

U S COAST GUARD
HDQTRS TELECOMMUNICATIONS

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COMDT COGARD WASHING

(UNIT TOTAL: 013)

ORIGIN: G-KSE (01) G-KSE-4 (01) G-OCU (01) G-NSR (01) G-NIO (01)

G-ENE (05) G-OLE (01) G-K (01) SUPR (01)

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(TOTAL COPIES: 013)

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SECTION 01 OF 02

SUBJ: FINAL ACTION MESSAGE ON USCGC THETIS (WMEC 910) CLASS A MISHAP INVOLVING THE CAPSIZING OF A HAITIAN SAILING VESSEL

bl

1. SYNOPSIS. AT ABOUT 0930 (LCL) ON 28 JAN 90, THE CGC THETIS INTERCEPTED A 25-30 FOOT SAILBOAT ABOUT 20 NM WEST OF CASTLE ISLAND, BAHAMAS. 15 PEOPLE WERE SEEN ON DECK. THE VESSEL APPEARED TO BE A NONDESCRIPT SAILBOAT TYPICAL OF THOSE WHICH TRANSPORT HAITIAN MIGRANTS TO THE U. S. THETIS CONTACTED CGC VALIANT, THE ALIEN MIGRANT INTERDICTION OPERATION (AMIO) CUTTER, AND TALKED TO THE IMMIGRATION AND NATURALIZATION SERVICE (INS) AGENT WHO RECOMMENDED WAITING FOR HIM TO BE TRANSPORTED TO THETIS PRIOR TO BOARDING THE SAILBOAT. THE AGENT AND HIS INTERPRETER WERE ABOARD THETIS APPROXIMATELY THREE HOURS LATER AT 1245. THE AGENT NOTED HE HAD SEEN ABOUT 50 PEOPLE ON THE SAILBOAT WHEN HE FLEW OVER IT. AT ABOUT 1310, AFTER A PLANNING SESSION, THETIS SENT A BOARDING PARTY, INCLUDING THE INS PERSONNEL, TO INVESTIGATE THE SAILBOAT AND ITS CREW. THE BOAT WAS DETERMINED TO BE HAITIAN, AND THE PASSENGERS ILLEGAL ALIENS. SMALL BOAT TRANSFER OF THE HAITIANS TO THE THETIS COMMENCED AT 1400. DURING THIS EVOLUTION, THE HAITIAN BOAT CAPSIZED. 48 HAITIANS, THE INS AGENT AND THE CG BOARDING PARTY WERE RECOVERED BY THETIS. THETIS HAD BEEN POSITIONED UPWIND OF THE SAILBOAT TO PROVIDE A LEE AND DURING THE RESCUE EFFORT, SHE DRIFTED DOWN ON THE CAPSIZED SAILBOAT. THE SAILBOAT FLOTTED UP ALONG THE STARBOARD SIDE OF THETIS EVENTUALLY WORKING ITS WAY AFT AND FOULING IN THETIS' PROPELLERS. A SEARCH FOR SURVIVORS, LASTING ABOUT 45 MINUTES, WAS MADE BY THE RIGID HULL INFLATABLE (RHI). AFTER ABOUT HALF AN HOUR, THE SAILBOAT CLEARED ITSELF AND WAS TOWED AWAY FROM THE THETIS BY THE RHI. THE ELAPSED TIME FROM THE CAPSIZING UNTIL THETIS DEPARTED THE SCENE, ENROUTE HAITI, WAS

G - OLE ROUT:

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ABOUT TWO HOURS. ALMOST IMMEDIATELY FOLLOWING THEIR RECOVERY, SEVERAL HAITIANS EXPRESSED CONCERN OVER THE FATE OF TWO MEMBERS OF THEIR GROUP. FORMAL INTERVIEWS, CONDUCTED LATER, CONFIRMED THAT TWO HAITIANS WERE LOST AT SEA AS A RESULT OF THE CAPSIZING.

2. CLASSIFICATION. THIS MISHAP IS A CLASS A MISHAP DUE TO THE LOSS OF TWO HAITIANS PRESUMED DROWNED.

3. CAUSES. THE PRIMARY CAUSE OF THIS INCIDENT WAS THAT THE HAITIAN VESSEL WAS EXTREMELY OVERLOADED AND COULD NOT SURVIVE THE UNFAVORABLE SEA AND WIND CONDITIONS.

