

SYNOPSIS



At approximately 1000 on 3 August 2007, three Army Cadet Force rigid raiding craft set off from Loch Carnan jetty, South Uist to transport a group of cadets and their adult instructors to an exercise area in Loch Skipport. Shortly after setting off, the sea conditions worsened and the officer in charge of the activity decided that the boats should turn back. At about 1005 one of the boats, which had accumulated a large amount of water on its deck, capsized.

Four of the twelve persons on board initially surfaced under the upturned hull, but only three managed to swim clear. The fourth, a 14 year old female cadet remained under the hull. Although a headcount was conducted, it failed to identify that the girl was missing. The survivors were returned to the jetty and onto their base camp in two groups. The trapped cadet was identified as missing at 1130 and was found under the boat on the rocky shores of Steisay Island at 1305. She was taken to the Western Isles hospital by coastguard helicopter but was pronounced dead on arrival.

The investigation identified a number of factors which contributed to the capsizing and the death of the cadet, including:

- The weight distribution within the boat reduced the freeboard forward and increased the likelihood of water being shipped.
- Water accumulated on the deck because the boat's self-bailers had not been lowered.
- The actions taken by the boat's coxswain did not take account of the free surface effect of the accumulated water.
- The lifejacket worn by the female cadet was not suitable for use by children and would have prevented her escape from the upturned hull once inflated.
- The delay in identifying that she was missing undoubtedly reduced her chances of survival.

A number of safety issues regarding the planning, control and authorisation of the activity were also identified. In particular, information, instructions and guidance included in numerous MoD publications pertinent to the ferrying of the cadets was not followed, and the verification and authorisation procedures for the ferrying activity were not robust.

The Ministry of Defence, Army and Army Cadet Force have taken, or initiated, a number of actions to address the issues identified with regard to the safety of cadet force training. In addition, the Royal Yachting Association has taken action to improve the knowledge of factors affecting boat stability among powerboat coxswains. Recommendations made to the Director of Reserve Forces and Cadets aim to: raise the awareness of non-syllabus activities conducted by individual units; provide all cadet forces access to external sources of expertise when planning and approving such activities; ensure that all activities are conducted in compliance with applicable instructions and guidance, and; ensure that approval to conduct such activities is given at an appropriate level in the chain of command.