According to the National Weather Service, seas at the time of the accident were 12 to 16 feet, winds were south at 30 knots, and the water temperature was 39° F.

At 1128 on April 25, the international COSPAS-SARSAT system³ relayed an emergency position indicating radio beacon (EPIRB) distress signal from the *Evanick* to the Coast Guard Rescue Coordination Center, Juneau, Alaska. At 1215 the Coast Guard dispatched two aircraft and the buoy tender *Firebush* to the indicated location. In response to the Coast Guard's urgent marine broadcast, the *Captain Kidd* and several other fishing vessels proceeded to the scene to assist in search and rescue efforts.

Coast Guard aircraft from Kodiak, a distance of about 130 miles from the scene, arrived at the site of the distress signal within 2 hours and observed the *Evanick* and its skiff floating in a capsized condition, but saw no sign of the *Evanick's* crew. With the assistance of responding fishing vessels, the Coast Guard conducted a search of the surrounding area into the night with negative results.

At first light on April 26, the Coast Guard aircraft resumed the search for survivors. Commercial divers transported by Coast Guard helicopters to the scene checked the interior of the overturned vessel. They did not find any *Evanick* crewmembers; they did find the crewmembers' four immersion suits⁴ still packaged in bags in a locker on the bridge. While they determined that the vessel's hull and superstructure were undamaged, they observed that the vessel's aft starboard handrail was damaged where the skiff had been secured. The divers tested the vessel's propeller and determined that it could be turned over easily by hand

³ COSPAS-SARSAT is an international satellite-based search and rescue system established by the United States, Russia, Canada, and France to locate emergency radio beacons transmitting on frequencies 121.5, 243, and 406 MHz.

⁴ Immersion suits are insulated, buoyant flotation devices that cover the wearer's entire body. They are designed to prevent shock upon entering cold water and to lessen the effect of hypothermia.

Finding no sign of survivors, the Coast Guard terminated the search and rescue operations at sunset. Because the floating *Evanick* constituted a hazard to navigation, it was purposely sunk by the Coast Guard.

Probable Cause

The National Transportation Safety Board determines that the probable cause of the capsizing of the *Evanick* was the fishing vessel's less-than-adequate stability for the sea conditions. Contributing to the loss of life was the probable suddenness of the capsizing, which did not afford the crew time to don their immersion suits before they entered the water.

Adopted: December 15, 1998