MAIB
MARINE ACCIDENT INVESTIGATION BRANCH

SAFETY FLYER TO THE FISHING INDUSTRY

Fishing vessel *Majestic* flooding and foundering off Shetland, 21 January 2016

Image courtesy of Mike Pennington

Narrative

At 1443 on 21 January 2016 the 16m wooden potter *Majestic* (LK678) sank close to a gas pipeline off the Point of Fethaland, Shetland. Around 4¾ hours earlier, the vessel's skipper returned to the wheelhouse after he had finished working a fleet of creels on deck with his crewman. When he arrived in the wheelhouse, the engine room bilge alarms were sounding. The skipper alerted the crewman, who lifted the engine room escape hatch and saw that water was half way up the side of the engine casing.

The skipper and the crewman immediately launched the liferaft. At 1010, the skipper pressed the DSC distress alert and broadcast a "Mayday" on VHF radio, channel 16. At about 1017, the skipper and the crewman boarded the liferaft; neither wore a lifejacket. Five minutes later, a rescue helicopter arrived on scene soon followed by the fishing vessel *Fairway II* (LK270). At 1033, *Majestic*'s skipper and crewman were recovered from the liferaft onto the fishing vessel. They were not injured.

Majestic remained upright and on an even keel. Over the next 4 hours, the vessel drifted to the north until it foundered at 1443, at the time the vessel's EPIRB released and activated. *Majestic* came to rest on the sea bed just 2 metres from the Orka Vow gas pipe line. Consequently, a remotely operated vehicle was later used to put sandbags between the wreck and the pipeline to prevent damage to the pipeline.

The cause of the engine room flood is unknown, but it was probably connected with a failure within a seawater system. The investigation identified that:

- The engine room had been flooding for up to 1 hour before the crew were alerted.
- The engine room's bilge alarms sounded in the wheelhouse and were not heard by the skipper and the crew who were working on the deck.

- The prompt abandonment and notification to the coastguard and vessels in the area reduced the risk to the lives of the crew.

- The rate of the flooding would have been slowed by the operation of the electric bilge pump and, possibly, by stopping the main engine.

- The effectiveness of the crew's response to the flood was probably reduced because they had not routinely conducted emergency drills.

Photograph of crew boarding *Fairview II*

Safety Lessons

1. A number of safety-critical alarms, such as fire, bilge and DSC alarms, are usually sited in the wheelhouse. Therefore, if a wheelhouse is left unattended there is a good chance these alarms will not be heard while working on deck.

2. A decision to abandon ship in order to reduce the risk to life will seldom be criticised. However, although such a decision needs to be taken in good time, abandonment is usually a measure of last resort.

3. Flooding drills and 'table-top' discussions covering the actions to take and the equipment available to deal with floods in different compartments make a huge contribution to the development of ship-specific plans and procedures.

4. When things go wrong, a smooth abandonment and rescue relies on serviceable equipment, knowledge and experience and good communications. Liferafts, sea survival training, DSC, "Mayday" and EPIRBs are essential in this respect.

5. Not wearing a PFD when working on the open deck at sea is taking an unnecessary risk. Not donning lifejackets when abandoning ship is foolhardy, even if assistance is close at hand.

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