

12 FEBRUARY 1997

A training remembering the CG 44363 disaster

FACILITATOR

Introduction



(scan for diagrams)

- Sailing vessel GALE RUNNER is transiting from San Francisco, CA to Puget Sound, WA with a crew of two
- CG Station Quillayute River (**QR**) in La Push, WA is the next station north of Station Grays Harbor. It:
 - Has a BMCM Officer in Charge (**OIC**) and BM1 Executive Petty Officer (**XPO**)
 - Has two 44' motor lifeboats (**MLB**)
 - Reports to Group/Air Station Port Angeles (**PA**), WA, (the 1997 equivalent of a Sector)
 - Has a hazardous river bar crossing in order to get into the harbor at La Push, WA
 - Has a set of stadium-like "bar lights" fixed on James Island next to the bar for night transits
 - In February 1997, they are inoperative
 - The Officer of the Day (**OOD**) reports to a Surfman Duty Officer (**SDO**)
- On 11-12 February the duty section is comprised of 10 ready boat crew members, a watchstander, and several additional non-rated members
- On 11 February, Dr. Dennis Noble, a retired Coast Guard Senior Chief Petty Officer and notable history author reports to the station for a few days to stay on board while researching a book he is writing on lifeboat stations
- The following facts are taken verbatim from the USCG Administrative Investigation and Dr. Dennis Noble's book
- Reading takes about 40 minutes with 14 speakers and one facilitator
- Consider turning off the lights and having any members without speaking parts close their eyes.
- Each reader should say their **highlighted parts by speaking the time, name, and details, for example**, "At 0700 FA DaMello assumes the station's communications watch..."

Tuesday 11 FEB 1997

Time	Member	Details
Morning	GALE RUNNER Sailing Vessel	Is in Westport, WA and stops in at CG Station Grays Harbor. GALE RUNNER receives the weather forecast and decides to get underway to continue north.
0700	FA DaMello Comms watchstander	Assumes the Station's communications watch until 0700 on 12FEB97.
1640	FA DaMello Comms watchstander	Receives the updated NOAA weather forecast which calls for NW wind 35-40kt and seas building to 14'. For 12 February, the forecast predicts NW winds 30kt and combined seas 18'.
Approx. 1730	BM1 Placido SDO/ 1 st Boat Surfman	<p>Gets together with OOD BM2 Bosley and drives to the station's bar overlook to observe last light bar conditions. He observes that seas aren't bad and he feels comfortable going home on recall for the night, about 15 minutes away.</p> <p>He later said, "From the look of the bar and what Bosley had told me about the weather, there was no need for me to stay aboard."</p>
1740	BM2 Bosley OOD/ 1 st Boat Coxswain	Views the NOAA forecast on the computer and logs his initials, "D.A.B." to acknowledge it.

Evening	GALE RUNNER Sailing Vessel	Begins to encounter heavy weather and decides to head for the QR bar entrance to seek safe harbor.
After 2130	BM2 Bosley OOD/ 1 st Boat Coxswain	Does his evening round with MK3 Schlimme and FN Matthews and drives out to the bar overlook to check things out. FN Matthews recalls BM2 and MK3 saying that, “they [hope] they [don’t] get a case [tonight].”
Between 2130- 2200	BMCM LaForge OIC/ 2nd Boat Surfman	Returns from an appointment in Port Angeles and checks in with the OOD at the station. BM2 Bosley does not pass the 1640 weather forecast, but tells the OIC that the weather is supposed to pick up overnight. Without knowing of the forecast details, the OIC agrees with the OOD that the ready boat Surfman can remain on recall for the night. The OIC leaves for his home, 5 minutes away from the station.
2130	Dr. Noble CG History Author	Finishes his conversations with the crew and goes to bed.
Approx. 2200	BM2 Bosley OOD/ 1 st Boat Coxswain	Calls the SDO who remembers Bosley saying, “Nothing [is] going on. The winds [have] picked up a little bit... the weather [is] supposed to pick up later [tomorrow].”
2200	FA DaMello Comms watchstander	Passes the radio guard to Group PA for the night and sets up the cot to sleep in the comms room.

Wednesday 12 FEB 1997

Approx. 0015	GALE RUNNER Sailing Vessel	Hails Station QR on VHF 16 to obtain a bar report. Telecommunications Specialist Third Class (TC3) Marshall at Group PA answers for Station QR, consults the status board and reports, “no restrictions.”
	FA DaMello Comms watchstander	Wakes up to the radio traffic between Group and the GALE RUNNER and notices high winds outside. The Station’s anemometer is registering gusts of 50kt. On his own initiative, DaMello remembers the 1640 forecast for 18’ seas and intercoms TC3 Marshall at Group to tell her about the wind he’s seeing and the forecast for seas. He says he thinks that if the OOD knew about the 50kt gusts, then he would put a restriction on the bar.
	Group Port Angeles	Watchstander TC3 Marshall tells FA DaMello to hail the GAIL RUNNER and pass them the current weather conditions.
	FA DaMello Comms watchstander	Hails the sailing vessel and asks, “Are you crossing the bar?”
	GALE RUNNER Sailing Vessel	Crewmember Marcia Infante replies, “Affirmative. We are at the entrance now.” She doesn’t pass a GPS position.
	FA DaMello Comms watchstander	Passes the latest winds and advises the GALE RUNNER that the bar could be breaking. Next, FA DaMello calls BM2 Bosley in the OOD room to brief him of the weather and situation.
	BM2 Bosley OOD/ 1 st Boat Coxswain	Comes into comms and asks DaMello if he has GALE RUNNER’s position. DaMello says that the caller has not relayed their position. Bosley tells DaMello to call the GALE RUNNER and obtain their position. Bosley phones SDO BM1 Placido at his home and informs him of the radio call and that he thinks that it’s a bad idea for the sailboat to come across the bar. BM1 asks if he has a position for the sailboat. To keep listening for information, Bosely places the SDO on hold.

	FA DaMello Comms watchstander	Asks the GALE RUNNER for their position. He hears, "We're at 47, 51..." and then static silence.
	GALE RUNNER Sailing Vessel	Crewmember Ken Schlag is steering the sailing vessel and Marcia Infante is on the radio. Suddenly, the sailboat is struck by a rogue wave, knocked down, and dismasted. The radio antenna is damaged and Ken Schlag is thrown overboard. He is tethered with a safety harness and manages to pull himself back onboard. Portholes are blown out by the wave and the GALE RUNNER begins taking on water.
	FA DaMello Comms watchstander	Tries again to hail the boat, "Sailing vessel, this is Quillayute River on 22, over."
Approx. 00:26	GALE RUNNER Sailing Vessel	Crewmember Marcia Infante breaks the silence, "MAYDAY! MAYDAY! THIS IS SAILING VESSEL <i>GALE RUNNER</i> ! U.S. COAST GUARD! WE'RE TAKING ON WATER!"
	GALE RUNNER Sailing Vessel	Crewmember Marcia Infante repeats her mayday calls every few minutes. She looks at the GPS plotter to reference the boat's position, but sees a black screen and figures that the GPS is broken. In fact, the GPS is in screensaver mode and she could have pushed any button to bring the chart and GPS position back up on the display.
	FA DaMello Comms watchstander	Only hears static after the mayday call. Group also hears static and suggests Station switch radio sites. DaMello says that he has already tried that.
Approx. 00:26	BM2 Bosley OOD/ 1 st Boat Coxswain	Has gathered this key information in a very short period: there is a sailing vessel that says it is at the entrance to the bar, it has begun taking on water, and the CG has lost communications with it. BM2 Bosley hits the SAR alarm and pipes, "Ready boat crew lay to the ready boat! Sailboat on the bar taking on water."
	BM2 Bosley OOD/ 1 st Boat Coxswain	Takes the SDO phone call off hold and says, "I'm heading for the door."
	BM1 Placido SDO/ 1 st Boat Surfman	Replies, "Call Master Chief [the OIC]. I'm right behind you" and gets in his car to drive back to the station.
		Later, BM1 Placido said that, "If I had known how bad the bar was, I would have told Bosley to wait until I could get to the station."
	SA Wingo 1 st Boat Crewmember	Runs out of his barracks room with SN Miniken and down to the boat.
	Group Port Angeles	Watchstander TC3 Marshall passes that the Group has received more radio transmissions from a frantic woman who doesn't understand Station QR's instructions.
		Group's Duty Officer briefs the Group Commanding Officer, CAPT Volk, at the direction of the Group Senior Duty Officer. The Group is still trying to gather information and is not yet trying to launch a helicopter.
0030	FA DaMello Comms watchstander	Calls and notifies BMCM LaForge of the case and BMCM comes back to the station from his home.
0031	FA DaMello Comms watchstander	Recalls the second boat crew in accordance with the unit's standing orders.
	BM2 Bosley OOD/ 1 st Boat Coxswain	Is one of the first down to the ready boat, CG 44363, and urgently wants to get underway. He runs back up to the station and yells, "Where is my crew?!"

	BMCM LaForge OIC/ 2nd Boat Surfman	Stops at the bar overlook to scan for signs of a sailboat before arriving back at the Station. He notes that there is reduced visibility, but that he can still see the "Q" buoy a mile from the bar. Winds are 30kt with stronger gusts.
0034	BM2 Bosley OOD/ 1 st Boat Coxswain	Gets CG 44363 underway for the SAR case. BM2 Bosley doesn't brief his crew on the mission and the four are all wearing Mustang anti-exposure suits. If he believed the sailboat taking on water was on the bar, he would have thought the situation was very urgent.
	SA Wingo 1 st Boat Crewmember	Hands out pyro vests and SN Miniken hands out surf belts as the boat gets underway. Wingo and Miniken clip into D-rings and later, SA Wingo said that he had presumed MK3 Schlimme clipped in, but he wasn't certain if BM2 Bosley wore his belt or clipped it in. No one on 44363 puts on a helmet, even though policy requires them to and no one speaks up about it. Bosley's helmet was clipped behind his coxswain chair and everyone else's helmets were stowed below in their SAR bags.
	BMCM LaForge OIC/ 2nd Boat Surfman	Is still at the overlook and observes the 44363 leaving the boat basin. He does not see its navigation lights energized. The OIC radios the 44363 and informs them that he does not see a sailboat in the immediate area and orders BM2 Bosley, "To check out the bar to see if they could cross." The OIC heads back to the station.
0043	Group Port Angeles	Watchstander TC3 Marshall intercoms Station QR to have the ready boat standby because they think the case might be a hoax. There has been a rash of hoax calls with a young voice in northwestern Washington over the past two weeks.
	MK3 Schlimme 1 st Boat Engineer	Comes over to the starboard side of the 44363 as it gets underway, adjusts the radar, and then returns the engineer's spot on the port side of the coxswain. While outbound, he reminds BM2 Bosley to not let the lube oil pressures get too high.
	BM2 Bosley OOD/ 1 st Boat Coxswain	Replies, "Yeah, I got it."
	SN Miniken 1 st Boat Crewmember	Operates the port spotlight.
	SA Wingo 1 st Boat Crewmember	Is ordered by BM2 Bosley to man the starboard spotlight and illuminate Wash Rock.
	MK3 Schlimme 1 st Boat Engineer	Yells at Bosley, "Let's get the fuck out of here," just before passing Wash Rock.
	BM2 Bosley OOD/ 1 st Boat Coxswain	Replies, "Fuck that!" Schlimme may have been indicating a desire to go back to the station or instead, to go out to deeper water past the bar.
	FA Ballard Non-rate	Assists FA DaMello in comms and calls the 44363 to pass the Group's instructions to have the ready boat standby.
	BM2 Bosley OOD/ 1 st Boat Coxswain	Responds, "Standby, we're a little busy," likely because BM2 Bosley is focused on negotiating the rough seas on the bar while heading outbound. Regarding the possibility of a hoax, Bosley tells the crew, "I hope not!"
Approx. 0044	SA Wingo 1 st Boat Crewmember	Is told by BM2 Bosley to aim the spotlight starboard towards James Island around the time the 44363 is at Wash Rock. Bosley wants to keep the island off the starboard beam. The 44363 is 100-150 yards off of the island.
0045	BM2 Bosley OOD/ 1 st Boat Coxswain	Radios the station that the 44363 has safely crossed the bar and that it is 16-18' past the bar and evening out. Winds are from the WSW.

	Dr. Noble CG History Author	Joins BMCM LaForge on another trip out to the bar overlook. While driving there, the two hear the 44363 say they made it safely across the bar. BMCM LaForge thinks that the 44363 is likely turning away from James Island and toward the sea buoy into deeper (safer) water.
	SA Wingo 1 st Boat Crewmember	Hears Bosley radio the station that it is 15-16' out (a factual inconsistency) and later said, "I was about to call BS. Those waves were a lot higher than 15-16' and it wasn't getting better, but I was like, 'oh well.'"
		The 44363 is not transiting south on the safe route outbound to the "Q" buoy, but is actually being set north towards the edge of James Island.
		SA Wingo spots a rock and yells, "Rock starboard side! Ten feet!" The boat hits something.
Approx. 0048	BM2 Bosley OOD/ 1 st Boat Coxswain	Yells, "What was that!?" Someone else shouts, "Wave port side!"
	SA Wingo 1 st Boat Crewmember	Sees an enormous wave off the port bow and the boat is rolled over to starboard. SA Wingo hits his head on something and tastes blood. The boat rights itself with its bow pointing towards James Island. When the boat comes up, SA Wingo is twisted in his belt and wrapped up in the canvas dodger. The mast is bent flat to the port side. Wingo reaches for the spotlight and realizes it has broken off the top of the cabin and is gone. The motor lifeboat turns towards the island with way on. The 44363 has been underway for approximately 14 minutes.
Approx. 0048	BM2 Bosley OOD/ 1 st Boat Coxswain	Radios, "Capsized and disoriented."
	FA DaMello Comms watchstander	Hears the call about the boat being capsized, but he and Group PA are confused if the caller is the GALE RUNNER or the 44363. Group and Station hail both boats.
	CG 44393 2 nd Boat	Is the second boat and the recalled crew for it begins arriving at the Station. They begin to dress out in anti-exposure suits and then change their minds, opting for dry suits. The crew heads down to the boat and passes the communications room. They overhear, "Capsized..." but think it is in reference to the sail boat.
	MK3 Schlimme 1 st Boat Engineer	Yells, "We're still on the bar!"
	BM2 Bosley OOD/ 1 st Boat Coxswain	Replies, "Find me buoy 3!"
	SA Wingo 1 st Boat Crewmember	Can see the lights of the town of La Push, but doesn't see Buoy 3 which is too far back around the eastern side of James Island to be visible.
	BMCM LaForge OIC/ 2nd Boat Surfman	And Dr. Noble hear the 44363 say they rolled. The OIC can't see the MLB's navigation lights, but for a moment sees its spotlight sweeping rapidly towards the south from what he thinks is the seaward side of James Island. The OIC now knows the 44363 is in trouble (too close to rocky James Island) and calls the station to get the second boat underway. He also tells the station to call Group PA and get a helicopter dispatched.
	FA DaMello Comms watchstander	Calls the OIC back and passes that Group's duty officer wants to talk with him because Group is still concerned the call is a hoax.

	BMCM LaForge OIC/ 2nd Boat Surfman	And Dr. Noble return to the Station and the OIC tells the SDO that the 44363 is in trouble. BMCM LaForge phones Group PA and says he has, "A serious situation and still [needs] the HH-65A helicopter launched" and also requests an HH-60 helicopter from Astoria, OR.
0049	GALE RUNNER Sailing Vessel	Passes their full position to Group PA.
Approx. 0049	SA Wingo 1 st Boat Crewmember	Hears someone shout something. The boat is hit by a wave on the port quarter and pitch-poles, end over end. Upon re-righting itself, the 44363 rests on the rocks and he knows it is out of the water because the engine noise is different. The mast and entire top of the cabin have sheared off. BM2 Bosley and SN Miniken are gone. The ship's clock recovered from the wreckage of the 44363 was stopped at exactly 00h:49m:03s. CG 44363 has been underway for about 15 minutes.
	MK3 Schlimme 1 st Boat Engineer	Takes control of the 44363.
	SA Wingo 1 st Boat Crewmember	Panics and says, "We have to get out of here" and begins to unclip his surf belt.
	MK3 Schlimme 1 st Boat Engineer	Convinces Wingo that it's safest to stay with the boat and to clip back in. He asks Wingo for the boat's radio and tries to call the station with their position.
	SA Wingo 1 st Boat Crewmember	Looks down at the radio while Schlimme makes the call and sees that it's broken. Wingo realizes that MK3 Schlimme "Was just doing it to calm me down, and it worked because suddenly I was super calm. He saved my life by keeping me on the boat."
	MK3 Schlimme 1 st Boat Engineer	Tries to get himself and SA Wingo down into the forward compartment of the 44363, but can't because the handle of the watertight door is jammed from the boat's impact with rocks. Seeing another wave approaching, Schlimme yells, "Hold on!"
	SA Wingo 1 st Boat Crewmember	Feels the boat roll for a third time after the 44363 is knocked off the rock it was resting on and pushed against the rock cliffs. Underwater, he notes a "tremendous quiet." When the 44363 rights again, MK3 Schlimme is gone and Wingo sees a body float by the boat. He can't throw a life ring to it because both life rings are missing.
		CG 44363 has been underway for about 20 minutes.
		Wingo feels the boat drifting backwards and banging along the rocks into the cove on James Island. He sees a strobe light flashing in the cove, grabs the strobe light from his pyro vest, and turns it on. SA Wingo remembers that he thinks he placed the boat's engines in neutral, but doesn't secure them. Wingo grabs his MK-79 flare kit, fires five flares into the sky and two horizontally towards the beach to illuminate it. Like Schlimme, he tries to get into the forward compartment where there is a portable VHF radio and more flares, but also finds the door jammed.
Approx. 0055	BMCM LaForge OIC/ 2nd Boat Surfman	Is off the phone with Group PA after asking for helicopters and someone at the station tells him they've spotted red flares. The OIC finds Dr. Noble and says, "Let's go back to the bar."
	BM1 Placido SDO/ 1 st Boat Surfman	Shouts, "I'm going" and runs down to the 44393.
	Dr. Noble CG History Author	Parks at the bar overlook with BMCM LaForge and sees a red flare in the sky.

	BM1 Placido SDO/ 1 st Boat Surfman	Gets down to the 44393 and gives a quick brief on the mission. At this point, the second boat crew doesn't know the 44363 is in trouble. He later said that, "I wanted to stick my nose close to the bar and look around before trying to get across. I had no Goddam clue what the bar was doing."
0058	CG 44393 2 nd Boat	Gets underway with BM1 Placido as Surfman and three other crewmen. By chance, BM3 Martin is on second boat, but should have been on the ready boat. Because of his pregnant wife, the surfmen had given him as much time on second boat as possible. CG 44363 got underway approximately 24 minutes earlier.
	BM1 Placido SDO/ 1 st Boat Surfman	Sees a red flare in the sky shortly after leaving the boat basin. He thinks it could be from the 44363. He decides that they must cross the bar.
	Dr. Noble CG History Author	And BMCM LaForge have been at the overlook for a few minutes and see the 44393 leaving the protection of the river. The OIC thinks he can help keep track of the 44393 and advise them if they begin to get set towards James Island. In his own words, Dr. Noble remembers seeing the, "Small white boat rising. Rising. Rising. Rising until it seemed to stand on its stern. White water almost enveloping the small boat. Then the plunge downward."
	BMCM LaForge OIC/ 2nd Boat Surfman	Uses the VHF radio in his truck to communicate back and forth with the 44393 on the bar. As the 44393 heads farther out to sea, he can tell that the length of the swells underneath the boat are lengthening out. He is able to see the 44393 getting set north towards James Island and advises the boat. Dr. Noble and the OIC see more red flares from the western part of James Island.
Approx. 0100	Group Port Angeles	<p>Duty Officer first called the Group's Operations Officer around 0030. He now calls the Group's Senior Duty Officer (SDO) in his duty room and informs him of the case. The SDO tells him to hit the SAR alarm at the Air Station.</p> <p>Next, the Group Duty Officer calls the Group Commanding Officer again and tells him that the helicopter is launching because they have lost communications with the 44363 and have spotted red flares. Until that time, the CO did not know that 44363 had gotten underway from Station Quillayute River. Group CO CAPT Volk drives into the Air Station and assigns a non-rate in the command center to scribe everything he sees and hears as the case goes on.</p>
0107	SA Wingo 1 st Boat Crewmember	<p>Floats with the 44363, gauging his progress into the cove by the illumination from the boat's aft deck light light. He notices the time on his watch: 0107.</p> <p>Starts praying, "Not a prayer of all the things I would or wouldn't do if I was saved, it was just an all-out cry for help: 'Please get my boat to shore.'" The boat's stern swings around and points towards the beach at the far back of the cove.</p> <p>SA Wingo thinks he sees a tree towards shore, unclips his surf belt, hops down into knee-deep water, and wades into the beach. CG 44363 comes to its final resting place at the back of the northern cove in James Island.</p>
0110	CG 44393 2 nd Boat	Crosses the bar.
0110	Group Port Angeles	Watchstander TC3 Marshall transmits an Urgent Marine Information Broadcast.

