UNITED STATES COAST GUARD

MVI
18 December 1951
(MISS BUCKEYE II -
C-7 Bd)

From: Chief, Merchant Vessel Inspection Division
To: Commandant
Via: Chief, Office of Merchant Marine Safety

Subj: Marine Board of Investigation; explosion on board the Motorboat MISS BUCKEYE II off Clearwater, Florida on 29 September 1951

1. Pursuant to the provisions of Title 46 C.F.R., Part 136, the record of the Marine Board convened to investigate subject casualty, together with its Findings of Fact, Opinions and Recommendations, has been reviewed and is forwarded herewith.

2. The motor vessel MISS BUCKEYE II, propelled by Diesel motor, 12 g.t., 57 feet in length, built in 1941, was engaged in service as a passenger-carrying vessel in the fishing and recreation business in the Florida area. The MISS BUCKEYE II, admeasuring less than 15 g.t., was not subject to statutory Coast Guard annual inspection and certification for seaworthy purposes. On the morning of 29 September 1951, the MISS BUCKEYE II departed from Clearwater, Florida for the fishing banks with forty-one passengers and two crew members on board. A closed globe valve incorrectly installed between the air tank and relief valve on the line to the air whistle caused such air tank to explode with sufficient violence to hole the vessel, causing her to submerge to deck level and thus necessitating her abandonment. This casualty occurred at approximately 0945 29 September 1951, approximately 12 miles off Clearwater, Florida. The motor vessel SEA FEVER was in close proximity and rescued all the passengers and crew of the MISS BUCKEYE II. The weather conditions at the time of this casualty were good. No lives were lost as a result of this casualty. However, one passenger sustained a broken leg, another a heart attack, and several male and female passengers suffered mild shock.

3. The Board made the following Findings of Fact:

"1. That the fifty-six point eight foot motorboat MISS BUCKEYE II suffered an explosion of its air tank at or about 9:45 a.m., e.s.t. on 29 September 1951, approximately twelve miles off shore from Clearwater, Florida.

"2. That as a result of this explosion, MISS BUCKEYE II submerged to deck level, causing passengers and crew to abandon ship in life jackets.

"3. That forty-one passengers and two crew members were rescued by M/V STA F.V. without loss of life.

"4. That injuries sustained as a result of this explosion consisted of a broken leg by one male passenger, a heart attack by another male passenger and mild shock by several male and female passengers.

"5. That the motorboat was in charge of a licensed operator, John Carrick, 1505 North Fort Harrison, Clearwater, Florida.

"6. That the motorboat MISS BUCKEYE II was operated in compliance with the provisions of the Motorboat Act of 25 April 1940.

"7. That the vessel was not required to be inspected and certificated under the law.

"8. That the call for assistance by MISS BUCKEYE II was answered promptly by Coast Guard Air Station, St. Petersburg, which unit dispatched aircraft to the scene.

"9. That life rafts and first aid equipment dropped by these aircraft were utilized in the rescue.

"10. That MISS BUCKEYE II was towed to the Lowe's Marine Ways, St. Petersburg, Florida by the Coast Guard Cutter NAMSIS."

4. The Board expressed the following Opinions:

"1. That the cause of the explosion was a closed globe valve incorrectly installed between the air tank and relief valve on the line to the air whistle.

"2. That this shut-off valve had been accidentally closed by some person unknown to this Board.

"3. That there was no culpable negligence on the part of the owner or operator since the air tank installation had been in operation for approximately six years.

"4. That the operator of the MISS BUCKEYE II, John Carrick, and crew member, Michael Mitch, conducted themselves in a seaman-like manner thereby aiding in preventing loss of life.

"5. That the successful rescue of the forty-one passengers and two crew members of the MISS BUCKEYE II was due to the prompt and skillful action of William J. Meyer, Master of the M/V SEA FEVER, combined with the aid of the Coast Guard planes from the U. S. Coast Guard Air Station, St. Petersburg, Florida.

"6. That had MISS BUCKEYE II been inspected by Coast Guard Marine Inspection officers the dangerous air system installation would have been noticed and correction required, thereby preventing such accident."

5. The Board made the following Recommendations:

"1. That no punitive action be taken against the owner or operator of MISS BUCKEYE II.

"2. That the owner and master of the M/V SEA FEVER, William J. Meyer, be presented the Silver Lifesaving Medal of the Treasury Department in recognition of his prompt and skillful rescue of the forty-three passengers and crew of MISS BUCKEYE II without loss of life or injury while being brought on board the SEA FEVER, although there was a moderately rough sea. Without this prompt action on his part there most surely would have been some loss of life.

"3. That if this action fails to qualify for this medal, a letter of commendation for this act be given Mr. Meyer.

"4. That this incident be used in furtherance of attempts to pass legislation requiring all vessels carrying passengers for hire and therefore under charge of an operator possessing a Motorboat Operator's License, to be inspected and certificated as is presently required for motorboats over sixty-five feet in length, or over fifteen gross tons."

REMARKS

6. In connection with recommendation 2 of the Board that the owner and master of the M/V SEA FEVER, William J. Meyer, be presented the Silver Lifesaving Medal of the Treasury Department for his rescue of all the passengers and crew of the MISS BUCKEYE II, a copy of the record of

Chief, MVI Division to
Commandant

Investigation of subject casualty will be retained for the consideration of the "Coast Guard Board of Awards" following approval of the report of subject casualty by the Commandant.

7. Recommendation 4 of the Board, in effect, suggests that the marine safety statutes requiring annual inspection and certification for seaworthy purposes be extended to cover motor vessels of 15 g.t. or less engaged in the carriage of passengers for hire. In this connection, Coast Guard HQ has prepared proposed legislation to require the annual inspection and certification of all motor vessels, regardless of tonnage, size or waters on which operated, which carry more than 12 passengers for hire, for consideration by Congress.

8. Subject to the foregoing remarks, it is recommended that the Findings of Fact, Opinions and Recommendations of the Marine Board of Investigation be approved.

/s/ P. A. OVERBECK
P. A. OVERBECK
Acting

Ind-1 27 December, 1951

From: Chief, Office of Merchant Marine Safety
To: Commandant

Forwarded, recommending approval.

/s/ H. C. SHEPHARD
H. C. SHEPHARD

APPROVED: DEC 29, 1951

/s/ A. C. RICHMOND
A. C. RICHMOND
Rear Admiral, U. S. Coast Guard
Acting Commandant