4. CONTRIBUTING FACTORS. THE FOLLOWING WERE CONTRIBUTING FACTORS IN THIS MISHAP:

- A. THE INSTABILITY OF THE SAILBOAT INCREASED OVER TIME DUE TO THE FOLLOWING: (1) THE VESSEL'S CENTER OF GRAVITY WAS RAISED AS PEOPLE CAME TOPSIDE TO BE OFF-LOADED (THE PROBLEM MAY HAVE BEEN AGGRAVATED BY THE FREE SURFACE EFFECT OF WATER IN THE HOLD). (2) THE VESSEL CHANGED COURSE TO MATCH THETIS' HELICOPTER RECOVERY MANEUVER PUTTING IT IN THE TROUGH. (3) ABOUT THREE HOURS AFTER THE INITIAL SIGHTING, WHILE ON THIS PARALLEL COURSE TO THETIS, THE SAILBOAT'S RUDDER BROKE, AND (4) NEXT THE SAIL WAS LOWERED, FURTHER REDUCING

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THE STABILITY.

B. THE THETIS CREW WAS VERY INEXPERIENCED IN AMIO. THEY CONDUCTED A GREAT DEAL OF TRAINING PRIOR TO THE INCIDENT WHICH PROVED TO BE VERY HELPFUL. THE ULTIMATE RESCUE OF 48 PEOPLE CAN BE ATTRIBUTED TO THE MANY THINGS THAT WERE DONE CORRECTLY BY THETIS. THE CO AND CREW RECOGNIZED AND PREPARED FOR THE CONTINGENCY OF A LARGE NUMBER OF PEOPLE IN THE WATER. THE COMBINATION OF R/A AND BOARDING BILLS REFLECTED A PROFESSIONAL AND FLEXIBLE RESPONSE TO THE MISSION.

C. AFTER AN INITIAL INTERROGATION ABOARD THE SAILBOAT, THETIS' PLAN CALLED FOR THE INTERPRETER TO RETURN TO THE SHIP, WHICH HE DID. MEANWHILE, HAITIANS ON THE SAILBOAT WERE AGGRAVATING THE STABILITY PROBLEM BY MOVING OUT OF THE HOLD. ARGUING OVER PERSONAL FLOTATION DEVICES (PFD), AND GENERALLY ACTING RESTLESS. THE HAITIAN CAPTAIN, WHO COULD SPEAK SOME ENGLISH, COULD NOT CONTROL THE SITUATION. THEREFORE, AFTER WAITING THREE HOURS FOR THE INS INTERPRETER, HE SHOULD HAVE BEEN USED WHERE HE WOULD HAVE BEEN MOST EFFECTIVE. THAT IS, ABOARD THE SAILBOAT WHERE HIS LANGUAGE SKILLS WOULD HAVE BEEN MOST BENEFICIAL.

D. BECAUSE PFD ISSUANCE WAS USED AS A SORTING AS WELL AS A SAFETY TOOL, ALL THE HAITIANS WERE NOT GIVEN PFD'S. THE PASSING OUT OF PFD'S CREATED SOME HASSLES AS PEOPLE FOUGHT FOR THEM. THE OVERCROWDED CONDITIONS MADE IT IMPOSSIBLE TO PUT EVERYONE IN PFD'S. IT IS OFTEN MORE EXPEDITIOUS TO SIMPLY MOVE QUICKLY THROUGH THE TRANSFER PROCESS THAN TO WASTE PRECIOUS TIME TRYING TO MANAGE PFD DISTRIBUTION.

5. CORRECTIVE ACTION. THE FOLLOWING ACTIONS ARE ONGOING OR SHALL BE TAKEN TO PREVENT FUTURE MISHAPS:

A. AN AMIO WORKSHOP WAS CONDUCTED AT THE LANTAREA CO'S CONFERENCE 18-19 APR 90. IT FOCUSED ON LESSONS LEARNED, INCLUDING THOSE FROM THIS MISHAP, ALONG WITH DISTRIBUTION OF SEVERAL EXAMPLES OF SHIP'S BILLS FOR RECOVERY OF LARGE NUMBERS OF SURVIVORS. A "LESSONS LEARNED" PACKAGE FROM THIS INCIDENT DEVELOPED BY CCGD7 HAS BEEN DISTRIBUTED TO LANTAREA W-EC'S, WMEC'S AND CG ACADEMY (PCOMPXO SCHOOL), AND RTO YORKTOWN (MLE SCHOOL).

B. WHERE POSSIBLE, THE PFD'S SHOULD BE USED AS A MEANS OF CONTROL, LIMITED IN NUMBER TO THOSE TO BE TRANSFERRED IN EACH SMALL BOAT LOAD. THE SITUATION WILL DICTATE THE PROCESS BASED ON TIME OF DAY, DAYLIGHT REMAINING, WEATHER CONDITIONS, AND CONDITIONS OF AND ON THE VESSEL INTERDICTION. GIVEN TIME, USING A NUMBER OF PFD'S EQUAL TO THE NUMBER OF PEOPLE TO BE TRANSPORTED IN THE SMALL BOAT HELPS TO CONTROL THE REMOVAL PROCESS. THOSE WEARING THE PFD'S WILL BE THE ONES EMBARKED ABOARD THE SMALL BOAT EACH TRIP. OTHERWISE, YOU RUN THE RISK OF CONFUSION AND EVERYONE TRYING TO SHIFT TO ONE SIDE OF THE BOAT TO BE THE FIRST TO GET OFF.