	BM1 Placido SDO/ 1 st Boat Surfman	Remembers that his, "Crew performed like they were supposed to... They constantly fed me information. I felt like a machine. I absorbed the information and my body performed the necessary motions." Eventually he sees flares both to the north (from the 44363) and from the south (from the GALE RUNNER).
		He remembers, "I knew which ones were ours. I started to push back in and had to decide: Should I go for the sailboat, or our boat? It was one of the hardest decisions I ever had to make. I [later] saw the helicopter starting to search for our boat. I knew the helo could probably help out our boat better than I could, so I headed for the sailboat."
0121	BM1 Placido SDO/ 1 st Boat Surfman	Radios, "We are on handheld. Our antenna was damaged by a breaker."
	BMCM LaForge OIC/ 2nd Boat Surfman	Advises the 44393 to head to the "Q" sea buoy and stay in deep water.
	CG 44393 2 nd Boat	Eventually depletes the battery on their portable VHF radio and loses all communications with the station and BMCM LaForge at the overlook. They proceed to the "Q" buoy.
	BMCM LaForge OIC/ 2nd Boat Surfman	Calls Group again for helicopter assistance because he has a sailboat in distress, a missing MLB, and another MLB he's lost communications with.
0123	CG 6589 Air Station Port Angeles	Takes off from Air Station PA. BM2 Bosley, MK3 Schlimme, and SN Miniken are already dead.
	BMCM LaForge OIC/ 2nd Boat Surfman	And Dr. Noble return to the station.
After 0130	Group Port Angeles	Commanding Officer (CO) CAPT Volk calls nearby units to request additional surface assets. The 110' cutter CUTTYHUNK is in Neah Bay and is dispatched towards La Push. CAPT Volk calls CWO2 Robert Coster, the CO of the Station Neah Bay, and asks if he can send one of his lifeboats south to help. CWO2 Coster drives in to his station and reviews the conditions. He makes the difficult decision that he cannot safely send his crews. CAPT Volk conferences with the CO of Group Astoria and CWO2 Randy Lewis, the CO of Station Grays Harbor. CWO2 Lewis also declines sending his station's 52' MLB due to the conditions. Later, CAPT Volk says that both stations' CO's, "Made the right decision."
0157	CG 6589 Air Station Port Angeles	Arrives on scene, is briefed about the situation by BMCM LaForge, and commences a search near James Island.
0159	GALE RUNNER Sailing Vessel	Passes their accurate position to the Coast Guard after reestablishing communications. They are not on the bar, but farther south near "The Needles," a group of jagged rock features sticking out from the ocean, about three miles from the bar.
0201	BMCM LaForge OIC/ 2nd Boat Surfman	Orders a beach search for survivors and several crewmembers, local police, and National Park Rangers set out for First Beach in anti-exposure coveralls and helmets.

0204	CG 6003 Air Station Astoria	Launches from Air Station Astoria.
	BMCM LaForge OIC/ 2nd Boat Surfman	Has to decide where to send resources: to the GALE RUNNER or to James Island for his lifeboat crew? He radios the CG 6589 back and recommends they leave James Island and proceed to the GALE RUNNER's position because it is only minutes away from the rocks. The OIC advises the watchstander to keep off the radio as much as possible because the helicopter may only have a brief window to transmit that they're in trouble too. BMCM LaForge has 14 lives and three Coast Guard assets in his hands.
0205	CG 6589 Air Station Port Angeles	Diverts from the vicinity of James Island and flies south towards The Needles. To make an approach on the GALE RUNNER, they must fly over, around, and through the 190' tall rock islands. The helicopter is being buffeted by winds and keeps fighting to make new approaches as the sailboat is washed over by breaking waves and drifts between the rock pinnacles.
	FA DaMello Comms watchstander	Is relieved of the communications watch to help the beach party. At First Beach, he and two other members run down the beach, dodging waves.
	SA Wingo 1 st Boat Crewmember	Sees a helicopter searchlight in the distance and CG 44393, and activates the night end of his MK-124 signal flare.
0219	CG 6589 Air Station Port Angeles	Arrives on scene with the GALE RUNNER to commence the hoist.
0227	CG 6585 Air Station Port Angeles	Launches from Air Station PA.
0234	CG 44393 2 nd Boat	Arrives at the "Q" buoy and is tasked by the Station to stay there. They remain there for about six hours until daylight and the chance to return across the bar.
0242	CG 6589 Air Station Port Angeles	Overstresses its hoist, but manages to hoist both crewmembers off the GALE RUNNER.
0251	CG 6589 Air Station Port Angeles	Lands at Station QR's ball field to pass the survivors to an ambulance and depart for Station Neah Bay to refuel.
0253	CG 6003 Air Station Astoria	Arrives on scene and spots a strobe light flashing from the cliff at the back of the cove on James Island.
0320	FA DaMello Comms watchstander	On First Beach sees a flashing light down the beach and starts running towards it. While running, DaMello and another member of the beach party are hit by a log that surges towards them on a wave. The wave knocks DaMello down and the log pins him underwater. FN DaMello sees his life and family flashing before his eyes and takes a breath of seawater. DaMello's arm is dislocated by the log, but it releases him and he gets to his feet. The light seen up the beach belongs to a National Park Ranger helping with the search.
	BMCM LaForge OIC/ 2nd Boat Surfman	Heads out to First Beach with another beach party. He is overheard saying to himself, "I should have trained them more, I should have trained them more."
0334	SN Miniken 1 st Boat Crewmember	Is found unconscious without socks or boots on by the other beach party on First Beach. The beach crew performs CPR at the scene and an ambulance takes him to the hospital in Forks, WA. Taking shifts with compressions, the team of responders gives him CPR for a total of four hours.

0432	CG 6003 Air Station Astoria	Observes BM2 Bosley and MK3 Schlimme floating in the cove on James Island. They request the county's high angle rescue team be contacted to rescue SA Wingo on the cliff.
0505	CG 44393 2 nd Boat	Loses communications with the Station after its portable VHF radio dies.
0508	CG 6013 Air Station Astoria	Leaves Air Station Astoria, OR to assist in the search.
0630	CG 6013 Air Station Astoria	Deploys a rescue swimmer to the cliff SA Wingo is hanging onto. SA Wingo is in good condition.
0633	CG 6585 Air Station Port Angeles	Transfers two additional portable VHF radios to 44393.
0734	CG 44393 2 nd Boat	Safely crosses the bar back into the Quillayute River and moors at Station Quillayute River. They have been underway for six hours and 36 minutes. Until they moor and see the other slip empty, they are unaware that CG 44363 has been lost.
Approx. 0815	CG 6013 Air Station Astoria	Deploys the high-angle rescue team to retrieve SA Wingo from the cliff and hoists him to safety.
0932	BM2 Bosley OOD/ 1 st Boat Coxswain	And MK3 Schlimme are recovered from the cove on James Island by 6013's rescue swimmer. The rescue swimmer states that the wreck of 44363 is in "bad shape" and is leaking fuel.
1030	FA Ballard Non-rate	And the rest of the station are notified that SN Miniken has been pronounced dead at Forks Community Hospital.
1050	CG 6013 Air Station Astoria	Hoists the remaining five rescue team members and its rescue swimmer from the beach. The helicopter drops off the remaining Clallam County rescue team and departs for Air Station Astoria.

Aftermath

Findings from the official report, signed by CG Commandant ADM Kramek

BM2 Bosley OOD/ 1 st Boat Coxswain	Is found by the investigators to, "...not have enough rough weather bar crossings at night in a 44' MLB to prepare him for the conditions that MLB 44363 encountered on 12 February 1997 and should not have attempted to cross the bar."
	The investigators are of the opinion that BM2 Bosley viewed the updated weather forecast and had ample time to pass it to the SDO or OIC. Had either of them received this information, a Surfman would have been on board when the call came in.
MK3 Schlimme 1 st Boat Engineer	And SN Miniken, and BM2 Bosley's autopsies list their cause of death as blunt force trauma to the head.
BMCM LaForge OIC/ 2nd Boat Surfman	Was found by the investigators to have "made several key decisions... which increased the chances of survival for both the sailboat and the MLB 4363 crews."

Investigation

Finds that there were no mechanical issues with 44363 to cause the accident. The boat is so badly damaged it is cut into three pieces and hoisted off the island by a helicopter for disposal.

According to investigators, "The proximate cause of this casualty was the coxswain's failure to safely navigate MLB 44363, causing the boat to capsize and founder in the surf conditions near James Island."

But the report also highlighted excessive personnel turnover at the unit. In February 1997, "only two non-rates had been at the station longer than one year, and because of ...high turnover of personnel, a majority of the Station training is focused on providing basic, introductory skills to help new personnel get their boat crew qualifications... Due to the high turnover of personnel, the Station's operational readiness was diminished in the area of advanced skills/techniques."

At this time, of the 17 crewmembers filling boat crew positions at the station, 12 had been there less than one year (~70%). Also, despite four Surfman billets, only three surfmen were assigned at the unit, including the OIC and XPO.

A 1961 editorial about the TRIUMPH-MERMAID disaster at Stations Point Adams/ Cape Disappointment noted similar concerns about crew inexperience at those units.

Discussion

1. What was it like "playing" your specific part?

2. What do you feel when the SAR alarm goes off?

- Do our risk management tools help here?
- How do you handle this?

3. What was the culture of response and operations like in 1997? How is it today?

- Coast Guard attitudes about risk
- "You have to go out, but you don't have to come back" (then)
- "Us, ours, them, theirs" (now: balancing risk-taking with being risk-averse)
- Crew selection, support and oversight from experienced SDOs, etc.
- The Coast Guard has supported and related to its small boat stations

4. What parts of the Coast Guard system were related to this mishap? Are they the same or different today?

- Surfman assignment process
- Risk management culture/tools
- Station experience level/qualification process
- Station staffing/ non-rates
- Group taking nighttime radio guard

5. What were the effects of high turnover?

- Training focused on basic qualifications instead of advanced skills
- Today's D13 surf stations have ~40% annual turnover, exacerbated with non-rate transfers for A-School

6. Are you prepared to operate without the normal aids and references you rely on?

- In 1997, crews never practiced nighttime rough bar crossings without bar lights
- What aids and references do we rely on today?
- Can we practice taking those away and adapting?
- Do we have “backup plans” for operating in nighttime, low viz, ATON discreps, etc.?

7. Compare communications issues in 1997 and today.

- How much time passed between the initial call and when the CG asked for a position?
- Station watchstanders used to sleep in the comms room to overhear any traffic from the Group
 - Today, Sector could be conversing with a vessel in the middle of the night for 30 minutes without anyone at the station being aware of it
- There was no Rescue 21 in 1997, so targeting a vessel’s location using radio lines of bearing was imprecise
 - This highlights the importance of R21 Geo Display and promptly asking for lat/long positions
- Simple advice to have a vessel standby and wait in deep water can buy time to gather all the information and prevent a worsening situation

8. Why should we get an accurate position and observe the bar before launching?

- The GALE RUNNER’s true position might have been ascertained before the 44363 crossed the bar near James Island
- Even today, vessels often pass geographic references that don’t match their precise location
- This information can impact asset and crew selection, and overall sense of urgency

9. Compare weather forecasting and reporting in 1997 and today.

- None of the 1997 crew or command could have gotten on their phone and seen the forecast or buoy readings
- Despite modern technology, there is still plenty of information that we need to pass manually today

10. Final questions or comments?

References

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For more on the CG 44363 disaster: www.uscg44363.com



12 FEBRUARY 1997

A training remembering the CG 44363 disaster

6003/6013



(scan for diagrams)

Introduction

- Sailing vessel GALE RUNNER is transiting from San Francisco, CA to Puget Sound, WA with a crew of two
- CG Station Quillayute River (**QR**) in La Push, WA is the next station north of Station Grays Harbor. It:
 - Has a BMCM Officer in Charge (**OIC**) and BM1 Executive Petty Officer (**XPO**)
 - Has two 44' motor lifeboats (**MLB**)
 - Reports to Group/Air Station Port Angeles (**PA**), WA, (the 1997 equivalent of a Sector)
 - Has a hazardous river bar crossing in order to get into the harbor at La Push, WA
 - Has a set of stadium-like "bar lights" fixed on James Island next to the bar for night transits
 - In February 1997, they are inoperative
 - The Officer of the Day (**OOD**) reports to a Surfman Duty Officer (**SDO**)
- On 11-12 February the duty section is comprised of 10 ready boat crew members, a watchstander, and several additional non-rated members
- On 11 February, Dr. Dennis Noble, a retired Coast Guard Senior Chief Petty Officer and notable history author reports to the station for a few days to stay on board while researching a book he is writing on lifeboat stations
- The following facts are taken verbatim from the USCG Administrative Investigation and Dr. Dennis Noble's book
- Reading takes about 40 minutes with 14 speakers and one facilitator
- Consider turning off the lights and having any members without speaking parts close their eyes.
- Each reader should say their **highlighted parts by speaking the time, name, and details, for example**, "At 0700 FA DaMello assumes the station's communications watch..."

Tuesday 11 FEB 1997

Time	Member	Details
Morning	GALE RUNNER Sailing Vessel	Is in Westport, WA and stops in at CG Station Grays Harbor. GALE RUNNER receives the weather forecast and decides to get underway to continue north.
0700	FA DaMello Comms watchstander	Assumes the Station's communications watch until 0700 on 12FEB97.
1640	FA DaMello Comms watchstander	Receives the updated NOAA weather forecast which calls for NW wind 35-40kt and seas building to 14'. For 12 February, the forecast predicts NW winds 30kt and combined seas 18'.
Approx. 1730	BM1 Placido SDO/ 1 st Boat Surfman	<p>Gets together with OOD BM2 Bosley and drives to the station's bar overlook to observe last light bar conditions. He observes that seas aren't bad and he feels comfortable going home on recall for the night, about 15 minutes away.</p> <p>He later said, "From the look of the bar and what Bosley had told me about the weather, there was no need for me to stay aboard."</p>
1740	BM2 Bosley OOD/ 1 st Boat Coxswain	Views the NOAA forecast on the computer and logs his initials, "D.A.B." to acknowledge it.

Evening	GALE RUNNER Sailing Vessel	Begins to encounter heavy weather and decides to head for the QR bar entrance to seek safe harbor.
After 2130	BM2 Bosley OOD/ 1 st Boat Coxswain	Does his evening round with MK3 Schlimme and FN Matthews and drives out to the bar overlook to check things out. FN Matthews recalls BM2 and MK3 saying that, “they [hope] they [don’t] get a case [tonight].”
Between 2130- 2200	BMCM LaForge OIC/ 2nd Boat Surfman	Returns from an appointment in Port Angeles and checks in with the OOD at the station. BM2 Bosley does not pass the 1640 weather forecast, but tells the OIC that the weather is supposed to pick up overnight. Without knowing of the forecast details, the OIC agrees with the OOD that the ready boat Surfman can remain on recall for the night. The OIC leaves for his home, 5 minutes away from the station.
2130	Dr. Noble CG History Author	Finishes his conversations with the crew and goes to bed.
Approx. 2200	BM2 Bosley OOD/ 1 st Boat Coxswain	Calls the SDO who remembers Bosley saying, “Nothing [is] going on. The winds [have] picked up a little bit... the weather [is] supposed to pick up later [tomorrow].”
2200	FA DaMello Comms watchstander	Passes the radio guard to Group PA for the night and sets up the cot to sleep in the comms room.

Wednesday 12 FEB 1997

Approx. 0015	GALE RUNNER Sailing Vessel	Hails Station QR on VHF 16 to obtain a bar report. Telecommunications Specialist Third Class (TC3) Marshall at Group PA answers for Station QR, consults the status board and reports, “no restrictions.”
	FA DaMello Comms watchstander	Wakes up to the radio traffic between Group and the GALE RUNNER and notices high winds outside. The Station’s anemometer is registering gusts of 50kt. On his own initiative, DaMello remembers the 1640 forecast for 18’ seas and intercoms TC3 Marshall at Group to tell her about the wind he’s seeing and the forecast for seas. He says he thinks that if the OOD knew about the 50kt gusts, then he would put a restriction on the bar.
	Group Port Angeles	Watchstander TC3 Marshall tells FA DaMello to hail the GAIL RUNNER and pass them the current weather conditions.
	FA DaMello Comms watchstander	Hails the sailing vessel and asks, “Are you crossing the bar?”
	GALE RUNNER Sailing Vessel	Crewmember Marcia Infante replies, “Affirmative. We are at the entrance now.” She doesn’t pass a GPS position.
	FA DaMello Comms watchstander	Passes the latest winds and advises the GALE RUNNER that the bar could be breaking. Next, FA DaMello calls BM2 Bosley in the OOD room to brief him of the weather and situation.
	BM2 Bosley OOD/ 1 st Boat Coxswain	Comes into comms and asks DaMello if he has GALE RUNNER’s position. DaMello says that the caller has not relayed their position. Bosley tells DaMello to call the GALE RUNNER and obtain their position. Bosley phones SDO BM1 Placido at his home and informs him of the radio call and that he thinks that it’s a bad idea for the sailboat to come across the bar. BM1 asks if he has a position for the sailboat. To keep listening for information, Bosely places the SDO on hold.

	FA DaMello Comms watchstander	Asks the GALE RUNNER for their position. He hears, "We're at 47, 51..." and then static silence.
	GALE RUNNER Sailing Vessel	Crewmember Ken Schlag is steering the sailing vessel and Marcia Infante is on the radio. Suddenly, the sailboat is struck by a rogue wave, knocked down, and dismasted. The radio antenna is damaged and Ken Schlag is thrown overboard. He is tethered with a safety harness and manages to pull himself back onboard. Portholes are blown out by the wave and the GALE RUNNER begins taking on water.
	FA DaMello Comms watchstander	Tries again to hail the boat, "Sailing vessel, this is Quillayute River on 22, over."
Approx. 00:26	GALE RUNNER Sailing Vessel	Crewmember Marcia Infante breaks the silence, "MAYDAY! MAYDAY! THIS IS SAILING VESSEL GALE RUNNER! U.S. COAST GUARD! WE'RE TAKING ON WATER!"
	GALE RUNNER Sailing Vessel	Crewmember Marcia Infante repeats her mayday calls every few minutes. She looks at the GPS plotter to reference the boat's position, but sees a black screen and figures that the GPS is broken. In fact, the GPS is in screensaver mode and she could have pushed any button to bring the chart and GPS position back up on the display.
	FA DaMello Comms watchstander	Only hears static after the mayday call. Group also hears static and suggests Station switch radio sites. DaMello says that he has already tried that.
Approx. 00:26	BM2 Bosley OOD/ 1 st Boat Coxswain	Has gathered this key information in a very short period: there is a sailing vessel that says it is at the entrance to the bar, it has begun taking on water, and the CG has lost communications with it. BM2 Bosley hits the SAR alarm and pipes, "Ready boat crew lay to the ready boat! Sailboat on the bar taking on water."
	BM2 Bosley OOD/ 1 st Boat Coxswain	Takes the SDO phone call off hold and says, "I'm heading for the door."
	BM1 Placido SDO/ 1 st Boat Surfman	Replies, "Call Master Chief [the OIC]. I'm right behind you" and gets in his car to drive back to the station.
		Later, BM1 Placido said that, "If I had known how bad the bar was, I would have told Bosley to wait until I could get to the station."
	SA Wingo 1 st Boat Crewmember	Runs out of his barracks room with SN Miniken and down to the boat.
	Group Port Angeles	Watchstander TC3 Marshall passes that the Group has received more radio transmissions from a frantic woman who doesn't understand Station QR's instructions.
		Group's Duty Officer briefs the Group Commanding Officer, CAPT Volk, at the direction of the Group Senior Duty Officer. The Group is still trying to gather information and is not yet trying to launch a helicopter.
0030	FA DaMello Comms watchstander	Calls and notifies BMCM LaForge of the case and BMCM comes back to the station from his home.
0031	FA DaMello Comms watchstander	Recalls the second boat crew in accordance with the unit's standing orders.
	BM2 Bosley OOD/ 1 st Boat Coxswain	Is one of the first down to the ready boat, CG 44363, and urgently wants to get underway. He runs back up to the station and yells, "Where is my crew?!"

	BMCM LaForge OIC/ 2nd Boat Surfman	Stops at the bar overlook to scan for signs of a sailboat before arriving back at the Station. He notes that there is reduced visibility, but that he can still see the “Q” buoy a mile from the bar. Winds are 30kt with stronger gusts.
0034	BM2 Bosley OOD/ 1 st Boat Coxswain	Gets CG 44363 underway for the SAR case. BM2 Bosley doesn’t brief his crew on the mission and the four are all wearing Mustang anti-exposure suits. If he believed the sailboat taking on water was on the bar, he would have thought the situation was very urgent.
	SA Wingo 1 st Boat Crewmember	Hands out pyro vests and SN Miniken hands out surf belts as the boat gets underway. Wingo and Miniken clip into D-rings and later, SA Wingo said that he had presumed MK3 Schlimme clipped in, but he wasn’t certain if BM2 Bosley wore his belt or clipped it in. No one on 44363 puts on a helmet, even though policy requires them to and no one speaks up about it. Bosley’s helmet was clipped behind his coxswain chair and everyone else’s helmets were stowed below in their SAR bags.
	BMCM LaForge OIC/ 2nd Boat Surfman	Is still at the overlook and observes the 44363 leaving the boat basin. He does not see its navigation lights energized. The OIC radios the 44363 and informs them that he does not see a sailboat in the immediate area and orders BM2 Bosley, “To check out the bar to see if they could cross.” The OIC heads back to the station.
0043	Group Port Angeles	Watchstander TC3 Marshall intercoms Station QR to have the ready boat standby because they think the case might be a hoax. There has been a rash of hoax calls with a young voice in northwestern Washington over the past two weeks.
	MK3 Schlimme 1 st Boat Engineer	Comes over to the starboard side of the 44363 as it gets underway, adjusts the radar, and then returns the engineer’s spot on the port side of the coxswain. While outbound, he reminds BM2 Bosley to not let the lube oil pressures get too high.
	BM2 Bosley OOD/ 1 st Boat Coxswain	Replies, “Yeah, I got it.”
	SN Miniken 1 st Boat Crewmember	Operates the port spotlight.
	SA Wingo 1 st Boat Crewmember	Is ordered by BM2 Bosley to man the starboard spotlight and illuminate Wash Rock.
	MK3 Schlimme 1 st Boat Engineer	Yells at Bosley, “Let’s get the fuck out of here,” just before passing Wash Rock.
	BM2 Bosley OOD/ 1 st Boat Coxswain	Replies, “Fuck that!” Schlimme may have been indicating a desire to go back to the station or instead, to go out to deeper water past the bar.
	FA Ballard Non-rate	Assists FA DaMello in comms and calls the 44363 to pass the Group’s instructions to have the ready boat standby.
	BM2 Bosley OOD/ 1 st Boat Coxswain	Responds, “Standby, we’re a little busy,” likely because BM2 Bosley is focused on negotiating the rough seas on the bar while heading outbound. Regarding the possibility of a hoax, Bosley tells the crew, “I hope not!”
Approx. 0044	SA Wingo 1 st Boat Crewmember	Is told by BM2 Bosley to aim the spotlight starboard towards James Island around the time the 44363 is at Wash Rock. Bosley wants to keep the island off the starboard beam. The 44363 is 100-150 yards off of the island.
0045	BM2 Bosley OOD/ 1 st Boat Coxswain	Radios the station that the 44363 has safely crossed the bar and that it is 16-18’ past the bar and evening out. Winds are from the WSW.

	Dr. Noble CG History Author	Joins BMCM LaForge on another trip out to the bar overlook. While driving there, the two hear the 44363 say they made it safely across the bar. BMCM LaForge thinks that the 44363 is likely turning away from James Island and toward the sea buoy into deeper (safer) water.
	SA Wingo 1 st Boat Crewmember	Hears Bosley radio the station that it is 15-16' out (a factual inconsistency) and later said, "I was about to call BS. Those waves were a lot higher than 15-16' and it wasn't getting better, but I was like, 'oh well.'"
		The 44363 is not transiting south on the safe route outbound to the "Q" buoy, but is actually being set north towards the edge of James Island.
		SA Wingo spots a rock and yells, "Rock starboard side! Ten feet!" The boat hits something.
Approx. 0048	BM2 Bosley OOD/ 1 st Boat Coxswain	Yells, "What was that!?" Someone else shouts, "Wave port side!"
	SA Wingo 1 st Boat Crewmember	Sees an enormous wave off the port bow and the boat is rolled over to starboard. SA Wingo hits his head on something and tastes blood. The boat rights itself with its bow pointing towards James Island. When the boat comes up, SA Wingo is twisted in his belt and wrapped up in the canvas dodger. The mast is bent flat to the port side. Wingo reaches for the spotlight and realizes it has broken off the top of the cabin and is gone. The motor lifeboat turns towards the island with way on. The 44363 has been underway for approximately 14 minutes.
Approx. 0048	BM2 Bosley OOD/ 1 st Boat Coxswain	Radios, "Capsized and disoriented."
	FA DaMello Comms watchstander	Hears the call about the boat being capsized, but he and Group PA are confused if the caller is the GALE RUNNER or the 44363. Group and Station hail both boats.
	CG 44393 2 nd Boat	Is the second boat and the recalled crew for it begins arriving at the Station. They begin to dress out in anti-exposure suits and then change their minds, opting for dry suits. The crew heads down to the boat and passes the communications room. They overhear, "Capsized..." but think it is in reference to the sail boat.
	MK3 Schlimme 1 st Boat Engineer	Yells, "We're still on the bar!"
	BM2 Bosley OOD/ 1 st Boat Coxswain	Replies, "Find me buoy 3!"
	SA Wingo 1 st Boat Crewmember	Can see the lights of the town of La Push, but doesn't see Buoy 3 which is too far back around the eastern side of James Island to be visible.
	BMCM LaForge OIC/ 2nd Boat Surfman	And Dr. Noble hear the 44363 say they rolled. The OIC can't see the MLB's navigation lights, but for a moment sees its spotlight sweeping rapidly towards the south from what he thinks is the seaward side of James Island. The OIC now knows the 44363 is in trouble (too close to rocky James Island) and calls the station to get the second boat underway. He also tells the station to call Group PA and get a helicopter dispatched.
	FA DaMello Comms watchstander	Calls the OIC back and passes that Group's duty officer wants to talk with him because Group is still concerned the call is a hoax.

	BMCM LaForge OIC/ 2nd Boat Surfman	And Dr. Noble return to the Station and the OIC tells the SDO that the 44363 is in trouble. BMCM LaForge phones Group PA and says he has, "A serious situation and still [needs] the HH-65A helicopter launched" and also requests an HH-60 helicopter from Astoria, OR.
0049	GALE RUNNER Sailing Vessel	Passes their full position to Group PA.
Approx. 0049	SA Wingo 1 st Boat Crewmember	Hears someone shout something. The boat is hit by a wave on the port quarter and pitch-poles, end over end. Upon re-righting itself, the 44363 rests on the rocks and he knows it is out of the water because the engine noise is different. The mast and entire top of the cabin have sheared off. BM2 Bosley and SN Miniken are gone. The ship's clock recovered from the wreckage of the 44363 was stopped at exactly 00h:49m:03s. CG 44363 has been underway for about 15 minutes.
	MK3 Schlimme 1 st Boat Engineer	Takes control of the 44363.
	SA Wingo 1 st Boat Crewmember	Panics and says, "We have to get out of here" and begins to unclip his surf belt.
	MK3 Schlimme 1 st Boat Engineer	Convinces Wingo that it's safest to stay with the boat and to clip back in. He asks Wingo for the boat's radio and tries to call the station with their position.
	SA Wingo 1 st Boat Crewmember	Looks down at the radio while Schlimme makes the call and sees that it's broken. Wingo realizes that MK3 Schlimme "Was just doing it to calm me down, and it worked because suddenly I was super calm. He saved my life by keeping me on the boat."
	MK3 Schlimme 1 st Boat Engineer	Tries to get himself and SA Wingo down into the forward compartment of the 44363, but can't because the handle of the watertight door is jammed from the boat's impact with rocks. Seeing another wave approaching, Schlimme yells, "Hold on!"
	SA Wingo 1 st Boat Crewmember	Feels the boat roll for a third time after the 44363 is knocked off the rock it was resting on and pushed against the rock cliffs. Underwater, he notes a "tremendous quiet." When the 44363 rights again, MK3 Schlimme is gone and Wingo sees a body float by the boat. He can't throw a life ring to it because both life rings are missing.
		CG 44363 has been underway for about 20 minutes.
		Wingo feels the boat drifting backwards and banging along the rocks into the cove on James Island. He sees a strobe light flashing in the cove, grabs the strobe light from his pyro vest, and turns it on. SA Wingo remembers that he thinks he placed the boat's engines in neutral, but doesn't secure them. Wingo grabs his MK-79 flare kit, fires five flares into the sky and two horizontally towards the beach to illuminate it. Like Schlimme, he tries to get into the forward compartment where there is a portable VHF radio and more flares, but also finds the door jammed.
Approx. 0055	BMCM LaForge OIC/ 2nd Boat Surfman	Is off the phone with Group PA after asking for helicopters and someone at the station tells him they've spotted red flares. The OIC finds Dr. Noble and says, "Let's go back to the bar."
	BM1 Placido SDO/ 1 st Boat Surfman	Shouts, "I'm going" and runs down to the 44393.
	Dr. Noble CG History Author	Parks at the bar overlook with BMCM LaForge and sees a red flare in the sky.

	BM1 Placido SDO/ 1 st Boat Surfman	Gets down to the 44393 and gives a quick brief on the mission. At this point, the second boat crew doesn't know the 44363 is in trouble. He later said that, "I wanted to stick my nose close to the bar and look around before trying to get across. I had no Goddam clue what the bar was doing."
0058	CG 44393 2 nd Boat	Gets underway with BM1 Placido as Surfman and three other crewmen. By chance, BM3 Martin is on second boat, but should have been on the ready boat. Because of his pregnant wife, the surfmen had given him as much time on second boat as possible. CG 44363 got underway approximately 24 minutes earlier.
	BM1 Placido SDO/ 1 st Boat Surfman	Sees a red flare in the sky shortly after leaving the boat basin. He thinks it could be from the 44363. He decides that they must cross the bar.
	Dr. Noble CG History Author	And BMCM LaForge have been at the overlook for a few minutes and see the 44393 leaving the protection of the river. The OIC thinks he can help keep track of the 44393 and advise them if they begin to get set towards James Island. In his own words, Dr. Noble remembers seeing the, "Small white boat rising. Rising. Rising. Rising until it seemed to stand on its stern. White water almost enveloping the small boat. Then the plunge downward."
	BMCM LaForge OIC/ 2nd Boat Surfman	Uses the VHF radio in his truck to communicate back and forth with the 44393 on the bar. As the 44393 heads farther out to sea, he can tell that the length of the swells underneath the boat are lengthening out. He is able to see the 44393 getting set north towards James Island and advises the boat. Dr. Noble and the OIC see more red flares from the western part of James Island.
Approx. 0100	Group Port Angeles	<p>Duty Officer first called the Group's Operations Officer around 0030. He now calls the Group's Senior Duty Officer (SDO) in his duty room and informs him of the case. The SDO tells him to hit the SAR alarm at the Air Station.</p> <p>Next, the Group Duty Officer calls the Group Commanding Officer again and tells him that the helicopter is launching because they have lost communications with the 44363 and have spotted red flares. Until that time, the CO did not know that 44363 had gotten underway from Station Quillayute River. Group CO CAPT Volk drives into the Air Station and assigns a non-rate in the command center to scribe everything he sees and hears as the case goes on.</p>
0107	SA Wingo 1 st Boat Crewmember	<p>Floats with the 44363, gauging his progress into the cove by the illumination from the boat's aft deck light light. He notices the time on his watch: 0107.</p> <p>Starts praying, "Not a prayer of all the things I would or wouldn't do if I was saved, it was just an all-out cry for help: 'Please get my boat to shore.'" The boat's stern swings around and points towards the beach at the far back of the cove.</p> <p>SA Wingo thinks he sees a tree towards shore, unclips his surf belt, hops down into knee-deep water, and wades into the beach. CG 44363 comes to its final resting place at the back of the northern cove in James Island.</p>
0110	CG 44393 2 nd Boat	Crosses the bar.
0110	Group Port Angeles	Watchstander TC3 Marshall transmits an Urgent Marine Information Broadcast.

	BM1 Placido SDO/ 1 st Boat Surfman	Remembers that his, "Crew performed like they were supposed to... They constantly fed me information. I felt like a machine. I absorbed the information and my body performed the necessary motions." Eventually he sees flares both to the north (from the 44363) and from the south (from the GALE RUNNER).
		He remembers, "I knew which ones were ours. I started to push back in and had to decide: Should I go for the sailboat, or our boat? It was one of the hardest decisions I ever had to make. I [later] saw the helicopter starting to search for our boat. I knew the helo could probably help out our boat better than I could, so I headed for the sailboat."
0121	BM1 Placido SDO/ 1 st Boat Surfman	Radios, "We are on handheld. Our antenna was damaged by a breaker."
	BMCM LaForge OIC/ 2nd Boat Surfman	Advises the 44393 to head to the "Q" sea buoy and stay in deep water.
	CG 44393 2 nd Boat	Eventually depletes the battery on their portable VHF radio and loses all communications with the station and BMCM LaForge at the overlook. They proceed to the "Q" buoy.
	BMCM LaForge OIC/ 2nd Boat Surfman	Calls Group again for helicopter assistance because he has a sailboat in distress, a missing MLB, and another MLB he's lost communications with.
0123	CG 6589 Air Station Port Angeles	Takes off from Air Station PA. BM2 Bosley, MK3 Schlimme, and SN Miniken are already dead.
	BMCM LaForge OIC/ 2nd Boat Surfman	And Dr. Noble return to the station.
After 0130	Group Port Angeles	Commanding Officer (CO) CAPT Volk calls nearby units to request additional surface assets. The 110' cutter CUTTYHUNK is in Neah Bay and is dispatched towards La Push. CAPT Volk calls CWO2 Robert Coster, the CO of the Station Neah Bay, and asks if he can send one of his lifeboats south to help. CWO2 Coster drives in to his station and reviews the conditions. He makes the difficult decision that he cannot safely send his crews. CAPT Volk conferences with the CO of Group Astoria and CWO2 Randy Lewis, the CO of Station Grays Harbor. CWO2 Lewis also declines sending his station's 52' MLB due to the conditions. Later, CAPT Volk says that both stations' CO's, "Made the right decision."
0157	CG 6589 Air Station Port Angeles	Arrives on scene, is briefed about the situation by BMCM LaForge, and commences a search near James Island.
0159	GALE RUNNER Sailing Vessel	Passes their accurate position to the Coast Guard after reestablishing communications. They are not on the bar, but farther south near "The Needles," a group of jagged rock features sticking out from the ocean, about three miles from the bar.
0201	BMCM LaForge OIC/ 2nd Boat Surfman	Orders a beach search for survivors and several crewmembers, local police, and National Park Rangers set out for First Beach in anti-exposure coveralls and helmets.

0204	CG 6003 Air Station Astoria	Launches from Air Station Astoria.
	BMCM LaForge OIC/ 2nd Boat Surfman	Has to decide where to send resources: to the GALE RUNNER or to James Island for his lifeboat crew? He radios the CG 6589 back and recommends they leave James Island and proceed to the GALE RUNNER's position because it is only minutes away from the rocks. The OIC advises the watchstander to keep off the radio as much as possible because the helicopter may only have a brief window to transmit that they're in trouble too. BMCM LaForge has 14 lives and three Coast Guard assets in his hands.
0205	CG 6589 Air Station Port Angeles	Diverts from the vicinity of James Island and flies south towards The Needles. To make an approach on the GALE RUNNER, they must fly over, around, and through the 190' tall rock islands. The helicopter is being buffeted by winds and keeps fighting to make new approaches as the sailboat is washed over by breaking waves and drifts between the rock pinnacles.
	FA DaMello Comms watchstander	Is relieved of the communications watch to help the beach party. At First Beach, he and two other members run down the beach, dodging waves.
	SA Wingo 1 st Boat Crewmember	Sees a helicopter searchlight in the distance and CG 44393, and activates the night end of his MK-124 signal flare.
0219	CG 6589 Air Station Port Angeles	Arrives on scene with the GALE RUNNER to commence the hoist.
0227	CG 6585 Air Station Port Angeles	Launches from Air Station PA.
0234	CG 44393 2 nd Boat	Arrives at the "Q" buoy and is tasked by the Station to stay there. They remain there for about six hours until daylight and the chance to return across the bar.
0242	CG 6589 Air Station Port Angeles	Overstresses its hoist, but manages to hoist both crewmembers off the GALE RUNNER.
0251	CG 6589 Air Station Port Angeles	Lands at Station QR's ball field to pass the survivors to an ambulance and depart for Station Neah Bay to refuel.
0253	CG 6003 Air Station Astoria	Arrives on scene and spots a strobe light flashing from the cliff at the back of the cove on James Island.
0320	FA DaMello Comms watchstander	On First Beach sees a flashing light down the beach and starts running towards it. While running, DaMello and another member of the beach party are hit by a log that surges towards them on a wave. The wave knocks DaMello down and the log pins him underwater. FN DaMello sees his life and family flashing before his eyes and takes a breath of seawater. DaMello's arm is dislocated by the log, but it releases him and he gets to his feet. The light seen up the beach belongs to a National Park Ranger helping with the search.
	BMCM LaForge OIC/ 2nd Boat Surfman	Heads out to First Beach with another beach party. He is overheard saying to himself, "I should have trained them more, I should have trained them more."
0334	SN Miniken 1 st Boat Crewmember	Is found unconscious without socks or boots on by the other beach party on First Beach. The beach crew performs CPR at the scene and an ambulance takes him to the hospital in Forks, WA. Taking shifts with compressions, the team of responders gives him CPR for a total of four hours.

0432	CG 6003 Air Station Astoria	Observes BM2 Bosley and MK3 Schlimme floating in the cove on James Island. They request the county's high angle rescue team be contacted to rescue SA Wingo on the cliff.
0505	CG 44393 2 nd Boat	Loses communications with the Station after its portable VHF radio dies.
0508	CG 6013 Air Station Astoria	Leaves Air Station Astoria, OR to assist in the search.
0630	CG 6013 Air Station Astoria	Deploys a rescue swimmer to the cliff SA Wingo is hanging onto. SA Wingo is in good condition.
0633	CG 6585 Air Station Port Angeles	Transfers two additional portable VHF radios to 44393.
0734	CG 44393 2 nd Boat	Safely crosses the bar back into the Quillayute River and moors at Station Quillayute River. They have been underway for six hours and 36 minutes. Until they moor and see the other slip empty, they are unaware that CG 44363 has been lost.
Approx. 0815	CG 6013 Air Station Astoria	Deploys the high-angle rescue team to retrieve SA Wingo from the cliff and hoists him to safety.
0932	BM2 Bosley OOD/ 1 st Boat Coxswain	And MK3 Schlimme are recovered from the cove on James Island by 6013's rescue swimmer. The rescue swimmer states that the wreck of 44363 is in "bad shape" and is leaking fuel.
1030	FA Ballard Non-rate	And the rest of the station are notified that SN Miniken has been pronounced dead at Forks Community Hospital.
1050	CG 6013 Air Station Astoria	Hoists the remaining five rescue team members and its rescue swimmer from the beach. The helicopter drops off the remaining Clallam County rescue team and departs for Air Station Astoria.

Aftermath

Findings from the official report, signed by CG Commandant ADM Kramek

BM2 Bosley OOD/ 1 st Boat Coxswain	Is found by the investigators to, "...not have enough rough weather bar crossings at night in a 44' MLB to prepare him for the conditions that MLB 44363 encountered on 12 February 1997 and should not have attempted to cross the bar."
	The investigators are of the opinion that BM2 Bosley viewed the updated weather forecast and had ample time to pass it to the SDO or OIC. Had either of them received this information, a Surfman would have been on board when the call came in.
MK3 Schlimme 1 st Boat Engineer	And SN Miniken, and BM2 Bosley's autopsies list their cause of death as blunt force trauma to the head.
BMCM LaForge OIC/ 2nd Boat Surfman	Was found by the investigators to have "made several key decisions... which increased the chances of survival for both the sailboat and the MLB 4363 crews."

Investigation	<p>Finds that there were no mechanical issues with 44363 to cause the accident. The boat is so badly damaged it is cut into three pieces and hoisted off the island by a helicopter for disposal.</p> <p>According to investigators, “The proximate cause of this casualty was the coxswain’s failure to safely navigate MLB 44363, causing the boat to capsize and founder in the surf conditions near James Island.”</p> <p>But the report also highlighted excessive personnel turnover at the unit. In February 1997, “only two non-rates had been at the station longer than one year, and because of ...high turnover of personnel, a majority of the Station training is focused on providing basic, introductory skills to help new personnel get their boat crew qualifications... Due to the high turnover of personnel, the Station’s operational readiness was diminished in the area of advanced skills/techniques.”</p> <p>At this time, of the 17 crewmembers filling boat crew positions at the station, 12 had been there less than one year (~70%). Also, despite four Surfman billets, only three surfmen were assigned at the unit, including the OIC and XPO.</p> <p>A 1961 editorial about the TRIUMPH-MERMAID disaster at Stations Point Adams/ Cape Disappointment noted similar concerns about crew inexperience at those units.</p>
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Discussion

10. What was it like “playing” your specific part?

11. What do you feel when the SAR alarm goes off?

- Do our risk management tools help here?
- How do you handle this?

12. What was the culture of response and operations like in 1997? How is it today?

- Coast Guard attitudes about risk
- “You have to go out, but you don’t have to come back” (then)
- “Us, ours, them, theirs” (now: balancing risk-taking with being risk-averse)
- Crew selection, support and oversight from experienced SDOs, etc.
- The Coast Guard has supported and related to its small boat stations

13. What parts of the Coast Guard system were related to this mishap? Are they the same or different today?

- Surfman assignment process
- Risk management culture/tools
- Station experience level/qualification process
- Station staffing
- Group nighttime radio guard

14. What were the effects of high turnover?

- Training focused on basic qualifications instead of advanced skills
- Today’s D13 surf stations have ~40% annual turnover, exacerbated with non-rate transfers for A-School

15. Are you prepared to operate without the normal aids and references you rely on?

- In 1997, crews never practiced nighttime rough bar crossings without bar lights
- What aids and references do we rely on today?
- Can we practice taking those away and adapting?
- Do we have “backup plans” for operating in nighttime, low viz, ATON discreps, etc.?

16. Compare communications issues in 1997 and today.

- How much time passed between the initial call and when the CG asked for a position?
- Station watchstanders used to sleep in the comms room to overhear any traffic from the Group
 - Today, Sector could be conversing with a vessel in the middle of the night for 30 minutes without anyone at the station being aware of it
- There was no Rescue 21 in 1997, so targeting a vessel’s location using radio lines of bearing was imprecise
 - This highlights the importance of R21 Geo Display and promptly asking for lat/long positions
- Simple advice to have a vessel standby and wait in deep water can buy time to gather all the information and prevent a worsening situation

17. Why should we get an accurate position and observe the bar before launching?

- The GALE RUNNER’s true position might have been ascertained before the 44363 crossed the bar near James Island
- Even today, vessels often pass geographic references that don’t match their precise location
- This information can impact asset and crew selection, and overall sense of urgency

18. Compare weather forecasting and reporting in 1997 and today.

- None of the 1997 crew or command could have gotten on their phone and seen the forecast or buoy readings
- Despite modern technology, there is still plenty of information that we need to pass manually today

10. Final questions or comments?

References

CDR Hasselbalch, James M. *Investigation into the Capsizing and Subsequent Loss of MLB 44363 and the Death of Three Coast Guard Members That Occurred at Coast Guard Station Quillayute River on 12 FEB 1997*. March, 1997 (including reviews by RADM J. David Spade and ADM Robert E. Kramek).

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For more on the CG 44363 disaster: www.uscg44363.com



12 FEBRUARY 1997

A training remembering the CG 44363 disaster

6585/6589



(scan for diagrams)

Introduction

- Sailing vessel GALE RUNNER is transiting from San Francisco, CA to Puget Sound, WA with a crew of two
- CG Station Quillayute River (**QR**) in La Push, WA is the next station north of Station Grays Harbor. It:
 - Has a BMCM Officer in Charge (**OIC**) and BM1 Executive Petty Officer (**XPO**)
 - Has two 44' motor lifeboats (**MLB**)
 - Reports to Group/Air Station Port Angeles (**PA**), WA, (the 1997 equivalent of a Sector)
 - Has a hazardous river bar crossing in order to get into the harbor at La Push, WA
 - Has a set of stadium-like "bar lights" fixed on James Island next to the bar for night transits
 - In February 1997, they are inoperative
 - The Officer of the Day (**OOD**) reports to a Surfman Duty Officer (**SDO**)
- On 11-12 February the duty section is comprised of 10 ready boat crew members, a watchstander, and several additional non-rated members
- On 11 February, Dr. Dennis Noble, a retired Coast Guard Senior Chief Petty Officer and notable history author reports to the station for a few days to stay on board while researching a book he is writing on lifeboat stations
- The following facts are taken verbatim from the USCG Administrative Investigation and Dr. Dennis Noble's book
- Reading takes about 40 minutes with 14 speakers and one facilitator
- Consider turning off the lights and having any members without speaking parts close their eyes.
- Each reader should say their **highlighted parts by speaking the time, name, and details, for example**, "At 0700 FA DaMello assumes the station's communications watch..."