C. CCGD7 IS REVISING THE CHECKMATE SEVEN OPLAN TO PROVIDE GUIDANCE FOR SETTING AN APPROPRIATE BILL FOR MIGRANT INTERDICTION, WITH SPECIFIC CONSIDERATION FOR THE POTENTIAL OF A LARGE NUMBER OF PEOPLE IN THE WATER. LIKEWISE, GUIDANCE WILL BE PROVIDED FOR THE FOLLOW-ON CARE OF LARGE NUMBERS OF PEOPLE.

D. COMLANTAREA HAS DIRECTED CCGD7 TO ENSURE THAT ANY WHEC OR WMEC OPERATING IN THE WINDWARD PASSAGE (OTHER THAN TRANSITING) IS EQUIPPED WITH AMIO PROVISIONS.

E. IN LIGHT OF THE INCREASE IN ENCOUNTERS SUCH AS THIS OCCURRING IN OTHER PASSAGES (E.G., MONA PASS), CCGD7 SHALL CONSIDER PROVIDING CUTTERS OPERATING IN THESE OTHER PASSAGES WITH AMIO PROVISIONS. CCGD7 SHOULD DETERMINE WHAT AREAS APPLY AS "HIGH PROBABILITY." CCGD7 SHALL ENSURE THAT THE APPROPRIATE CUTTERS ARE EQUIPPED WITH AMIO PROVISIONS.

6. RELATED ACTIONS.

A. IN THE CIRCUMSTANCES THAT CONFRONTED THETIS, THE CO ELECTED TO RECOVER SURVIVORS AS QUICKLY AS POSSIBLE. GIVEN THE PROXIMITY

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B. CARRYING AND MOVING A LARGE NUMBER OF PEOPLE ABOUT ON A SMALL BOAT SHOULD BE RECOGNIZED EARLY AS A SEVERE CONDITION ON AMIO DUE TO THE INHERENT RISKS. IN THIS CASE, NO URGENCY TO THE SITUATION WAS EITHER COMMUNICATED OR UNDERSTOOD TO EXIST WHEN THE BOARDING PARTY WAS ON SCENE.

C. THETIS' DECISION TO AWAIT THE ARRIVAL OF THE INS AGENT AND INTERPRETER PRIOR TO BOARDING NEITHER WORSENERD THE SITUATION NOR CAUSED THE RESULT. THOSE RESOURCES WERE READILY AVAILABLE BY HELO AND COULD BE EXPECTED TO ARRIVE ON SCENE IN TIME TO ALLOW AN ORDERLY INTERDICTION AND TRANSFER OF PEOPLE DURING DAYLIGHT HOURS. NOTING THE RELATIVE INEXPERIENCE OF THETIS ON AMIO, THIS WAS A PRUDENT DECISION.

D. TWO ACTS THAT NEEDLESSLY ENDANGERED THETIS CREW MEMBERS WERE THE ATTEMPT TO BREAK THROUGH THE HULL WITH AN AX, AND THE USE OF A RECREATIONAL DIVER TO INSPECT THE SHAFTS. THE ATTEMPT TO BREAK THROUGH THE HULL WAS INAPPROPRIATE IN THIS CASE BECAUSE THE CAPSIZED SAILING VESSEL WAS LOCATED SO CLOSE TO THETIS AND EVENTUALLY PASSED BENEATH THE CUTTER. SECTION 1.B.4. OF THE CG DIVING POLICIES AND PROCEDURES MANUAL STATES: "IF FACED WITH A LIFE THREATENING SITUATION AND NONE OF THE DIVING RESOURCES DISCUSSED IN 1.B.3. ARE REASONABLY AVAILABLE, A UNIT COMMANDING OFFICER MAY CONSIDER USING ANY PERSONNEL WITH DIVING

QUALIFICATIONS INCLUDING RECREATIONAL DIVING QUALIFICATIONS WHO VOLUNTEER THEIR SERVICES. SUCH PERSONNEL SHOULD BE USED ONLY WHEN IN THE JUDGMENT OF THE UNIT COMMANDING OFFICER, THE LIKELIHOOD OF SAVING A LIFE AND THE HAZARD TO THE DIVER ARE BOTH REASONABLE."

E. CO'S MUST MAINTAIN A BALANCE BETWEEN HUMANITARIAN NEEDS AND THE NEED FOR POSITIVE CONTROL IN PROVIDING FOR THE FOLLOW-ON CARE OF LARGE NUMBERS OF SURVIVORS.

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