Tuesday 11 FEB 1997

Time	Member	Details
Morning	GALE RUNNER Sailing Vessel	Is in Westport, WA and stops in at CG Station Grays Harbor. GALE RUNNER receives the weather forecast and decides to get underway to continue north.
0700	FA DaMello Comms watchstander	Assumes the Station's communications watch until 0700 on 12FEB97.
1640	FA DaMello Comms watchstander	Receives the updated NOAA weather forecast which calls for NW wind 35-40kt and seas building to 14'. For 12 February, the forecast predicts NW winds 30kt and combined seas 18'.
Approx. 1730	BM1 Placido SDO/ 1 st Boat Surfman	<p>Gets together with OOD BM2 Bosley and drives to the station's bar overlook to observe last light bar conditions. He observes that seas aren't bad and he feels comfortable going home on recall for the night, about 15 minutes away.</p> <p>He later said, "From the look of the bar and what Bosley had told me about the weather, there was no need for me to stay aboard."</p>
1740	BM2 Bosley OOD/ 1 st Boat Coxswain	Views the NOAA forecast on the computer and logs his initials, "D.A.B." to acknowledge it.

Evening	GALE RUNNER Sailing Vessel	Begins to encounter heavy weather and decides to head for the QR bar entrance to seek safe harbor.
After 2130	BM2 Bosley OOD/ 1 st Boat Coxswain	Does his evening round with MK3 Schlimme and FN Matthews and drives out to the bar overlook to check things out. FN Matthews recalls BM2 and MK3 saying that, “they [hope] they [don’t] get a case [tonight].”
Between 2130- 2200	BMCM LaForge OIC/ 2nd Boat Surfman	Returns from an appointment in Port Angeles and checks in with the OOD at the station. BM2 Bosley does not pass the 1640 weather forecast, but tells the OIC that the weather is supposed to pick up overnight. Without knowing of the forecast details, the OIC agrees with the OOD that the ready boat Surfman can remain on recall for the night. The OIC leaves for his home, 5 minutes away from the station.
2130	Dr. Noble CG History Author	Finishes his conversations with the crew and goes to bed.
Approx. 2200	BM2 Bosley OOD/ 1 st Boat Coxswain	Calls the SDO who remembers Bosley saying, “Nothing [is] going on. The winds [have] picked up a little bit... the weather [is] supposed to pick up later [tomorrow].”
2200	FA DaMello Comms watchstander	Passes the radio guard to Group PA for the night and sets up the cot to sleep in the comms room.

Wednesday 12 FEB 1997

Approx. 0015	GALE RUNNER Sailing Vessel	Hails Station QR on VHF 16 to obtain a bar report. Telecommunications Specialist Third Class (TC3) Marshall at Group PA answers for Station QR, consults the status board and reports, “no restrictions.”
	FA DaMello Comms watchstander	Wakes up to the radio traffic between Group and the GALE RUNNER and notices high winds outside. The Station’s anemometer is registering gusts of 50kt. On his own initiative, DaMello remembers the 1640 forecast for 18’ seas and intercoms TC3 Marshall at Group to tell her about the wind he’s seeing and the forecast for seas. He says he thinks that if the OOD knew about the 50kt gusts, then he would put a restriction on the bar.
	Group Port Angeles	Watchstander TC3 Marshall tells FA DaMello to hail the GAIL RUNNER and pass them the current weather conditions.
	FA DaMello Comms watchstander	Hails the sailing vessel and asks, “Are you crossing the bar?”
	GALE RUNNER Sailing Vessel	Crewmember Marcia Infante replies, “Affirmative. We are at the entrance now.” She doesn’t pass a GPS position.
	FA DaMello Comms watchstander	Passes the latest winds and advises the GALE RUNNER that the bar could be breaking. Next, FA DaMello calls BM2 Bosley in the OOD room to brief him of the weather and situation.
	BM2 Bosley OOD/ 1 st Boat Coxswain	Comes into comms and asks DaMello if he has GALE RUNNER’s position. DaMello says that the caller has not relayed their position. Bosley tells DaMello to call the GALE RUNNER and obtain their position. Bosley phones SDO BM1 Placido at his home and informs him of the radio call and that he thinks that it’s a bad idea for the sailboat to come across the bar. BM1 asks if he has a position for the sailboat. To keep listening for information, Bosely places the SDO on hold.

	FA DaMello Comms watchstander	Asks the GALE RUNNER for their position. He hears, "We're at 47, 51..." and then static silence.
	GALE RUNNER Sailing Vessel	Crewmember Ken Schlag is steering the sailing vessel and Marcia Infante is on the radio. Suddenly, the sailboat is struck by a rogue wave, knocked down, and dismasted. The radio antenna is damaged and Ken Schlag is thrown overboard. He is tethered with a safety harness and manages to pull himself back onboard. Portholes are blown out by the wave and the GALE RUNNER begins taking on water.
	FA DaMello Comms watchstander	Tries again to hail the boat, "Sailing vessel, this is Quillayute River on 22, over."
Approx. 00:26	GALE RUNNER Sailing Vessel	Crewmember Marcia Infante breaks the silence, "MAYDAY! MAYDAY! THIS IS SAILING VESSEL <i>GALE RUNNER</i> ! U.S. COAST GUARD! WE'RE TAKING ON WATER!"
	GALE RUNNER Sailing Vessel	Crewmember Marcia Infante repeats her mayday calls every few minutes. She looks at the GPS plotter to reference the boat's position, but sees a black screen and figures that the GPS is broken. In fact, the GPS is in screensaver mode and she could have pushed any button to bring the chart and GPS position back up on the display.
	FA DaMello Comms watchstander	Only hears static after the mayday call. Group also hears static and suggests Station switch radio sites. DaMello says that he has already tried that.
Approx. 00:26	BM2 Bosley OOD/ 1 st Boat Coxswain	Has gathered this key information in a very short period: there is a sailing vessel that says it is at the entrance to the bar, it has begun taking on water, and the CG has lost communications with it. BM2 Bosley hits the SAR alarm and pipes, "Ready boat crew lay to the ready boat! Sailboat on the bar taking on water."
	BM2 Bosley OOD/ 1 st Boat Coxswain	Takes the SDO phone call off hold and says, "I'm heading for the door."
	BM1 Placido SDO/ 1 st Boat Surfman	Replies, "Call Master Chief [the OIC]. I'm right behind you" and gets in his car to drive back to the station.
		Later, BM1 Placido said that, "If I had known how bad the bar was, I would have told Bosley to wait until I could get to the station."
	SA Wingo 1 st Boat Crewmember	Runs out of his barracks room with SN Miniken and down to the boat.
	Group Port Angeles	Watchstander TC3 Marshall passes that the Group has received more radio transmissions from a frantic woman who doesn't understand Station QR's instructions.
		Group's Duty Officer briefs the Group Commanding Officer, CAPT Volk, at the direction of the Group Senior Duty Officer. The Group is still trying to gather information and is not yet trying to launch a helicopter.
0030	FA DaMello Comms watchstander	Calls and notifies BMCM LaForge of the case and BMCM comes back to the station from his home.
0031	FA DaMello Comms watchstander	Recalls the second boat crew in accordance with the unit's standing orders.
	BM2 Bosley OOD/ 1 st Boat Coxswain	Is one of the first down to the ready boat, CG 44363, and urgently wants to get underway. He runs back up to the station and yells, "Where is my crew?!"

	BMCM LaForge OIC/ 2nd Boat Surfman	Stops at the bar overlook to scan for signs of a sailboat before arriving back at the Station. He notes that there is reduced visibility, but that he can still see the "Q" buoy a mile from the bar. Winds are 30kt with stronger gusts.
0034	BM2 Bosley OOD/ 1 st Boat Coxswain	Gets CG 44363 underway for the SAR case. BM2 Bosley doesn't brief his crew on the mission and the four are all wearing Mustang anti-exposure suits. If he believed the sailboat taking on water was on the bar, he would have thought the situation was very urgent.
	SA Wingo 1 st Boat Crewmember	Hands out pyro vests and SN Miniken hands out surf belts as the boat gets underway. Wingo and Miniken clip into D-rings and later, SA Wingo said that he had presumed MK3 Schlimme clipped in, but he wasn't certain if BM2 Bosley wore his belt or clipped it in. No one on 44363 puts on a helmet, even though policy requires them to and no one speaks up about it. Bosley's helmet was clipped behind his coxswain chair and everyone else's helmets were stowed below in their SAR bags.
	BMCM LaForge OIC/ 2nd Boat Surfman	Is still at the overlook and observes the 44363 leaving the boat basin. He does not see its navigation lights energized. The OIC radios the 44363 and informs them that he does not see a sailboat in the immediate area and orders BM2 Bosley, "To check out the bar to see if they could cross." The OIC heads back to the station.
0043	Group Port Angeles	Watchstander TC3 Marshall intercoms Station QR to have the ready boat standby because they think the case might be a hoax. There has been a rash of hoax calls with a young voice in northwestern Washington over the past two weeks.
	MK3 Schlimme 1 st Boat Engineer	Comes over to the starboard side of the 44363 as it gets underway, adjusts the radar, and then returns the engineer's spot on the port side of the coxswain. While outbound, he reminds BM2 Bosley to not let the lube oil pressures get too high.
	BM2 Bosley OOD/ 1 st Boat Coxswain	Replies, "Yeah, I got it."
	SN Miniken 1 st Boat Crewmember	Operates the port spotlight.
	SA Wingo 1 st Boat Crewmember	Is ordered by BM2 Bosley to man the starboard spotlight and illuminate Wash Rock.
	MK3 Schlimme 1 st Boat Engineer	Yells at Bosley, "Let's get the fuck out of here," just before passing Wash Rock.
	BM2 Bosley OOD/ 1 st Boat Coxswain	Replies, "Fuck that!" Schlimme may have been indicating a desire to go back to the station or instead, to go out to deeper water past the bar.
	FA Ballard Non-rate	Assists FA DaMello in comms and calls the 44363 to pass the Group's instructions to have the ready boat standby.
	BM2 Bosley OOD/ 1 st Boat Coxswain	Responds, "Standby, we're a little busy," likely because BM2 Bosley is focused on negotiating the rough seas on the bar while heading outbound. Regarding the possibility of a hoax, Bosley tells the crew, "I hope not!"
Approx. 0044	SA Wingo 1 st Boat Crewmember	Is told by BM2 Bosley to aim the spotlight starboard towards James Island around the time the 44363 is at Wash Rock. Bosley wants to keep the island off the starboard beam. The 44363 is 100-150 yards off of the island.
0045	BM2 Bosley OOD/ 1 st Boat Coxswain	Radios the station that the 44363 has safely crossed the bar and that it is 16-18' past the bar and evening out. Winds are from the WSW.

	Dr. Noble CG History Author	Joins BMCM LaForge on another trip out to the bar overlook. While driving there, the two hear the 44363 say they made it safely across the bar. BMCM LaForge thinks that the 44363 is likely turning away from James Island and toward the sea buoy into deeper (safer) water.
	SA Wingo 1 st Boat Crewmember	Hears Bosley radio the station that it is 15-16' out (a factual inconsistency) and later said, "I was about to call BS. Those waves were a lot higher than 15-16' and it wasn't getting better, but I was like, 'oh well.'"
		The 44363 is not transiting south on the safe route outbound to the "Q" buoy, but is actually being set north towards the edge of James Island.
		SA Wingo spots a rock and yells, "Rock starboard side! Ten feet!" The boat hits something.
Approx. 0048	BM2 Bosley OOD/ 1 st Boat Coxswain	Yells, "What was that!?" Someone else shouts, "Wave port side!"
	SA Wingo 1 st Boat Crewmember	Sees an enormous wave off the port bow and the boat is rolled over to starboard. SA Wingo hits his head on something and tastes blood. The boat rights itself with its bow pointing towards James Island. When the boat comes up, SA Wingo is twisted in his belt and wrapped up in the canvas dodger. The mast is bent flat to the port side. Wingo reaches for the spotlight and realizes it has broken off the top of the cabin and is gone. The motor lifeboat turns towards the island with way on. The 44363 has been underway for approximately 14 minutes.
Approx. 0048	BM2 Bosley OOD/ 1 st Boat Coxswain	Radios, "Capsized and disoriented."
	FA DaMello Comms watchstander	Hears the call about the boat being capsized, but he and Group PA are confused if the caller is the GALE RUNNER or the 44363. Group and Station hail both boats.
	CG 44393 2 nd Boat	Is the second boat and the recalled crew for it begins arriving at the Station. They begin to dress out in anti-exposure suits and then change their minds, opting for dry suits. The crew heads down to the boat and passes the communications room. They overhear, "Capsized..." but think it is in reference to the sail boat.
	MK3 Schlimme 1 st Boat Engineer	Yells, "We're still on the bar!"
	BM2 Bosley OOD/ 1 st Boat Coxswain	Replies, "Find me buoy 3!"
	SA Wingo 1 st Boat Crewmember	Can see the lights of the town of La Push, but doesn't see Buoy 3 which is too far back around the eastern side of James Island to be visible.
	BMCM LaForge OIC/ 2nd Boat Surfman	And Dr. Noble hear the 44363 say they rolled. The OIC can't see the MLB's navigation lights, but for a moment sees its spotlight sweeping rapidly towards the south from what he thinks is the seaward side of James Island. The OIC now knows the 44363 is in trouble (too close to rocky James Island) and calls the station to get the second boat underway. He also tells the station to call Group PA and get a helicopter dispatched.
	FA DaMello Comms watchstander	Calls the OIC back and passes that Group's duty officer wants to talk with him because Group is still concerned the call is a hoax.

	BMCM LaForge OIC/ 2nd Boat Surfman	And Dr. Noble return to the Station and the OIC tells the SDO that the 44363 is in trouble. BMCM LaForge phones Group PA and says he has, "A serious situation and still [needs] the HH-65A helicopter launched" and also requests an HH-60 helicopter from Astoria, OR.
0049	GALE RUNNER Sailing Vessel	Passes their full position to Group PA.
Approx. 0049	SA Wingo 1 st Boat Crewmember	Hears someone shout something. The boat is hit by a wave on the port quarter and pitch-poles, end over end. Upon re-righting itself, the 44363 rests on the rocks and he knows it is out of the water because the engine noise is different. The mast and entire top of the cabin have sheared off. BM2 Bosley and SN Miniken are gone. The ship's clock recovered from the wreckage of the 44363 was stopped at exactly 00h:49m:03s. CG 44363 has been underway for about 15 minutes.
	MK3 Schlimme 1 st Boat Engineer	Takes control of the 44363.
	SA Wingo 1 st Boat Crewmember	Panics and says, "We have to get out of here" and begins to unclip his surf belt.
	MK3 Schlimme 1 st Boat Engineer	Convinces Wingo that it's safest to stay with the boat and to clip back in. He asks Wingo for the boat's radio and tries to call the station with their position.
	SA Wingo 1 st Boat Crewmember	Looks down at the radio while Schlimme makes the call and sees that it's broken. Wingo realizes that MK3 Schlimme "Was just doing it to calm me down, and it worked because suddenly I was super calm. He saved my life by keeping me on the boat."
	MK3 Schlimme 1 st Boat Engineer	Tries to get himself and SA Wingo down into the forward compartment of the 44363, but can't because the handle of the watertight door is jammed from the boat's impact with rocks. Seeing another wave approaching, Schlimme yells, "Hold on!"
	SA Wingo 1 st Boat Crewmember	Feels the boat roll for a third time after the 44363 is knocked off the rock it was resting on and pushed against the rock cliffs. Underwater, he notes a "tremendous quiet." When the 44363 rights again, MK3 Schlimme is gone and Wingo sees a body float by the boat. He can't throw a life ring to it because both life rings are missing.
		CG 44363 has been underway for about 20 minutes.
		Wingo feels the boat drifting backwards and banging along the rocks into the cove on James Island. He sees a strobe light flashing in the cove, grabs the strobe light from his pyro vest, and turns it on. SA Wingo remembers that he thinks he placed the boat's engines in neutral, but doesn't secure them. Wingo grabs his MK-79 flare kit, fires five flares into the sky and two horizontally towards the beach to illuminate it. Like Schlimme, he tries to get into the forward compartment where there is a portable VHF radio and more flares, but also finds the door jammed.
Approx. 0055	BMCM LaForge OIC/ 2nd Boat Surfman	Is off the phone with Group PA after asking for helicopters and someone at the station tells him they've spotted red flares. The OIC finds Dr. Noble and says, "Let's go back to the bar."
	BM1 Placido SDO/ 1 st Boat Surfman	Shouts, "I'm going" and runs down to the 44393.
	Dr. Noble CG History Author	Parks at the bar overlook with BMCM LaForge and sees a red flare in the sky.

	BM1 Placido SDO/ 1 st Boat Surfman	Gets down to the 44393 and gives a quick brief on the mission. At this point, the second boat crew doesn't know the 44363 is in trouble. He later said that, "I wanted to stick my nose close to the bar and look around before trying to get across. I had no Goddam clue what the bar was doing."
0058	CG 44393 2 nd Boat	Gets underway with BM1 Placido as Surfman and three other crewmen. By chance, BM3 Martin is on second boat, but should have been on the ready boat. Because of his pregnant wife, the surfmen had given him as much time on second boat as possible. CG 44363 got underway approximately 24 minutes earlier.
	BM1 Placido SDO/ 1 st Boat Surfman	Sees a red flare in the sky shortly after leaving the boat basin. He thinks it could be from the 44363. He decides that they must cross the bar.
	Dr. Noble CG History Author	And BMCM LaForge have been at the overlook for a few minutes and see the 44393 leaving the protection of the river. The OIC thinks he can help keep track of the 44393 and advise them if they begin to get set towards James Island. In his own words, Dr. Noble remembers seeing the, "Small white boat rising. Rising. Rising. Rising until it seemed to stand on its stern. White water almost enveloping the small boat. Then the plunge downward."
	BMCM LaForge OIC/ 2nd Boat Surfman	Uses the VHF radio in his truck to communicate back and forth with the 44393 on the bar. As the 44393 heads farther out to sea, he can tell that the length of the swells underneath the boat are lengthening out. He is able to see the 44393 getting set north towards James Island and advises the boat. Dr. Noble and the OIC see more red flares from the western part of James Island.
Approx. 0100	Group Port Angeles	Duty Officer first called the Group's Operations Officer around 0030. He now calls the Group's Senior Duty Officer (SDO) in his duty room and informs him of the case. The SDO tells him to hit the SAR alarm at the Air Station. Next, the Group Duty Officer calls the Group Commanding Officer again and tells him that the helicopter is launching because they have lost communications with the 44363 and have spotted red flares. Until that time, the CO did not know that 44363 had gotten underway from Station Quillayute River. Group CO CAPT Volk drives into the Air Station and assigns a non-rate in the command center to scribe everything he sees and hears as the case goes on.
0107	SA Wingo 1 st Boat Crewmember	Floats with the 44363, gauging his progress into the cove by the illumination from the boat's aft deck light light. He notices the time on his watch: 0107. Starts praying, "Not a prayer of all the things I would or wouldn't do if I was saved, it was just an all-out cry for help: 'Please get my boat to shore.'" The boat's stern swings around and points towards the beach at the far back of the cove. SA Wingo thinks he sees a tree towards shore, unclips his surf belt, hops down into knee-deep water, and wades into the beach. CG 44363 comes to its final resting place at the back of the northern cove in James Island.
0110	CG 44393 2 nd Boat	Crosses the bar.
0110	Group Port Angeles	Watchstander TC3 Marshall transmits an Urgent Marine Information Broadcast.

	BM1 Placido SDO/ 1 st Boat Surfman	Remembers that his, "Crew performed like they were supposed to... They constantly fed me information. I felt like a machine. I absorbed the information and my body performed the necessary motions." Eventually he sees flares both to the north (from the 44363) and from the south (from the GALE RUNNER).
		He remembers, "I knew which ones were ours. I started to push back in and had to decide: Should I go for the sailboat, or our boat? It was one of the hardest decisions I ever had to make. I [later] saw the helicopter starting to search for our boat. I knew the helo could probably help out our boat better than I could, so I headed for the sailboat."
0121	BM1 Placido SDO/ 1 st Boat Surfman	Radios, "We are on handheld. Our antenna was damaged by a breaker."
	BMCM LaForge OIC/ 2nd Boat Surfman	Advises the 44393 to head to the "Q" sea buoy and stay in deep water.
	CG 44393 2 nd Boat	Eventually depletes the battery on their portable VHF radio and loses all communications with the station and BMCM LaForge at the overlook. They proceed to the "Q" buoy.
	BMCM LaForge OIC/ 2nd Boat Surfman	Calls Group again for helicopter assistance because he has a sailboat in distress, a missing MLB, and another MLB he's lost communications with.
0123	CG 6589 Air Station Port Angeles	Takes off from Air Station PA. BM2 Bosley, MK3 Schlimme, and SN Miniken are already dead.
	BMCM LaForge OIC/ 2nd Boat Surfman	And Dr. Noble return to the station.
After 0130	Group Port Angeles	Commanding Officer (CO) CAPT Volk calls nearby units to request additional surface assets. The 110' cutter CUTTYHUNK is in Neah Bay and is dispatched towards La Push. CAPT Volk calls CWO2 Robert Coster, the CO of the Station Neah Bay, and asks if he can send one of his lifeboats south to help. CWO2 Coster drives in to his station and reviews the conditions. He makes the difficult decision that he cannot safely send his crews. CAPT Volk conferences with the CO of Group Astoria and CWO2 Randy Lewis, the CO of Station Grays Harbor. CWO2 Lewis also declines sending his station's 52' MLB due to the conditions. Later, CAPT Volk says that both stations' CO's, "Made the right decision."
0157	CG 6589 Air Station Port Angeles	Arrives on scene, is briefed about the situation by BMCM LaForge, and commences a search near James Island.
0159	GALE RUNNER Sailing Vessel	Passes their accurate position to the Coast Guard after reestablishing communications. They are not on the bar, but farther south near "The Needles," a group of jagged rock features sticking out from the ocean, about three miles from the bar.
0201	BMCM LaForge OIC/ 2nd Boat Surfman	Orders a beach search for survivors and several crewmembers, local police, and National Park Rangers set out for First Beach in anti-exposure coveralls and helmets.

0204	CG 6003 Air Station Astoria	Launches from Air Station Astoria.
	BMCM LaForge OIC/ 2nd Boat Surfman	Has to decide where to send resources: to the GALE RUNNER or to James Island for his lifeboat crew? He radios the CG 6589 back and recommends they leave James Island and proceed to the GALE RUNNER's position because it is only minutes away from the rocks. The OIC advises the watchstander to keep off the radio as much as possible because the helicopter may only have a brief window to transmit that they're in trouble too. BMCM LaForge has 14 lives and three Coast Guard assets in his hands.
0205	CG 6589 Air Station Port Angeles	Diverts from the vicinity of James Island and flies south towards The Needles. To make an approach on the GALE RUNNER, they must fly over, around, and through the 190' tall rock islands. The helicopter is being buffeted by winds and keeps fighting to make new approaches as the sailboat is washed over by breaking waves and drifts between the rock pinnacles.
	FA DaMello Comms watchstander	Is relieved of the communications watch to help the beach party. At First Beach, he and two other members run down the beach, dodging waves.
	SA Wingo 1 st Boat Crewmember	Sees a helicopter searchlight in the distance and CG 44393, and activates the night end of his MK-124 signal flare.
0219	CG 6589 Air Station Port Angeles	Arrives on scene with the GALE RUNNER to commence the hoist.
0227	CG 6585 Air Station Port Angeles	Launches from Air Station PA.
0234	CG 44393 2 nd Boat	Arrives at the "Q" buoy and is tasked by the Station to stay there. They remain there for about six hours until daylight and the chance to return across the bar.
0242	CG 6589 Air Station Port Angeles	Overstresses its hoist, but manages to hoist both crewmembers off the GALE RUNNER.
0251	CG 6589 Air Station Port Angeles	Lands at Station QR's ball field to pass the survivors to an ambulance and depart for Station Neah Bay to refuel.
0253	CG 6003 Air Station Astoria	Arrives on scene and spots a strobe light flashing from the cliff at the back of the cove on James Island.
0320	FA DaMello Comms watchstander	On First Beach sees a flashing light down the beach and starts running towards it. While running, DaMello and another member of the beach party are hit by a log that surges towards them on a wave. The wave knocks DaMello down and the log pins him underwater. FN DaMello sees his life and family flashing before his eyes and takes a breath of seawater. DaMello's arm is dislocated by the log, but it releases him and he gets to his feet. The light seen up the beach belongs to a National Park Ranger helping with the search.
	BMCM LaForge OIC/ 2nd Boat Surfman	Heads out to First Beach with another beach party. He is overheard saying to himself, "I should have trained them more, I should have trained them more."
0334	SN Miniken 1 st Boat Crewmember	Is found unconscious without socks or boots on by the other beach party on First Beach. The beach crew performs CPR at the scene and an ambulance takes him to the hospital in Forks, WA. Taking shifts with compressions, the team of responders gives him CPR for a total of four hours.

0432	CG 6003 Air Station Astoria	Observes BM2 Bosley and MK3 Schlimme floating in the cove on James Island. They request the county's high angle rescue team be contacted to rescue SA Wingo on the cliff.
0505	CG 44393 2 nd Boat	Loses communications with the Station after its portable VHF radio dies.
0508	CG 6013 Air Station Astoria	Leaves Air Station Astoria, OR to assist in the search.
0630	CG 6013 Air Station Astoria	Deploys a rescue swimmer to the cliff SA Wingo is hanging onto. SA Wingo is in good condition.
0633	CG 6585 Air Station Port Angeles	Transfers two additional portable VHF radios to 44393.
0734	CG 44393 2 nd Boat	Safely crosses the bar back into the Quillayute River and moors at Station Quillayute River. They have been underway for six hours and 36 minutes. Until they moor and see the other slip empty, they are unaware that CG 44363 has been lost.
Approx. 0815	CG 6013 Air Station Astoria	Deploys the high-angle rescue team to retrieve SA Wingo from the cliff and hoists him to safety.
0932	BM2 Bosley OOD/ 1 st Boat Coxswain	And MK3 Schlimme are recovered from the cove on James Island by 6013's rescue swimmer. The rescue swimmer states that the wreck of 44363 is in "bad shape" and is leaking fuel.
1030	FA Ballard Non-rate	And the rest of the station are notified that SN Miniken has been pronounced dead at Forks Community Hospital.
1050	CG 6013 Air Station Astoria	Hoists the remaining five rescue team members and its rescue swimmer from the beach. The helicopter drops off the remaining Clallam County rescue team and departs for Air Station Astoria.

Aftermath

Findings from the official report, signed by CG Commandant ADM Kramek

BM2 Bosley OOD/ 1 st Boat Coxswain	Is found by the investigators to, "...not have enough rough weather bar crossings at night in a 44' MLB to prepare him for the conditions that MLB 44363 encountered on 12 February 1997 and should not have attempted to cross the bar."
	The investigators are of the opinion that BM2 Bosley viewed the updated weather forecast and had ample time to pass it to the SDO or OIC. Had either of them received this information, a Surfman would have been on board when the call came in.
MK3 Schlimme 1 st Boat Engineer	And SN Miniken, and BM2 Bosley's autopsies list their cause of death as blunt force trauma to the head.
BMCM LaForge OIC/ 2nd Boat Surfman	Was found by the investigators to have "made several key decisions... which increased the chances of survival for both the sailboat and the MLB 4363 crews."

Investigation	<p>Finds that there were no mechanical issues with 44363 to cause the accident. The boat is so badly damaged it is cut into three pieces and hoisted off the island by a helicopter for disposal.</p> <p>According to investigators, “The proximate cause of this casualty was the coxswain’s failure to safely navigate MLB 44363, causing the boat to capsize and founder in the surf conditions near James Island.”</p> <p>But the report also highlighted excessive personnel turnover at the unit. In February 1997, “only two non-rates had been at the station longer than one year, and because of ...high turnover of personnel, a majority of the Station training is focused on providing basic, introductory skills to help new personnel get their boat crew qualifications... Due to the high turnover of personnel, the Station’s operational readiness was diminished in the area of advanced skills/techniques.”</p> <p>At this time, of the 17 crewmembers filling boat crew positions at the station, 12 had been there less than one year (~70%). Also, despite four Surfman billets, only three surfmen were assigned at the unit, including the OIC and XPO.</p> <p>A 1961 editorial about the TRIUMPH-MERMAID disaster at Stations Point Adams/ Cape Disappointment noted similar concerns about crew inexperience at those units.</p>
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Discussion

19. What was it like “playing” your specific part?

20. What do you feel when the SAR alarm goes off?

- Do our risk management tools help here?
- How do you handle this?

21. What was the culture of response and operations like in 1997? How is it today?

- Coast Guard attitudes about risk
- “You have to go out, but you don’t have to come back” (then)
- “Us, ours, them, theirs” (now: balancing risk-taking with being risk-averse)
- Crew selection, support and oversight from experienced SDOs, etc.
- The Coast Guard has supported and related to its small boat stations

22. What parts of the Coast Guard system were related to this mishap? Are they the same or different today?

- Surfman assignment process
- Risk management culture/tools
- Station experience level/qualification process
- Station staffing
- Group nighttime radio guard

23. What were the effects of high turnover?

- Training focused on basic qualifications instead of advanced skills
- Today’s D13 surf stations have ~40% annual turnover, exacerbated with non-rate transfers for A-School

24. Are you prepared to operate without the normal aids and references you rely on?

- In 1997, crews never practiced nighttime rough bar crossings without bar lights
- What aids and references do we rely on today?
- Can we practice taking those away and adapting?
- Do we have “backup plans” for operating in nighttime, low viz, ATON discreps, etc.?

25. Compare communications issues in 1997 and today.

- How much time passed between the initial call and when the CG asked for a position?
- Station watchstanders used to sleep in the comms room to overhear any traffic from the Group
 - Today, Sector could be conversing with a vessel in the middle of the night for 30 minutes without anyone at the station being aware of it
- There was no Rescue 21 in 1997, so targeting a vessel’s location using radio lines of bearing was imprecise
 - This highlights the importance of R21 Geo Display and promptly asking for lat/long positions
- Simple advice to have a vessel standby and wait in deep water can buy time to gather all the information and prevent a worsening situation

26. Why should we get an accurate position and observe the bar before launching?

- The GALE RUNNER’s true position might have been ascertained before the 44363 crossed the bar near James Island
- Even today, vessels often pass geographic references that don’t match their precise location
- This information can impact asset and crew selection, and overall sense of urgency

27. Compare weather forecasting and reporting in 1997 and today.

- None of the 1997 crew or command could have gotten on their phone and seen the forecast or buoy readings
- Despite modern technology, there is still plenty of information that we need to pass manually today

10. Final questions or comments?

References

CDR Hasselbalch, James M. *Investigation into the Capsizing and Subsequent Loss of MLB 44363 and the Death of Three Coast Guard Members That Occurred at Coast Guard Station Quillayute River on 12 FEB 1997*. March, 1997 (including reviews by RADM J. David Spade and ADM Robert E. Kramek).

Noble, Dennis L. *The Rescue of the Gale Runner*. University Press of Florida, 2002.



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For more on the CG 44363 disaster: www.uscg44363.com



12 FEBRUARY 1997

A training remembering the CG 44363 disaster

CG 44393



(scan for diagrams)

Introduction

- Sailing vessel GALE RUNNER is transiting from San Francisco, CA to Puget Sound, WA with a crew of two
- CG Station Quillayute River (QR) in La Push, WA is the next station north of Station Grays Harbor. It:
 - Has a BMCM Officer in Charge (OIC) and BM1 Executive Petty Officer (XPO)
 - Has two 44' motor lifeboats (MLB)
 - Reports to Group/Air Station Port Angeles (PA), WA, (the 1997 equivalent of a Sector)
 - Has a hazardous river bar crossing in order to get into the harbor at La Push, WA
 - Has a set of stadium-like "bar lights" fixed on James Island next to the bar for night transits
 - In February 1997, they are inoperative
 - The Officer of the Day (OOD) reports to a Surfman Duty Officer (SDO)
- On 11-12 February the duty section is comprised of 10 ready boat crew members, a watchstander, and several additional non-rated members
- On 11 February, Dr. Dennis Noble, a retired Coast Guard Senior Chief Petty Officer and notable history author reports to the station for a few days to stay on board while researching a book he is writing on lifeboat stations
- The following facts are taken verbatim from the USCG Administrative Investigation and Dr. Dennis Noble's book
- Reading takes about 40 minutes with 14 speakers and one facilitator
- Consider turning off the lights and having any members without speaking parts close their eyes.
- Each reader should say their highlighted parts by speaking the time, name, and details, for example, "At 0700 FA DaMello assumes the station's communications watch..."

Tuesday 11 FEB 1997

Time	Member	Details
Morning	GALE RUNNER Sailing Vessel	Is in Westport, WA and stops in at CG Station Grays Harbor. GALE RUNNER receives the weather forecast and decides to get underway to continue north.
0700	FA DaMello Comms watchstander	Assumes the Station's communications watch until 0700 on 12FEB97.
1640	FA DaMello Comms watchstander	Receives the updated NOAA weather forecast which calls for NW wind 35-40kt and seas building to 14'. For 12 February, the forecast predicts NW winds 30kt and combined seas 18'.
Approx. 1730	BM1 Placido SDO/ 1 st Boat Surfman	<p>Gets together with OOD BM2 Bosley and drives to the station's bar overlook to observe last light bar conditions. He observes that seas aren't bad and he feels comfortable going home on recall for the night, about 15 minutes away.</p> <p>He later said, "From the look of the bar and what Bosley had told me about the weather, there was no need for me to stay aboard."</p>
1740	BM2 Bosley OOD/ 1 st Boat Coxswain	Views the NOAA forecast on the computer and logs his initials, "D.A.B." to acknowledge it.

Evening	GALE RUNNER Sailing Vessel	Begins to encounter heavy weather and decides to head for the QR bar entrance to seek safe harbor.
After 2130	BM2 Bosley OOD/ 1 st Boat Coxswain	Does his evening round with MK3 Schlimme and FN Matthews and drives out to the bar overlook to check things out. FN Matthews recalls BM2 and MK3 saying that, “they [hope] they [don’t] get a case [tonight].”
Between 2130- 2200	BMCM LaForge OIC/ 2nd Boat Surfman	Returns from an appointment in Port Angeles and checks in with the OOD at the station. BM2 Bosley does not pass the 1640 weather forecast, but tells the OIC that the weather is supposed to pick up overnight. Without knowing of the forecast details, the OIC agrees with the OOD that the ready boat Surfman can remain on recall for the night. The OIC leaves for his home, 5 minutes away from the station.
2130	Dr. Noble CG History Author	Finishes his conversations with the crew and goes to bed.
Approx. 2200	BM2 Bosley OOD/ 1 st Boat Coxswain	Calls the SDO who remembers Bosley saying, “Nothing [is] going on. The winds [have] picked up a little bit... the weather [is] supposed to pick up later [tomorrow].”
2200	FA DaMello Comms watchstander	Passes the radio guard to Group PA for the night and sets up the cot to sleep in the comms room.

Wednesday 12 FEB 1997

Approx. 0015	GALE RUNNER Sailing Vessel	Hails Station QR on VHF 16 to obtain a bar report. Telecommunications Specialist Third Class (TC3) Marshall at Group PA answers for Station QR, consults the status board and reports, “no restrictions.”
	FA DaMello Comms watchstander	Wakes up to the radio traffic between Group and the GALE RUNNER and notices high winds outside. The Station’s anemometer is registering gusts of 50kt. On his own initiative, DaMello remembers the 1640 forecast for 18’ seas and intercoms TC3 Marshall at Group to tell her about the wind he’s seeing and the forecast for seas. He says he thinks that if the OOD knew about the 50kt gusts, then he would put a restriction on the bar.
	Group Port Angeles	Watchstander TC3 Marshall tells FA DaMello to hail the GAIL RUNNER and pass them the current weather conditions.
	FA DaMello Comms watchstander	Hails the sailing vessel and asks, “Are you crossing the bar?”
	GALE RUNNER Sailing Vessel	Crewmember Marcia Infante replies, “Affirmative. We are at the entrance now.” She doesn’t pass a GPS position.
	FA DaMello Comms watchstander	Passes the latest winds and advises the GALE RUNNER that the bar could be breaking. Next, FA DaMello calls BM2 Bosley in the OOD room to brief him of the weather and situation.
	BM2 Bosley OOD/ 1 st Boat Coxswain	Comes into comms and asks DaMello if he has GALE RUNNER’s position. DaMello says that the caller has not relayed their position. Bosley tells DaMello to call the GALE RUNNER and obtain their position. Bosley phones SDO BM1 Placido at his home and informs him of the radio call and that he thinks that it’s a bad idea for the sailboat to come across the bar. BM1 asks if he has a position for the sailboat. To keep listening for information, Bosely places the SDO on hold.

	FA DaMello Comms watchstander	Asks the GALE RUNNER for their position. He hears, "We're at 47, 51..." and then static silence.
	GALE RUNNER Sailing Vessel	Crewmember Ken Schlag is steering the sailing vessel and Marcia Infante is on the radio. Suddenly, the sailboat is struck by a rogue wave, knocked down, and dismasted. The radio antenna is damaged and Ken Schlag is thrown overboard. He is tethered with a safety harness and manages to pull himself back onboard. Portholes are blown out by the wave and the GALE RUNNER begins taking on water.
	FA DaMello Comms watchstander	Tries again to hail the boat, "Sailing vessel, this is Quillayute River on 22, over."
Approx. 00:26	GALE RUNNER Sailing Vessel	Crewmember Marcia Infante breaks the silence, "MAYDAY! MAYDAY! THIS IS SAILING VESSEL GALE RUNNER! U.S. COAST GUARD! WE'RE TAKING ON WATER!"
	GALE RUNNER Sailing Vessel	Crewmember Marcia Infante repeats her mayday calls every few minutes. She looks at the GPS plotter to reference the boat's position, but sees a black screen and figures that the GPS is broken. In fact, the GPS is in screensaver mode and she could have pushed any button to bring the chart and GPS position back up on the display.
	FA DaMello Comms watchstander	Only hears static after the mayday call. Group also hears static and suggests Station switch radio sites. DaMello says that he has already tried that.
Approx. 00:26	BM2 Bosley OOD/ 1 st Boat Coxswain	Has gathered this key information in a very short period: there is a sailing vessel that says it is at the entrance to the bar, it has begun taking on water, and the CG has lost communications with it. BM2 Bosley hits the SAR alarm and pipes, "Ready boat crew lay to the ready boat! Sailboat on the bar taking on water."
	BM2 Bosley OOD/ 1 st Boat Coxswain	Takes the SDO phone call off hold and says, "I'm heading for the door."
	BM1 Placido SDO/ 1 st Boat Surfman	Replies, "Call Master Chief [the OIC]. I'm right behind you" and gets in his car to drive back to the station.
		Later, BM1 Placido said that, "If I had known how bad the bar was, I would have told Bosley to wait until I could get to the station."
	SA Wingo 1 st Boat Crewmember	Runs out of his barracks room with SN Miniken and down to the boat.
	Group Port Angeles	Watchstander TC3 Marshall passes that the Group has received more radio transmissions from a frantic woman who doesn't understand Station QR's instructions.
		Group's Duty Officer briefs the Group Commanding Officer, CAPT Volk, at the direction of the Group Senior Duty Officer. The Group is still trying to gather information and is not yet trying to launch a helicopter.
0030	FA DaMello Comms watchstander	Calls and notifies BMCM LaForge of the case and BMCM comes back to the station from his home.
0031	FA DaMello Comms watchstander	Recalls the second boat crew in accordance with the unit's standing orders.
	BM2 Bosley OOD/ 1 st Boat Coxswain	Is one of the first down to the ready boat, CG 44363, and urgently wants to get underway. He runs back up to the station and yells, "Where is my crew?!"

	BMCM LaForge OIC/ 2nd Boat Surfman	Stops at the bar overlook to scan for signs of a sailboat before arriving back at the Station. He notes that there is reduced visibility, but that he can still see the "Q" buoy a mile from the bar. Winds are 30kt with stronger gusts.
0034	BM2 Bosley OOD/ 1 st Boat Coxswain	Gets CG 44363 underway for the SAR case. BM2 Bosley doesn't brief his crew on the mission and the four are all wearing Mustang anti-exposure suits. If he believed the sailboat taking on water was on the bar, he would have thought the situation was very urgent.
	SA Wingo 1 st Boat Crewmember	Hands out pyro vests and SN Miniken hands out surf belts as the boat gets underway. Wingo and Miniken clip into D-rings and later, SA Wingo said that he had presumed MK3 Schlimme clipped in, but he wasn't certain if BM2 Bosley wore his belt or clipped it in. No one on 44363 puts on a helmet, even though policy requires them to and no one speaks up about it. Bosley's helmet was clipped behind his coxswain chair and everyone else's helmets were stowed below in their SAR bags.
	BMCM LaForge OIC/ 2nd Boat Surfman	Is still at the overlook and observes the 44363 leaving the boat basin. He does not see its navigation lights energized. The OIC radios the 44363 and informs them that he does not see a sailboat in the immediate area and orders BM2 Bosley, "To check out the bar to see if they could cross." The OIC heads back to the station.
0043	Group Port Angeles	Watchstander TC3 Marshall intercoms Station QR to have the ready boat standby because they think the case might be a hoax. There has been a rash of hoax calls with a young voice in northwestern Washington over the past two weeks.
	MK3 Schlimme 1 st Boat Engineer	Comes over to the starboard side of the 44363 as it gets underway, adjusts the radar, and then returns the engineer's spot on the port side of the coxswain. While outbound, he reminds BM2 Bosley to not let the lube oil pressures get too high.
	BM2 Bosley OOD/ 1 st Boat Coxswain	Replies, "Yeah, I got it."
	SN Miniken 1 st Boat Crewmember	Operates the port spotlight.
	SA Wingo 1 st Boat Crewmember	Is ordered by BM2 Bosley to man the starboard spotlight and illuminate Wash Rock.
	MK3 Schlimme 1 st Boat Engineer	Yells at Bosley, "Let's get the fuck out of here," just before passing Wash Rock.
	BM2 Bosley OOD/ 1 st Boat Coxswain	Replies, "Fuck that!" Schlimme may have been indicating a desire to go back to the station or instead, to go out to deeper water past the bar.
	FA Ballard Non-rate	Assists FA DaMello in comms and calls the 44363 to pass the Group's instructions to have the ready boat standby.
	BM2 Bosley OOD/ 1 st Boat Coxswain	Responds, "Standby, we're a little busy," likely because BM2 Bosley is focused on negotiating the rough seas on the bar while heading outbound. Regarding the possibility of a hoax, Bosley tells the crew, "I hope not!"
Approx. 0044	SA Wingo 1 st Boat Crewmember	Is told by BM2 Bosley to aim the spotlight starboard towards James Island around the time the 44363 is at Wash Rock. Bosley wants to keep the island off the starboard beam. The 44363 is 100-150 yards off of the island.
0045	BM2 Bosley OOD/ 1 st Boat Coxswain	Radios the station that the 44363 has safely crossed the bar and that it is 16-18' past the bar and evening out. Winds are from the WSW.

	Dr. Noble CG History Author	Joins BMCM LaForge on another trip out to the bar overlook. While driving there, the two hear the 44363 say they made it safely across the bar. BMCM LaForge thinks that the 44363 is likely turning away from James Island and toward the sea buoy into deeper (safer) water.
	SA Wingo 1 st Boat Crewmember	Hears Bosley radio the station that it is 15-16' out (a factual inconsistency) and later said, "I was about to call BS. Those waves were a lot higher than 15-16' and it wasn't getting better, but I was like, 'oh well.'"
		The 44363 is not transiting south on the safe route outbound to the "Q" buoy, but is actually being set north towards the edge of James Island.
		SA Wingo spots a rock and yells, "Rock starboard side! Ten feet!" The boat hits something.
Approx. 0048	BM2 Bosley OOD/ 1 st Boat Coxswain	Yells, "What was that!?" Someone else shouts, "Wave port side!"
	SA Wingo 1 st Boat Crewmember	Sees an enormous wave off the port bow and the boat is rolled over to starboard. SA Wingo hits his head on something and tastes blood. The boat rights itself with its bow pointing towards James Island. When the boat comes up, SA Wingo is twisted in his belt and wrapped up in the canvas dodger. The mast is bent flat to the port side. Wingo reaches for the spotlight and realizes it has broken off the top of the cabin and is gone. The motor lifeboat turns towards the island with way on. The 44363 has been underway for approximately 14 minutes.
Approx. 0048	BM2 Bosley OOD/ 1 st Boat Coxswain	Radios, "Capsized and disoriented."
	FA DaMello Comms watchstander	Hears the call about the boat being capsized, but he and Group PA are confused if the caller is the GALE RUNNER or the 44363. Group and Station hail both boats.
	CG 44393 2 nd Boat	Is the second boat and the recalled crew for it begins arriving at the Station. They begin to dress out in anti-exposure suits and then change their minds, opting for dry suits. The crew heads down to the boat and passes the communications room. They overhear, "Capsized..." but think it is in reference to the sail boat.
	MK3 Schlimme 1 st Boat Engineer	Yells, "We're still on the bar!"
	BM2 Bosley OOD/ 1 st Boat Coxswain	Replies, "Find me buoy 3!"
	SA Wingo 1 st Boat Crewmember	Can see the lights of the town of La Push, but doesn't see Buoy 3 which is too far back around the eastern side of James Island to be visible.
	BMCM LaForge OIC/ 2nd Boat Surfman	And Dr. Noble hear the 44363 say they rolled. The OIC can't see the MLB's navigation lights, but for a moment sees its spotlight sweeping rapidly towards the south from what he thinks is the seaward side of James Island. The OIC now knows the 44363 is in trouble (too close to rocky James Island) and calls the station to get the second boat underway. He also tells the station to call Group PA and get a helicopter dispatched.
	FA DaMello Comms watchstander	Calls the OIC back and passes that Group's duty officer wants to talk with him because Group is still concerned the call is a hoax.

	BMCM LaForge OIC/ 2nd Boat Surfman	And Dr. Noble return to the Station and the OIC tells the SDO that the 44363 is in trouble. BMCM LaForge phones Group PA and says he has, "A serious situation and still [needs] the HH-65A helicopter launched" and also requests an HH-60 helicopter from Astoria, OR.
0049	GALE RUNNER Sailing Vessel	Passes their full position to Group PA.
Approx. 0049	SA Wingo 1 st Boat Crewmember	Hears someone shout something. The boat is hit by a wave on the port quarter and pitch-poles, end over end. Upon re-righting itself, the 44363 rests on the rocks and he knows it is out of the water because the engine noise is different. The mast and entire top of the cabin have sheared off. BM2 Bosley and SN Miniken are gone. The ship's clock recovered from the wreckage of the 44363 was stopped at exactly 00h:49m:03s. CG 44363 has been underway for about 15 minutes.
	MK3 Schlimme 1 st Boat Engineer	Takes control of the 44363.
	SA Wingo 1 st Boat Crewmember	Panics and says, "We have to get out of here" and begins to unclip his surf belt.
	MK3 Schlimme 1 st Boat Engineer	Convinces Wingo that it's safest to stay with the boat and to clip back in. He asks Wingo for the boat's radio and tries to call the station with their position.
	SA Wingo 1 st Boat Crewmember	Looks down at the radio while Schlimme makes the call and sees that it's broken. Wingo realizes that MK3 Schlimme "Was just doing it to calm me down, and it worked because suddenly I was super calm. He saved my life by keeping me on the boat."
	MK3 Schlimme 1 st Boat Engineer	Tries to get himself and SA Wingo down into the forward compartment of the 44363, but can't because the handle of the watertight door is jammed from the boat's impact with rocks. Seeing another wave approaching, Schlimme yells, "Hold on!"
	SA Wingo 1 st Boat Crewmember	Feels the boat roll for a third time after the 44363 is knocked off the rock it was resting on and pushed against the rock cliffs. Underwater, he notes a "tremendous quiet." When the 44363 rights again, MK3 Schlimme is gone and Wingo sees a body float by the boat. He can't throw a life ring to it because both life rings are missing.
		CG 44363 has been underway for about 20 minutes.
		Wingo feels the boat drifting backwards and banging along the rocks into the cove on James Island. He sees a strobe light flashing in the cove, grabs the strobe light from his pyro vest, and turns it on. SA Wingo remembers that he thinks he placed the boat's engines in neutral, but doesn't secure them. Wingo grabs his MK-79 flare kit, fires five flares into the sky and two horizontally towards the beach to illuminate it. Like Schlimme, he tries to get into the forward compartment where there is a portable VHF radio and more flares, but also finds the door jammed.
Approx. 0055	BMCM LaForge OIC/ 2nd Boat Surfman	Is off the phone with Group PA after asking for helicopters and someone at the station tells him they've spotted red flares. The OIC finds Dr. Noble and says, "Let's go back to the bar."
	BM1 Placido SDO/ 1 st Boat Surfman	Shouts, "I'm going" and runs down to the 44393.
	Dr. Noble CG History Author	Parks at the bar overlook with BMCM LaForge and sees a red flare in the sky.

	BM1 Placido SDO/ 1 st Boat Surfman	Gets down to the 44393 and gives a quick brief on the mission. At this point, the second boat crew doesn't know the 44363 is in trouble. He later said that, "I wanted to stick my nose close to the bar and look around before trying to get across. I had no Goddam clue what the bar was doing."
0058	CG 44393 2 nd Boat	Gets underway with BM1 Placido as Surfman and three other crewmen. By chance, BM3 Martin is on second boat, but should have been on the ready boat. Because of his pregnant wife, the surfmen had given him as much time on second boat as possible. CG 44363 got underway approximately 24 minutes earlier.
	BM1 Placido SDO/ 1 st Boat Surfman	Sees a red flare in the sky shortly after leaving the boat basin. He thinks it could be from the 44363. He decides that they must cross the bar.
	Dr. Noble CG History Author	And BMCM LaForge have been at the overlook for a few minutes and see the 44393 leaving the protection of the river. The OIC thinks he can help keep track of the 44393 and advise them if they begin to get set towards James Island. In his own words, Dr. Noble remembers seeing the, "Small white boat rising. Rising. Rising. Rising until it seemed to stand on its stern. White water almost enveloping the small boat. Then the plunge downward."
	BMCM LaForge OIC/ 2nd Boat Surfman	Uses the VHF radio in his truck to communicate back and forth with the 44393 on the bar. As the 44393 heads farther out to sea, he can tell that the length of the swells underneath the boat are lengthening out. He is able to see the 44393 getting set north towards James Island and advises the boat. Dr. Noble and the OIC see more red flares from the western part of James Island.
Approx. 0100	Group Port Angeles	Duty Officer first called the Group's Operations Officer around 0030. He now calls the Group's Senior Duty Officer (SDO) in his duty room and informs him of the case. The SDO tells him to hit the SAR alarm at the Air Station. Next, the Group Duty Officer calls the Group Commanding Officer again and tells him that the helicopter is launching because they have lost communications with the 44363 and have spotted red flares. Until that time, the CO did not know that 44363 had gotten underway from Station Quillayute River. Group CO CAPT Volk drives into the Air Station and assigns a non-rate in the command center to scribe everything he sees and hears as the case goes on.
0107	SA Wingo 1 st Boat Crewmember	Floats with the 44363, gauging his progress into the cove by the illumination from the boat's aft deck light light. He notices the time on his watch: 0107. Starts praying, "Not a prayer of all the things I would or wouldn't do if I was saved, it was just an all-out cry for help: 'Please get my boat to shore.'" The boat's stern swings around and points towards the beach at the far back of the cove. SA Wingo thinks he sees a tree towards shore, unclips his surf belt, hops down into knee-deep water, and wades into the beach. CG 44363 comes to its final resting place at the back of the northern cove in James Island.
0110	CG 44393 2 nd Boat	Crosses the bar.
0110	Group Port Angeles	Watchstander TC3 Marshall transmits an Urgent Marine Information Broadcast.

	BM1 Placido SDO/ 1 st Boat Surfman	Remembers that his, "Crew performed like they were supposed to... They constantly fed me information. I felt like a machine. I absorbed the information and my body performed the necessary motions." Eventually he sees flares both to the north (from the 44363) and from the south (from the GALE RUNNER).
		He remembers, "I knew which ones were ours. I started to push back in and had to decide: Should I go for the sailboat, or our boat? It was one of the hardest decisions I ever had to make. I [later] saw the helicopter starting to search for our boat. I knew the helo could probably help out our boat better than I could, so I headed for the sailboat."
0121	BM1 Placido SDO/ 1 st Boat Surfman	Radios, "We are on handheld. Our antenna was damaged by a breaker."
	BMCM LaForge OIC/ 2nd Boat Surfman CG 44393 2 nd Boat	Advises the 44393 to head to the "Q" sea buoy and stay in deep water. Eventually depletes the battery on their portable VHF radio and loses all communications with the station and BMCM LaForge at the overlook. They proceed to the "Q" buoy.
	BMCM LaForge OIC/ 2nd Boat Surfman	Calls Group again for helicopter assistance because he has a sailboat in distress, a missing MLB, and another MLB he's lost communications with.
0123	CG 6589 Air Station Port Angeles	Takes off from Air Station PA. BM2 Bosley, MK3 Schlimme, and SN Miniken are already dead.
	BMCM LaForge OIC/ 2nd Boat Surfman	And Dr. Noble return to the station.
After 0130	Group Port Angeles	Commanding Officer (CO) CAPT Volk calls nearby units to request additional surface assets. The 110' cutter CUTTYHUNK is in Neah Bay and is dispatched towards La Push. CAPT Volk calls CWO2 Robert Coster, the CO of the Station Neah Bay, and asks if he can send one of his lifeboats south to help. CWO2 Coster drives in to his station and reviews the conditions. He makes the difficult decision that he cannot safely send his crews. CAPT Volk conferences with the CO of Group Astoria and CWO2 Randy Lewis, the CO of Station Grays Harbor. CWO2 Lewis also declines sending his station's 52' MLB due to the conditions. Later, CAPT Volk says that both stations' CO's, "Made the right decision."
0157	CG 6589 Air Station Port Angeles	Arrives on scene, is briefed about the situation by BMCM LaForge, and commences a search near James Island.
0159	GALE RUNNER Sailing Vessel	Passes their accurate position to the Coast Guard after reestablishing communications. They are not on the bar, but farther south near "The Needles," a group of jagged rock features sticking out from the ocean, about three miles from the bar.
0201	BMCM LaForge OIC/ 2nd Boat Surfman	Orders a beach search for survivors and several crewmembers, local police, and National Park Rangers set out for First Beach in anti-exposure coveralls and helmets.

0204	CG 6003 Air Station Astoria	Launches from Air Station Astoria.
	BMCM LaForge OIC/ 2nd Boat Surfman	Has to decide where to send resources: to the GALE RUNNER or to James Island for his lifeboat crew? He radios the CG 6589 back and recommends they leave James Island and proceed to the GALE RUNNER's position because it is only minutes away from the rocks. The OIC advises the watchstander to keep off the radio as much as possible because the helicopter may only have a brief window to transmit that they're in trouble too. BMCM LaForge has 14 lives and three Coast Guard assets in his hands.
0205	CG 6589 Air Station Port Angeles	Diverts from the vicinity of James Island and flies south towards The Needles. To make an approach on the GALE RUNNER, they must fly over, around, and through the 190' tall rock islands. The helicopter is being buffeted by winds and keeps fighting to make new approaches as the sailboat is washed over by breaking waves and drifts between the rock pinnacles.
	FA DaMello Comms watchstander	Is relieved of the communications watch to help the beach party. At First Beach, he and two other members run down the beach, dodging waves.
	SA Wingo 1 st Boat Crewmember	Sees a helicopter searchlight in the distance and CG 44393, and activates the night end of his MK-124 signal flare.
0219	CG 6589 Air Station Port Angeles	Arrives on scene with the GALE RUNNER to commence the hoist.
0227	CG 6585 Air Station Port Angeles	Launches from Air Station PA.
0234	CG 44393 2 nd Boat	Arrives at the "Q" buoy and is tasked by the Station to stay there. They remain there for about six hours until daylight and the chance to return across the bar.
0242	CG 6589 Air Station Port Angeles	Overstresses its hoist, but manages to hoist both crewmembers off the GALE RUNNER.
0251	CG 6589 Air Station Port Angeles	Lands at Station QR's ball field to pass the survivors to an ambulance and depart for Station Neah Bay to refuel.
0253	CG 6003 Air Station Astoria	Arrives on scene and spots a strobe light flashing from the cliff at the back of the cove on James Island.
0320	FA DaMello Comms watchstander	On First Beach sees a flashing light down the beach and starts running towards it. While running, DaMello and another member of the beach party are hit by a log that surges towards them on a wave. The wave knocks DaMello down and the log pins him underwater. FN DaMello sees his life and family flashing before his eyes and takes a breath of seawater. DaMello's arm is dislocated by the log, but it releases him and he gets to his feet. The light seen up the beach belongs to a National Park Ranger helping with the search.
	BMCM LaForge OIC/ 2nd Boat Surfman	Heads out to First Beach with another beach party. He is overheard saying to himself, "I should have trained them more, I should have trained them more."
0334	SN Miniken 1 st Boat Crewmember	Is found unconscious without socks or boots on by the other beach party on First Beach. The beach crew performs CPR at the scene and an ambulance takes him to the hospital in Forks, WA. Taking shifts with compressions, the team of responders gives him CPR for a total of four hours.

0432	CG 6003 Air Station Astoria	Observes BM2 Bosley and MK3 Schlimme floating in the cove on James Island. They request the county's high angle rescue team be contacted to rescue SA Wingo on the cliff.
0505	CG 44393 2 nd Boat	Loses communications with the Station after its portable VHF radio dies.
0508	CG 6013 Air Station Astoria	Leaves Air Station Astoria, OR to assist in the search.
0630	CG 6013 Air Station Astoria	Deploys a rescue swimmer to the cliff SA Wingo is hanging onto. SA Wingo is in good condition.
0633	CG 6585 Air Station Port Angeles	Transfers two additional portable VHF radios to 44393.
0734	CG 44393 2 nd Boat	Safely crosses the bar back into the Quillayute River and moors at Station Quillayute River. They have been underway for six hours and 36 minutes. Until they moor and see the other slip empty, they are unaware that CG 44363 has been lost.
Approx. 0815	CG 6013 Air Station Astoria	Deploys the high-angle rescue team to retrieve SA Wingo from the cliff and hoists him to safety.
0932	BM2 Bosley OOD/ 1 st Boat Coxswain	And MK3 Schlimme are recovered from the cove on James Island by 6013's rescue swimmer. The rescue swimmer states that the wreck of 44363 is in "bad shape" and is leaking fuel.
1030	FA Ballard Non-rate	And the rest of the station are notified that SN Miniken has been pronounced dead at Forks Community Hospital.
1050	CG 6013 Air Station Astoria	Hoists the remaining five rescue team members and its rescue swimmer from the beach. The helicopter drops off the remaining Clallam County rescue team and departs for Air Station Astoria.

Aftermath

Findings from the official report, signed by CG Commandant ADM Kramek

BM2 Bosley OOD/ 1 st Boat Coxswain	Is found by the investigators to, "...not have enough rough weather bar crossings at night in a 44' MLB to prepare him for the conditions that MLB 44363 encountered on 12 February 1997 and should not have attempted to cross the bar."
	The investigators are of the opinion that BM2 Bosley viewed the updated weather forecast and had ample time to pass it to the SDO or OIC. Had either of them received this information, a Surfman would have been on board when the call came in.
MK3 Schlimme 1 st Boat Engineer	And SN Miniken, and BM2 Bosley's autopsies list their cause of death as blunt force trauma to the head.
BMCM LaForge OIC/ 2nd Boat Surfman	Was found by the investigators to have "made several key decisions... which increased the chances of survival for both the sailboat and the MLB 4363 crews."

Investigation	<p>Finds that there were no mechanical issues with 44363 to cause the accident. The boat is so badly damaged it is cut into three pieces and hoisted off the island by a helicopter for disposal.</p> <p>According to investigators, “The proximate cause of this casualty was the coxswain’s failure to safely navigate MLB 44363, causing the boat to capsize and founder in the surf conditions near James Island.”</p> <p>But the report also highlighted excessive personnel turnover at the unit. In February 1997, “only two non-rates had been at the station longer than one year, and because of ...high turnover of personnel, a majority of the Station training is focused on providing basic, introductory skills to help new personnel get their boat crew qualifications... Due to the high turnover of personnel, the Station’s operational readiness was diminished in the area of advanced skills/techniques.”</p> <p>At this time, of the 17 crewmembers filling boat crew positions at the station, 12 had been there less than one year (~70%). Also, despite four Surfman billets, only three surfmen were assigned at the unit, including the OIC and XPO.</p> <p>A 1961 editorial about the TRIUMPH-MERMAID disaster at Stations Point Adams/ Cape Disappointment noted similar concerns about crew inexperience at those units.</p>
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Discussion

28. What was it like “playing” your specific part?

29. What do you feel when the SAR alarm goes off?

- Do our risk management tools help here?
- How do you handle this?

30. What was the culture of response and operations like in 1997? How is it today?

- Coast Guard attitudes about risk
- “You have to go out, but you don’t have to come back” (then)
- “Us, ours, them, theirs” (now: balancing risk-taking with being risk-averse)
- Crew selection, support and oversight from experienced SDOs, etc.
- The Coast Guard has supported and related to its small boat stations

31. What parts of the Coast Guard system were related to this mishap? Are they the same or different today?

- Surfman assignment process
- Risk management culture/tools
- Station experience level/qualification process
- Station staffing
- Group nighttime radio guard

32. What were the effects of high turnover?

- Training focused on basic qualifications instead of advanced skills
- Today’s D13 surf stations have ~40% annual turnover, exacerbated with non-rate transfers for A-School

33. Are you prepared to operate without the normal aids and references you rely on?

- In 1997, crews never practiced nighttime rough bar crossings without bar lights
- What aids and references do we rely on today?
- Can we practice taking those away and adapting?
- Do we have “backup plans” for operating in nighttime, low viz, ATON discreps, etc.?

34. Compare communications issues in 1997 and today.

- How much time passed between the initial call and when the CG asked for a position?
- Station watchstanders used to sleep in the comms room to overhear any traffic from the Group
 - Today, Sector could be conversing with a vessel in the middle of the night for 30 minutes without anyone at the station being aware of it
- There was no Rescue 21 in 1997, so targeting a vessel’s location using radio lines of bearing was imprecise
 - This highlights the importance of R21 Geo Display and promptly asking for lat/long positions
- Simple advice to have a vessel standby and wait in deep water can buy time to gather all the information and prevent a worsening situation

35. Why should we get an accurate position and observe the bar before launching?

- The GALE RUNNER’s true position might have been ascertained before the 44363 crossed the bar near James Island
- Even today, vessels often pass geographic references that don’t match their precise location
- This information can impact asset and crew selection, and overall sense of urgency

36. Compare weather forecasting and reporting in 1997 and today.

- None of the 1997 crew or command could have gotten on their phone and seen the forecast or buoy readings
- Despite modern technology, there is still plenty of information that we need to pass manually today

10. Final questions or comments?

References

CDR Hasselbalch, James M. *Investigation into the Capsizing and Subsequent Loss of MLB 44363 and the Death of Three Coast Guard Members That Occurred at Coast Guard Station Quillayute River on 12 FEB 1997*. March, 1997 (including reviews by RADM J. David Spade and ADM Robert E. Kramek).

Noble, Dennis L. *The Rescue of the Gale Runner*. University Press of Florida, 2002.



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For more on the CG 44363 disaster: www.uscg44363.com



12 FEBRUARY 1997

A training remembering the CG 44363 disaster

FA BALLARD



(scan for diagrams)

Introduction

- Sailing vessel GALE RUNNER is transiting from San Francisco, CA to Puget Sound, WA with a crew of two
- CG Station Quillayute River (QR) in La Push, WA is the next station north of Station Grays Harbor. It:
 - Has a BMCM Officer in Charge (OIC) and BM1 Executive Petty Officer (XPO)
 - Has two 44' motor lifeboats (MLB)
 - Reports to Group/Air Station Port Angeles (PA), WA, (the 1997 equivalent of a Sector)
 - Has a hazardous river bar crossing in order to get into the harbor at La Push, WA
 - Has a set of stadium-like "bar lights" fixed on James Island next to the bar for night transits
 - In February 1997, they are inoperative
 - The Officer of the Day (OOD) reports to a Surfman Duty Officer (SDO)
- On 11-12 February the duty section is comprised of 10 ready boat crew members, a watchstander, and several additional non-rated members
- On 11 February, Dr. Dennis Noble, a retired Coast Guard Senior Chief Petty Officer and notable history author reports to the station for a few days to stay on board while researching a book he is writing on lifeboat stations
- The following facts are taken verbatim from the USCG Administrative Investigation and Dr. Dennis Noble's book
- Reading takes about 40 minutes with 14 speakers and one facilitator
- Consider turning off the lights and having any members without speaking parts close their eyes.
- Each reader should say their highlighted parts by speaking the time, name, and details, for example, "At 0700 FA DaMello assumes the station's communications watch..."

Tuesday 11 FEB 1997

Time	Member	Details
Morning	GALE RUNNER Sailing Vessel	Is in Westport, WA and stops in at CG Station Grays Harbor. GALE RUNNER receives the weather forecast and decides to get underway to continue north.
0700	FA DaMello Comms watchstander	Assumes the Station's communications watch until 0700 on 12FEB97.
1640	FA DaMello Comms watchstander	Receives the updated NOAA weather forecast which calls for NW wind 35-40kt and seas building to 14'. For 12 February, the forecast predicts NW winds 30kt and combined seas 18'.
Approx. 1730	BM1 Placido SDO/ 1 st Boat Surfman	<p>Gets together with OOD BM2 Bosley and drives to the station's bar overlook to observe last light bar conditions. He observes that seas aren't bad and he feels comfortable going home on recall for the night, about 15 minutes away.</p> <p>He later said, "From the look of the bar and what Bosley had told me about the weather, there was no need for me to stay aboard."</p>
1740	BM2 Bosley OOD/ 1 st Boat Coxswain	Views the NOAA forecast on the computer and logs his initials, "D.A.B." to acknowledge it.

Evening	GALE RUNNER Sailing Vessel	Begins to encounter heavy weather and decides to head for the QR bar entrance to seek safe harbor.
After 2130	BM2 Bosley OOD/ 1 st Boat Coxswain	Does his evening round with MK3 Schlimme and FN Matthews and drives out to the bar overlook to check things out. FN Matthews recalls BM2 and MK3 saying that, "they [hope] they [don't] get a case [tonight]."
Between 2130- 2200	BMCM LaForge OIC/ 2nd Boat Surfman	Returns from an appointment in Port Angeles and checks in with the OOD at the station. BM2 Bosley does not pass the 1640 weather forecast, but tells the OIC that the weather is supposed to pick up overnight. Without knowing of the forecast details, the OIC agrees with the OOD that the ready boat Surfman can remain on recall for the night. The OIC leaves for his home, 5 minutes away from the station.
2130	Dr. Noble CG History Author	Finishes his conversations with the crew and goes to bed.
Approx. 2200	BM2 Bosley OOD/ 1 st Boat Coxswain	Calls the SDO who remembers Bosley saying, "Nothing [is] going on. The winds [have] picked up a little bit... the weather [is] supposed to pick up later [tomorrow]."
2200	FA DaMello Comms watchstander	Passes the radio guard to Group PA for the night and sets up the cot to sleep in the comms room.

Wednesday 12 FEB 1997

Approx. 0015	GALE RUNNER Sailing Vessel	Hails Station QR on VHF 16 to obtain a bar report. Telecommunications Specialist Third Class (TC3) Marshall at Group PA answers for Station QR, consults the status board and reports, "no restrictions."
	FA DaMello Comms watchstander	Wakes up to the radio traffic between Group and the GALE RUNNER and notices high winds outside. The Station's anemometer is registering gusts of 50kt. On his own initiative, DaMello remembers the 1640 forecast for 18' seas and intercoms TC3 Marshall at Group to tell her about the wind he's seeing and the forecast for seas. He says he thinks that if the OOD knew about the 50kt gusts, then he would put a restriction on the bar.
	Group Port Angeles	Watchstander TC3 Marshall tells FA DaMello to hail the GAIL RUNNER and pass them the current weather conditions.
	FA DaMello Comms watchstander	Hails the sailing vessel and asks, "Are you crossing the bar?"
	GALE RUNNER Sailing Vessel	Crewmember Marcia Infante replies, "Affirmative. We are at the entrance now." She doesn't pass a GPS position.
	FA DaMello Comms watchstander	Passes the latest winds and advises the GALE RUNNER that the bar could be breaking. Next, FA DaMello calls BM2 Bosley in the OOD room to brief him of the weather and situation.
	BM2 Bosley OOD/ 1 st Boat Coxswain	Comes into comms and asks DaMello if he has GALE RUNNER's position. DaMello says that the caller has not relayed their position. Bosley tells DaMello to call the GALE RUNNER and obtain their position. Bosley phones SDO BM1 Placido at his home and informs him of the radio call and that he thinks that it's a bad idea for the sailboat to come across the bar. BM1 asks if he has a position for the sailboat. To keep listening for information, Bosely places the SDO on hold.

	FA DaMello Comms watchstander	Asks the GALE RUNNER for their position. He hears, "We're at 47, 51..." and then static silence.
	GALE RUNNER Sailing Vessel	Crewmember Ken Schlag is steering the sailing vessel and Marcia Infante is on the radio. Suddenly, the sailboat is struck by a rogue wave, knocked down, and dismantled. The radio antenna is damaged and Ken Schlag is thrown overboard. He is tethered with a safety harness and manages to pull himself back onboard. Portholes are blown out by the wave and the GALE RUNNER begins taking on water.
	FA DaMello Comms watchstander	Tries again to hail the boat, "Sailing vessel, this is Quillayute River on 22, over."
Approx. 00:26	GALE RUNNER Sailing Vessel	Crewmember Marcia Infante breaks the silence, "MAYDAY! MAYDAY! THIS IS SAILING VESSEL GALE RUNNER! U.S. COAST GUARD! WE'RE TAKING ON WATER!"
	GALE RUNNER Sailing Vessel	Crewmember Marcia Infante repeats her mayday calls every few minutes. She looks at the GPS plotter to reference the boat's position, but sees a black screen and figures that the GPS is broken. In fact, the GPS is in screensaver mode and she could have pushed any button to bring the chart and GPS position back up on the display.
	FA DaMello Comms watchstander	Only hears static after the mayday call. Group also hears static and suggests Station switch radio sites. DaMello says that he has already tried that.
Approx. 00:26	BM2 Bosley OOD/ 1 st Boat Coxswain	Has gathered this key information in a very short period: there is a sailing vessel that says it is at the entrance to the bar, it has begun taking on water, and the CG has lost communications with it. BM2 Bosley hits the SAR alarm and pipes, "Ready boat crew lay to the ready boat! Sailboat on the bar taking on water."
	BM2 Bosley OOD/ 1 st Boat Coxswain	Takes the SDO phone call off hold and says, "I'm heading for the door."
	BM1 Placido SDO/ 1 st Boat Surfman	Replies, "Call Master Chief [the OIC]. I'm right behind you" and gets in his car to drive back to the station.
		Later, BM1 Placido said that, "If I had known how bad the bar was, I would have told Bosley to wait until I could get to the station."
	SA Wingo 1 st Boat Crewmember	Runs out of his barracks room with SN Miniken and down to the boat.
	Group Port Angeles	Watchstander TC3 Marshall passes that the Group has received more radio transmissions from a frantic woman who doesn't understand Station QR's instructions.
		Group's Duty Officer briefs the Group Commanding Officer, CAPT Volk, at the direction of the Group Senior Duty Officer. The Group is still trying to gather information and is not yet trying to launch a helicopter.
0030	FA DaMello Comms watchstander	Calls and notifies BMCM LaForge of the case and BMCM comes back to the station from his home.
0031	FA DaMello Comms watchstander	Recalls the second boat crew in accordance with the unit's standing orders.
	BM2 Bosley OOD/ 1 st Boat Coxswain	Is one of the first down to the ready boat, CG 44363, and urgently wants to get underway. He runs back up to the station and yells, "Where is my crew?!"

	BMCM LaForge OIC/ 2nd Boat Surfman	Stops at the bar overlook to scan for signs of a sailboat before arriving back at the Station. He notes that there is reduced visibility, but that he can still see the "Q" buoy a mile from the bar. Winds are 30kt with stronger gusts.
0034	BM2 Bosley OOD/ 1 st Boat Coxswain	Gets CG 44363 underway for the SAR case. BM2 Bosley doesn't brief his crew on the mission and the four are all wearing Mustang anti-exposure suits. If he believed the sailboat taking on water was on the bar, he would have thought the situation was very urgent.
	SA Wingo 1 st Boat Crewmember	Hands out pyro vests and SN Miniken hands out surf belts as the boat gets underway. Wingo and Miniken clip into D-rings and later, SA Wingo said that he had presumed MK3 Schlimme clipped in, but he wasn't certain if BM2 Bosley wore his belt or clipped it in. No one on 44363 puts on a helmet, even though policy requires them to and no one speaks up about it. Bosley's helmet was clipped behind his coxswain chair and everyone else's helmets were stowed below in their SAR bags.
	BMCM LaForge OIC/ 2nd Boat Surfman	Is still at the overlook and observes the 44363 leaving the boat basin. He does not see its navigation lights energized. The OIC radios the 44363 and informs them that he does not see a sailboat in the immediate area and orders BM2 Bosley, "To check out the bar to see if they could cross." The OIC heads back to the station.
0043	Group Port Angeles	Watchstander TC3 Marshall intercoms Station QR to have the ready boat standby because they think the case might be a hoax. There has been a rash of hoax calls with a young voice in northwestern Washington over the past two weeks.
	MK3 Schlimme 1 st Boat Engineer	Comes over to the starboard side of the 44363 as it gets underway, adjusts the radar, and then returns the engineer's spot on the port side of the coxswain. While outbound, he reminds BM2 Bosley to not let the lube oil pressures get too high.
	BM2 Bosley OOD/ 1 st Boat Coxswain	Replies, "Yeah, I got it."
	SN Miniken 1 st Boat Crewmember	Operates the port spotlight.
	SA Wingo 1 st Boat Crewmember	Is ordered by BM2 Bosley to man the starboard spotlight and illuminate Wash Rock.
	MK3 Schlimme 1 st Boat Engineer	Yells at Bosley, "Let's get the fuck out of here," just before passing Wash Rock.
	BM2 Bosley OOD/ 1 st Boat Coxswain	Replies, "Fuck that!" Schlimme may have been indicating a desire to go back to the station or instead, to go out to deeper water past the bar.
	FA Ballard Non-rate	Assists FA DaMello in comms and calls the 44363 to pass the Group's instructions to have the ready boat standby.
	BM2 Bosley OOD/ 1 st Boat Coxswain	Responds, "Standby, we're a little busy," likely because BM2 Bosley is focused on negotiating the rough seas on the bar while heading outbound. Regarding the possibility of a hoax, Bosley tells the crew, "I hope not!"
Approx. 0044	SA Wingo 1 st Boat Crewmember	Is told by BM2 Bosley to aim the spotlight starboard towards James Island around the time the 44363 is at Wash Rock. Bosley wants to keep the island off the starboard beam. The 44363 is 100-150 yards off of the island.
0045	BM2 Bosley OOD/ 1 st Boat Coxswain	Radios the station that the 44363 has safely crossed the bar and that it is 16-18' past the bar and evening out. Winds are from the WSW.

	Dr. Noble CG History Author	Joins BMCM LaForge on another trip out to the bar overlook. While driving there, the two hear the 44363 say they made it safely across the bar. BMCM LaForge thinks that the 44363 is likely turning away from James Island and toward the sea buoy into deeper (safer) water.
	SA Wingo 1 st Boat Crewmember	Hears Bosley radio the station that it is 15-16' out (a factual inconsistency) and later said, "I was about to call BS. Those waves were a lot higher than 15-16' and it wasn't getting better, but I was like, 'oh well.'"
		The 44363 is not transiting south on the safe route outbound to the "Q" buoy, but is actually being set north towards the edge of James Island.
		SA Wingo spots a rock and yells, "Rock starboard side! Ten feet!" The boat hits something.
Approx. 0048	BM2 Bosley OOD/ 1 st Boat Coxswain	Yells, "What was that!?" Someone else shouts, "Wave port side!"
	SA Wingo 1 st Boat Crewmember	Sees an enormous wave off the port bow and the boat is rolled over to starboard. SA Wingo hits his head on something and tastes blood. The boat rights itself with its bow pointing towards James Island. When the boat comes up, SA Wingo is twisted in his belt and wrapped up in the canvas dodger. The mast is bent flat to the port side. Wingo reaches for the spotlight and realizes it has broken off the top of the cabin and is gone. The motor lifeboat turns towards the island with way on. The 44363 has been underway for approximately 14 minutes.
Approx. 0048	BM2 Bosley OOD/ 1 st Boat Coxswain	Radios, "Capsized and disoriented."
	FA DaMello Comms watchstander	Hears the call about the boat being capsized, but he and Group PA are confused if the caller is the GALE RUNNER or the 44363. Group and Station hail both boats.
	CG 44393 2 nd Boat	Is the second boat and the recalled crew for it begins arriving at the Station. They begin to dress out in anti-exposure suits and then change their minds, opting for dry suits. The crew heads down to the boat and passes the communications room. They overhear, "Capsized..." but think it is in reference to the sail boat.
	MK3 Schlimme 1 st Boat Engineer	Yells, "We're still on the bar!"
	BM2 Bosley OOD/ 1 st Boat Coxswain	Replies, "Find me buoy 3!"
	SA Wingo 1 st Boat Crewmember	Can see the lights of the town of La Push, but doesn't see Buoy 3 which is too far back around the eastern side of James Island to be visible.
	BMCM LaForge OIC/ 2nd Boat Surfman	And Dr. Noble hear the 44363 say they rolled. The OIC can't see the MLB's navigation lights, but for a moment sees its spotlight sweeping rapidly towards the south from what he thinks is the seaward side of James Island. The OIC now knows the 44363 is in trouble (too close to rocky James Island) and calls the station to get the second boat underway. He also tells the station to call Group PA and get a helicopter dispatched.
	FA DaMello Comms watchstander	Calls the OIC back and passes that Group's duty officer wants to talk with him because Group is still concerned the call is a hoax.

	BMCM LaForge OIC/ 2nd Boat Surfman	And Dr. Noble return to the Station and the OIC tells the SDO that the 44363 is in trouble. BMCM LaForge phones Group PA and says he has, "A serious situation and still [needs] the HH-65A helicopter launched" and also requests an HH-60 helicopter from Astoria, OR.
0049	GALE RUNNER Sailing Vessel	Passes their full position to Group PA.
Approx. 0049	SA Wingo 1 st Boat Crewmember	Hears someone shout something. The boat is hit by a wave on the port quarter and pitch-poles, end over end. Upon re-righting itself, the 44363 rests on the rocks and he knows it is out of the water because the engine noise is different. The mast and entire top of the cabin have sheared off. BM2 Bosley and SN Miniken are gone. The ship's clock recovered from the wreckage of the 44363 was stopped at exactly 00h:49m:03s. CG 44363 has been underway for about 15 minutes.
	MK3 Schlimme 1 st Boat Engineer	Takes control of the 44363.
	SA Wingo 1 st Boat Crewmember	Panics and says, "We have to get out of here" and begins to unclip his surf belt.
	MK3 Schlimme 1 st Boat Engineer	Convinces Wingo that it's safest to stay with the boat and to clip back in. He asks Wingo for the boat's radio and tries to call the station with their position.
	SA Wingo 1 st Boat Crewmember	Looks down at the radio while Schlimme makes the call and sees that it's broken. Wingo realizes that MK3 Schlimme "Was just doing it to calm me down, and it worked because suddenly I was super calm. He saved my life by keeping me on the boat."
	MK3 Schlimme 1 st Boat Engineer	Tries to get himself and SA Wingo down into the forward compartment of the 44363, but can't because the handle of the watertight door is jammed from the boat's impact with rocks. Seeing another wave approaching, Schlimme yells, "Hold on!"
	SA Wingo 1 st Boat Crewmember	Feels the boat roll for a third time after the 44363 is knocked off the rock it was resting on and pushed against the rock cliffs. Underwater, he notes a "tremendous quiet." When the 44363 rights again, MK3 Schlimme is gone and Wingo sees a body float by the boat. He can't throw a life ring to it because both life rings are missing.
		CG 44363 has been underway for about 20 minutes.
		Wingo feels the boat drifting backwards and banging along the rocks into the cove on James Island. He sees a strobe light flashing in the cove, grabs the strobe light from his pyro vest, and turns it on. SA Wingo remembers that he thinks he placed the boat's engines in neutral, but doesn't secure them. Wingo grabs his MK-79 flare kit, fires five flares into the sky and two horizontally towards the beach to illuminate it. Like Schlimme, he tries to get into the forward compartment where there is a portable VHF radio and more flares, but also finds the door jammed.
Approx. 0055	BMCM LaForge OIC/ 2nd Boat Surfman	Is off the phone with Group PA after asking for helicopters and someone at the station tells him they've spotted red flares. The OIC finds Dr. Noble and says, "Let's go back to the bar."
	BM1 Placido SDO/ 1 st Boat Surfman	Shouts, "I'm going" and runs down to the 44393.
	Dr. Noble CG History Author	Parks at the bar overlook with BMCM LaForge and sees a red flare in the sky.

	BM1 Placido SDO/ 1 st Boat Surfman	Gets down to the 44393 and gives a quick brief on the mission. At this point, the second boat crew doesn't know the 44363 is in trouble. He later said that, "I wanted to stick my nose close to the bar and look around before trying to get across. I had no Goddam clue what the bar was doing."
0058	CG 44393 2 nd Boat	Gets underway with BM1 Placido as Surfman and three other crewmen. By chance, BM3 Martin is on second boat, but should have been on the ready boat. Because of his pregnant wife, the surfmen had given him as much time on second boat as possible. CG 44363 got underway approximately 24 minutes earlier.
	BM1 Placido SDO/ 1 st Boat Surfman	Sees a red flare in the sky shortly after leaving the boat basin. He thinks it could be from the 44363. He decides that they must cross the bar.
	Dr. Noble CG History Author	And BMCM LaForge have been at the overlook for a few minutes and see the 44393 leaving the protection of the river. The OIC thinks he can help keep track of the 44393 and advise them if they begin to get set towards James Island. In his own words, Dr. Noble remembers seeing the, "Small white boat rising. Rising. Rising. Rising until it seemed to stand on its stern. White water almost enveloping the small boat. Then the plunge downward."
	BMCM LaForge OIC/ 2nd Boat Surfman	Uses the VHF radio in his truck to communicate back and forth with the 44393 on the bar. As the 44393 heads farther out to sea, he can tell that the length of the swells underneath the boat are lengthening out. He is able to see the 44393 getting set north towards James Island and advises the boat. Dr. Noble and the OIC see more red flares from the western part of James Island.
Approx. 0100	Group Port Angeles	<p>Duty Officer first called the Group's Operations Officer around 0030. He now calls the Group's Senior Duty Officer (SDO) in his duty room and informs him of the case. The SDO tells him to hit the SAR alarm at the Air Station.</p> <p>Next, the Group Duty Officer calls the Group Commanding Officer again and tells him that the helicopter is launching because they have lost communications with the 44363 and have spotted red flares. Until that time, the CO did not know that 44363 had gotten underway from Station Quillayute River. Group CO CAPT Volk drives into the Air Station and assigns a non-rate in the command center to scribe everything he sees and hears as the case goes on.</p>
0107	SA Wingo 1 st Boat Crewmember	<p>Floats with the 44363, gauging his progress into the cove by the illumination from the boat's aft deck light light. He notices the time on his watch: 0107.</p> <p>Starts praying, "Not a prayer of all the things I would or wouldn't do if I was saved, it was just an all-out cry for help: 'Please get my boat to shore.'" The boat's stern swings around and points towards the beach at the far back of the cove.</p> <p>SA Wingo thinks he sees a tree towards shore, unclips his surf belt, hops down into knee-deep water, and wades into the beach. CG 44363 comes to its final resting place at the back of the northern cove in James Island.</p>
0110	CG 44393 2 nd Boat	Crosses the bar.
0110	Group Port Angeles	Watchstander TC3 Marshall transmits an Urgent Marine Information Broadcast.

	BM1 Placido SDO/ 1 st Boat Surfman	Remembers that his, "Crew performed like they were supposed to... They constantly fed me information. I felt like a machine. I absorbed the information and my body performed the necessary motions." Eventually he sees flares both to the north (from the 44363) and from the south (from the GALE RUNNER).
		He remembers, "I knew which ones were ours. I started to push back in and had to decide: Should I go for the sailboat, or our boat? It was one of the hardest decisions I ever had to make. I [later] saw the helicopter starting to search for our boat. I knew the helo could probably help out our boat better than I could, so I headed for the sailboat."
0121	BM1 Placido SDO/ 1 st Boat Surfman	Radios, "We are on handheld. Our antenna was damaged by a breaker."
	BMCM LaForge OIC/ 2nd Boat Surfman	Advises the 44393 to head to the "Q" sea buoy and stay in deep water.
	CG 44393 2 nd Boat	Eventually depletes the battery on their portable VHF radio and loses all communications with the station and BMCM LaForge at the overlook. They proceed to the "Q" buoy.
	BMCM LaForge OIC/ 2nd Boat Surfman	Calls Group again for helicopter assistance because he has a sailboat in distress, a missing MLB, and another MLB he's lost communications with.
0123	CG 6589 Air Station Port Angeles	Takes off from Air Station PA. BM2 Bosley, MK3 Schlimme, and SN Miniken are already dead.
	BMCM LaForge OIC/ 2nd Boat Surfman	And Dr. Noble return to the station.
After 0130	Group Port Angeles	Commanding Officer (CO) CAPT Volk calls nearby units to request additional surface assets. The 110' cutter CUTTYHUNK is in Neah Bay and is dispatched towards La Push. CAPT Volk calls CWO2 Robert Coster, the CO of the Station Neah Bay, and asks if he can send one of his lifeboats south to help. CWO2 Coster drives in to his station and reviews the conditions. He makes the difficult decision that he cannot safely send his crews. CAPT Volk conferences with the CO of Group Astoria and CWO2 Randy Lewis, the CO of Station Grays Harbor. CWO2 Lewis also declines sending his station's 52' MLB due to the conditions. Later, CAPT Volk says that both stations' CO's, "Made the right decision."
0157	CG 6589 Air Station Port Angeles	Arrives on scene, is briefed about the situation by BMCM LaForge, and commences a search near James Island.
0159	GALE RUNNER Sailing Vessel	Passes their accurate position to the Coast Guard after reestablishing communications. They are not on the bar, but farther south near "The Needles," a group of jagged rock features sticking out from the ocean, about three miles from the bar.
0201	BMCM LaForge OIC/ 2nd Boat Surfman	Orders a beach search for survivors and several crewmembers, local police, and National Park Rangers set out for First Beach in anti-exposure coveralls and helmets.

0204	CG 6003 Air Station Astoria	Launches from Air Station Astoria.
	BMCM LaForge OIC/ 2nd Boat Surfman	Has to decide where to send resources: to the GALE RUNNER or to James Island for his lifeboat crew? He radios the CG 6589 back and recommends they leave James Island and proceed to the GALE RUNNER's position because it is only minutes away from the rocks. The OIC advises the watchstander to keep off the radio as much as possible because the helicopter may only have a brief window to transmit that they're in trouble too. BMCM LaForge has 14 lives and three Coast Guard assets in his hands.
0205	CG 6589 Air Station Port Angeles	Diverts from the vicinity of James Island and flies south towards The Needles. To make an approach on the GALE RUNNER, they must fly over, around, and through the 190' tall rock islands. The helicopter is being buffeted by winds and keeps fighting to make new approaches as the sailboat is washed over by breaking waves and drifts between the rock pinnacles.
	FA DaMello Comms watchstander	Is relieved of the communications watch to help the beach party. At First Beach, he and two other members run down the beach, dodging waves.
	SA Wingo 1 st Boat Crewmember	Sees a helicopter searchlight in the distance and CG 44393, and activates the night end of his MK-124 signal flare.
0219	CG 6589 Air Station Port Angeles	Arrives on scene with the GALE RUNNER to commence the hoist.
0227	CG 6585 Air Station Port Angeles	Launches from Air Station PA.
0234	CG 44393 2 nd Boat	Arrives at the "Q" buoy and is tasked by the Station to stay there. They remain there for about six hours until daylight and the chance to return across the bar.
0242	CG 6589 Air Station Port Angeles	Overstresses its hoist, but manages to hoist both crewmembers off the GALE RUNNER.
0251	CG 6589 Air Station Port Angeles	Lands at Station QR's ball field to pass the survivors to an ambulance and depart for Station Neah Bay to refuel.
0253	CG 6003 Air Station Astoria	Arrives on scene and spots a strobe light flashing from the cliff at the back of the cove on James Island.
0320	FA DaMello Comms watchstander	On First Beach sees a flashing light down the beach and starts running towards it. While running, DaMello and another member of the beach party are hit by a log that surges towards them on a wave. The wave knocks DaMello down and the log pins him underwater. FN DaMello sees his life and family flashing before his eyes and takes a breath of seawater. DaMello's arm is dislocated by the log, but it releases him and he gets to his feet. The light seen up the beach belongs to a National Park Ranger helping with the search.
	BMCM LaForge OIC/ 2nd Boat Surfman	Heads out to First Beach with another beach party. He is overheard saying to himself, "I should have trained them more, I should have trained them more."
0334	SN Miniken 1 st Boat Crewmember	Is found unconscious without socks or boots on by the other beach party on First Beach. The beach crew performs CPR at the scene and an ambulance takes him to the hospital in Forks, WA. Taking shifts with compressions, the team of responders gives him CPR for a total of four hours.

0432	CG 6003 Air Station Astoria	Observes BM2 Bosley and MK3 Schlimme floating in the cove on James Island. They request the county's high angle rescue team be contacted to rescue SA Wingo on the cliff.
0505	CG 44393 2 nd Boat	Loses communications with the Station after its portable VHF radio dies.
0508	CG 6013 Air Station Astoria	Leaves Air Station Astoria, OR to assist in the search.
0630	CG 6013 Air Station Astoria	Deploys a rescue swimmer to the cliff SA Wingo is hanging onto. SA Wingo is in good condition.
0633	CG 6585 Air Station Port Angeles	Transfers two additional portable VHF radios to 44393.
0734	CG 44393 2 nd Boat	Safely crosses the bar back into the Quillayute River and moors at Station Quillayute River. They have been underway for six hours and 36 minutes. Until they moor and see the other slip empty, they are unaware that CG 44363 has been lost.
Approx. 0815	CG 6013 Air Station Astoria	Deploys the high-angle rescue team to retrieve SA Wingo from the cliff and hoists him to safety.
0932	BM2 Bosley OOD/ 1 st Boat Coxswain	And MK3 Schlimme are recovered from the cove on James Island by 6013's rescue swimmer. The rescue swimmer states that the wreck of 44363 is in "bad shape" and is leaking fuel.
1030	FA Ballard Non-rate	And the rest of the station are notified that SN Miniken has been pronounced dead at Forks Community Hospital.
1050	CG 6013 Air Station Astoria	Hoists the remaining five rescue team members and its rescue swimmer from the beach. The helicopter drops off the remaining Clallam County rescue team and departs for Air Station Astoria.

Aftermath

Findings from the official report, signed by CG Commandant ADM Kramek

BM2 Bosley OOD/ 1 st Boat Coxswain	Is found by the investigators to, "...not have enough rough weather bar crossings at night in a 44' MLB to prepare him for the conditions that MLB 44363 encountered on 12 February 1997 and should not have attempted to cross the bar."
	The investigators are of the opinion that BM2 Bosley viewed the updated weather forecast and had ample time to pass it to the SDO or OIC. Had either of them received this information, a Surfman would have been on board when the call came in.
MK3 Schlimme 1 st Boat Engineer	And SN Miniken, and BM2 Bosley's autopsies list their cause of death as blunt force trauma to the head.
BMCM LaForge OIC/ 2nd Boat Surfman	Was found by the investigators to have "made several key decisions... which increased the chances of survival for both the sailboat and the MLB 4363 crews."

Investigation	<p>Finds that there were no mechanical issues with 44363 to cause the accident. The boat is so badly damaged it is cut into three pieces and hoisted off the island by a helicopter for disposal.</p> <p>According to investigators, “The proximate cause of this casualty was the coxswain’s failure to safely navigate MLB 44363, causing the boat to capsize and founder in the surf conditions near James Island.”</p> <p>But the report also highlighted excessive personnel turnover at the unit. In February 1997, “only two non-rates had been at the station longer than one year, and because of ...high turnover of personnel, a majority of the Station training is focused on providing basic, introductory skills to help new personnel get their boat crew qualifications... Due to the high turnover of personnel, the Station’s operational readiness was diminished in the area of advanced skills/techniques.”</p> <p>At this time, of the 17 crewmembers filling boat crew positions at the station, 12 had been there less than one year (~70%). Also, despite four Surfman billets, only three surfmen were assigned at the unit, including the OIC and XPO.</p> <p>A 1961 editorial about the TRIUMPH-MERMAID disaster at Stations Point Adams/ Cape Disappointment noted similar concerns about crew inexperience at those units.</p>
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Discussion

37. What was it like “playing” your specific part?

38. What do you feel when the SAR alarm goes off?

- Do our risk management tools help here?
- How do you handle this?

39. What was the culture of response and operations like in 1997? How is it today?

- Coast Guard attitudes about risk
- “You have to go out, but you don’t have to come back” (then)
- “Us, ours, them, theirs” (now: balancing risk-taking with being risk-averse)
- Crew selection, support and oversight from experienced SDOs, etc.
- The Coast Guard has supported and related to its small boat stations

40. What parts of the Coast Guard system were related to this mishap? Are they the same or different today?

- Surfman assignment process
- Risk management culture/tools
- Station experience level/qualification process
- Station staffing
- Group nighttime radio guard

41. What were the effects of high turnover?

- Training focused on basic qualifications instead of advanced skills
- Today’s D13 surf stations have ~40% annual turnover, exacerbated with non-rate transfers for A-School

42. Are you prepared to operate without the normal aids and references you rely on?

- In 1997, crews never practiced nighttime rough bar crossings without bar lights
- What aids and references do we rely on today?
- Can we practice taking those away and adapting?
- Do we have “backup plans” for operating in nighttime, low viz, ATON discreps, etc.?

43. Compare communications issues in 1997 and today.

- How much time passed between the initial call and when the CG asked for a position?
- Station watchstanders used to sleep in the comms room to overhear any traffic from the Group
 - Today, Sector could be conversing with a vessel in the middle of the night for 30 minutes without anyone at the station being aware of it
- There was no Rescue 21 in 1997, so targeting a vessel’s location using radio lines of bearing was imprecise
 - This highlights the importance of R21 Geo Display and promptly asking for lat/long positions
- Simple advice to have a vessel standby and wait in deep water can buy time to gather all the information and prevent a worsening situation

44. Why should we get an accurate position and observe the bar before launching?

- The GALE RUNNER’s true position might have been ascertained before the 44363 crossed the bar near James Island
- Even today, vessels often pass geographic references that don’t match their precise location
- This information can impact asset and crew selection, and overall sense of urgency

45. Compare weather forecasting and reporting in 1997 and today.

- None of the 1997 crew or command could have gotten on their phone and seen the forecast or buoy readings
- Despite modern technology, there is still plenty of information that we need to pass manually today

10. Final questions or comments?

References

CDR Hasselbalch, James M. *Investigation into the Capsizing and Subsequent Loss of MLB 44363 and the Death of Three Coast Guard Members That Occurred at Coast Guard Station Quillayute River on 12 FEB 1997*. March, 1997 (including reviews by RADM J. David Spade and ADM Robert E. Kramek).

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For more on the CG 44363 disaster: www.uscg44363.com



12 FEBRUARY 1997

A training remembering the CG 44363 disaster

BM2 BOSLEY



(scan for diagrams)

Introduction

- Sailing vessel GALE RUNNER is transiting from San Francisco, CA to Puget Sound, WA with a crew of two
- CG Station Quillayute River (QR) in La Push, WA is the next station north of Station Grays Harbor. It:
 - Has a BMCM Officer in Charge (OIC) and BM1 Executive Petty Officer (XPO)
 - Has two 44' motor lifeboats (MLB)
 - Reports to Group/Air Station Port Angeles (PA), WA, (the 1997 equivalent of a Sector)
 - Has a hazardous river bar crossing in order to get into the harbor at La Push, WA
 - Has a set of stadium-like "bar lights" fixed on James Island next to the bar for night transits
 - In February 1997, they are inoperative
 - The Officer of the Day (OOD) reports to a Surfman Duty Officer (SDO)
- On 11-12 February the duty section is comprised of 10 ready boat crew members, a watchstander, and several additional non-rated members
- On 11 February, Dr. Dennis Noble, a retired Coast Guard Senior Chief Petty Officer and notable history author reports to the station for a few days to stay on board while researching a book he is writing on lifeboat stations
- The following facts are taken verbatim from the USCG Administrative Investigation and Dr. Dennis Noble's book
- Reading takes about 40 minutes with 14 speakers and one facilitator
- Consider turning off the lights and having any members without speaking parts close their eyes.
- Each reader should say their highlighted parts by speaking the time, name, and details, for example, "At 0700 FA DaMello assumes the station's communications watch..."

Tuesday 11 FEB 1997

Time	Member	Details
Morning	GALE RUNNER Sailing Vessel	Is in Westport, WA and stops in at CG Station Grays Harbor. GALE RUNNER receives the weather forecast and decides to get underway to continue north.
0700	FA DaMello Comms watchstander	Assumes the Station's communications watch until 0700 on 12FEB97.
1640	FA DaMello Comms watchstander	Receives the updated NOAA weather forecast which calls for NW wind 35-40kt and seas building to 14'. For 12 February, the forecast predicts NW winds 30kt and combined seas 18'.
Approx. 1730	BM1 Placido SDO/ 1 st Boat Surfman	<p>Gets together with OOD BM2 Bosley and drives to the station's bar overlook to observe last light bar conditions. He observes that seas aren't bad and he feels comfortable going home on recall for the night, about 15 minutes away.</p> <p>He later said, "From the look of the bar and what Bosley had told me about the weather, there was no need for me to stay aboard."</p>
1740	BM2 Bosley OOD/ 1 st Boat Coxswain	Views the NOAA forecast on the computer and logs his initials, "D.A.B." to acknowledge it.

Evening	GALE RUNNER Sailing Vessel	Begins to encounter heavy weather and decides to head for the QR bar entrance to seek safe harbor.
After 2130	BM2 Bosley OOD/ 1 st Boat Coxswain	Does his evening round with MK3 Schlimme and FN Matthews and drives out to the bar overlook to check things out. FN Matthews recalls BM2 and MK3 saying that, "they [hope] they [don't] get a case [tonight]."
Between 2130- 2200	BMCM LaForge OIC/ 2nd Boat Surfman	Returns from an appointment in Port Angeles and checks in with the OOD at the station. BM2 Bosley does not pass the 1640 weather forecast, but tells the OIC that the weather is supposed to pick up overnight. Without knowing of the forecast details, the OIC agrees with the OOD that the ready boat Surfman can remain on recall for the night. The OIC leaves for his home, 5 minutes away from the station.
2130	Dr. Noble CG History Author	Finishes his conversations with the crew and goes to bed.
Approx. 2200	BM2 Bosley OOD/ 1 st Boat Coxswain	Calls the SDO who remembers Bosley saying, "Nothing [is] going on. The winds [have] picked up a little bit... the weather [is] supposed to pick up later [tomorrow]."
2200	FA DaMello Comms watchstander	Passes the radio guard to Group PA for the night and sets up the cot to sleep in the comms room.

Wednesday 12 FEB 1997

Approx. 0015	GALE RUNNER Sailing Vessel	Hails Station QR on VHF 16 to obtain a bar report. Telecommunications Specialist Third Class (TC3) Marshall at Group PA answers for Station QR, consults the status board and reports, "no restrictions."
	FA DaMello Comms watchstander	Wakes up to the radio traffic between Group and the GALE RUNNER and notices high winds outside. The Station's anemometer is registering gusts of 50kt. On his own initiative, DaMello remembers the 1640 forecast for 18' seas and intercoms TC3 Marshall at Group to tell her about the wind he's seeing and the forecast for seas. He says he thinks that if the OOD knew about the 50kt gusts, then he would put a restriction on the bar.
	Group Port Angeles	Watchstander TC3 Marshall tells FA DaMello to hail the GAIL RUNNER and pass them the current weather conditions.
	FA DaMello Comms watchstander	Hails the sailing vessel and asks, "Are you crossing the bar?"
	GALE RUNNER Sailing Vessel	Crewmember Marcia Infante replies, "Affirmative. We are at the entrance now." She doesn't pass a GPS position.
	FA DaMello Comms watchstander	Passes the latest winds and advises the GALE RUNNER that the bar could be breaking. Next, FA DaMello calls BM2 Bosley in the OOD room to brief him of the weather and situation.
	BM2 Bosley OOD/ 1 st Boat Coxswain	Comes into comms and asks DaMello if he has GALE RUNNER's position. DaMello says that the caller has not relayed their position. Bosley tells DaMello to call the GALE RUNNER and obtain their position. Bosley phones SDO BM1 Placido at his home and informs him of the radio call and that he thinks that it's a bad idea for the sailboat to come across the bar. BM1 asks if he has a position for the sailboat. To keep listening for information, Bosely places the SDO on hold.

	FA DaMello Comms watchstander	Asks the GALE RUNNER for their position. He hears, "We're at 47, 51..." and then static silence.
	GALE RUNNER Sailing Vessel	Crewmember Ken Schlag is steering the sailing vessel and Marcia Infante is on the radio. Suddenly, the sailboat is struck by a rogue wave, knocked down, and dismasted. The radio antenna is damaged and Ken Schlag is thrown overboard. He is tethered with a safety harness and manages to pull himself back onboard. Portholes are blown out by the wave and the GALE RUNNER begins taking on water.
	FA DaMello Comms watchstander	Tries again to hail the boat, "Sailing vessel, this is Quillayute River on 22, over."
Approx. 00:26	GALE RUNNER Sailing Vessel	Crewmember Marcia Infante breaks the silence, "MAYDAY! MAYDAY! THIS IS SAILING VESSEL GALE RUNNER! U.S. COAST GUARD! WE'RE TAKING ON WATER!"
	GALE RUNNER Sailing Vessel	Crewmember Marcia Infante repeats her mayday calls every few minutes. She looks at the GPS plotter to reference the boat's position, but sees a black screen and figures that the GPS is broken. In fact, the GPS is in screensaver mode and she could have pushed any button to bring the chart and GPS position back up on the display.
	FA DaMello Comms watchstander	Only hears static after the mayday call. Group also hears static and suggests Station switch radio sites. DaMello says that he has already tried that.
Approx. 00:26	BM2 Bosley OOD/ 1 st Boat Coxswain	Has gathered this key information in a very short period: there is a sailing vessel that says it is at the entrance to the bar, it has begun taking on water, and the CG has lost communications with it. BM2 Bosley hits the SAR alarm and pipes, "Ready boat crew lay to the ready boat! Sailboat on the bar taking on water."
	BM2 Bosley OOD/ 1 st Boat Coxswain	Takes the SDO phone call off hold and says, "I'm heading for the door."
	BM1 Placido SDO/ 1 st Boat Surfman	Replies, "Call Master Chief [the OIC]. I'm right behind you" and gets in his car to drive back to the station.
		Later, BM1 Placido said that, "If I had known how bad the bar was, I would have told Bosley to wait until I could get to the station."
	SA Wingo 1 st Boat Crewmember	Runs out of his barracks room with SN Miniken and down to the boat.
	Group Port Angeles	Watchstander TC3 Marshall passes that the Group has received more radio transmissions from a frantic woman who doesn't understand Station QR's instructions.
		Group's Duty Officer briefs the Group Commanding Officer, CAPT Volk, at the direction of the Group Senior Duty Officer. The Group is still trying to gather information and is not yet trying to launch a helicopter.
0030	FA DaMello Comms watchstander	Calls and notifies BMCM LaForge of the case and BMCM comes back to the station from his home.
0031	FA DaMello Comms watchstander	Recalls the second boat crew in accordance with the unit's standing orders.
	BM2 Bosley OOD/ 1 st Boat Coxswain	Is one of the first down to the ready boat, CG 44363, and urgently wants to get underway. He runs back up to the station and yells, "Where is my crew?!"

	BMCM LaForge OIC/ 2nd Boat Surfman	Stops at the bar overlook to scan for signs of a sailboat before arriving back at the Station. He notes that there is reduced visibility, but that he can still see the "Q" buoy a mile from the bar. Winds are 30kt with stronger gusts.
0034	BM2 Bosley OOD/ 1 st Boat Coxswain	Gets CG 44363 underway for the SAR case. BM2 Bosley doesn't brief his crew on the mission and the four are all wearing Mustang anti-exposure suits. If he believed the sailboat taking on water was on the bar, he would have thought the situation was very urgent.
	SA Wingo 1 st Boat Crewmember	Hands out pyro vests and SN Miniken hands out surf belts as the boat gets underway. Wingo and Miniken clip into D-rings and later, SA Wingo said that he had presumed MK3 Schlimme clipped in, but he wasn't certain if BM2 Bosley wore his belt or clipped it in. No one on 44363 puts on a helmet, even though policy requires them to and no one speaks up about it. Bosley's helmet was clipped behind his coxswain chair and everyone else's helmets were stowed below in their SAR bags.
	BMCM LaForge OIC/ 2nd Boat Surfman	Is still at the overlook and observes the 44363 leaving the boat basin. He does not see its navigation lights energized. The OIC radios the 44363 and informs them that he does not see a sailboat in the immediate area and orders BM2 Bosley, "To check out the bar to see if they could cross." The OIC heads back to the station.
0043	Group Port Angeles	Watchstander TC3 Marshall intercoms Station QR to have the ready boat standby because they think the case might be a hoax. There has been a rash of hoax calls with a young voice in northwestern Washington over the past two weeks.
	MK3 Schlimme 1 st Boat Engineer	Comes over to the starboard side of the 44363 as it gets underway, adjusts the radar, and then returns the engineer's spot on the port side of the coxswain. While outbound, he reminds BM2 Bosley to not let the lube oil pressures get too high.
	BM2 Bosley OOD/ 1 st Boat Coxswain	Replies , "Yeah, I got it."
	SN Miniken 1 st Boat Crewmember	Operates the port spotlight.
	SA Wingo 1 st Boat Crewmember	Is ordered by BM2 Bosley to man the starboard spotlight and illuminate Wash Rock.
	MK3 Schlimme 1 st Boat Engineer	Yells at Bosley, "Let's get the fuck out of here," just before passing Wash Rock.
	BM2 Bosley OOD/ 1 st Boat Coxswain	Replies , "Fuck that!" Schlimme may have been indicating a desire to go back to the station or instead, to go out to deeper water past the bar.
	FA Ballard Non-rate	Assists FA DaMello in comms and calls the 44363 to pass the Group's instructions to have the ready boat standby.
	BM2 Bosley OOD/ 1 st Boat Coxswain	Responds , "Standby, we're a little busy," likely because BM2 Bosley is focused on negotiating the rough seas on the bar while heading outbound. Regarding the possibility of a hoax, Bosley tells the crew, "I hope not!"
Approx. 0044	SA Wingo 1 st Boat Crewmember	Is told by BM2 Bosley to aim the spotlight starboard towards James Island around the time the 44363 is at Wash Rock. Bosley wants to keep the island off the starboard beam. The 44363 is 100-150 yards off of the island.
0045	BM2 Bosley OOD/ 1 st Boat Coxswain	Radios the station that the 44363 has safely crossed the bar and that it is 16-18' past the bar and evening out. Winds are from the WSW.

Dr. Noble
CG History Author

Joins BMCM LaForge on another trip out to the bar overlook. While driving there, the two hear the 44363 say they made it safely across the bar. BMCM LaForge thinks that the 44363 is likely turning away from James Island and toward the sea buoy into deeper (safer) water.

SA Wingo
1st Boat Crewmember

Hears Bosley radio the station that it is 15-16' out (a factual inconsistency) and later said, "I was about to call BS. Those waves were a lot higher than 15-16' and it wasn't getting better, but I was like, 'oh well.'"

The 44363 is not transiting south on the safe route outbound to the "Q" buoy, but is actually being set north towards the edge of James Island.

SA Wingo spots a rock and yells, "Rock starboard side! Ten feet!" The boat hits something.

Approx.
0048

BM2 Bosley
OOD/ 1st Boat Coxswain

Yells, "What was that!?" Someone else shouts, "Wave port side!"

SA Wingo
1st Boat Crewmember

Sees an enormous wave off the port bow and the boat is rolled over to starboard. SA Wingo hits his head on something and tastes blood. The boat rights itself with its bow pointing towards James Island. When the boat comes up, SA Wingo is twisted in his belt and wrapped up in the canvas dodger. The mast is bent flat to the port side. Wingo reaches for the spotlight and realizes it has broken off the top of the cabin and is gone. The motor lifeboat turns towards the island with way on. The 44363 has been underway for approximately 14 minutes.

Approx.
0048

BM2 Bosley
OOD/ 1st Boat Coxswain

Radios, "Capsized and disoriented."

FA DaMello
Comms watchstander

Hears the call about the boat being capsized, but he and Group PA are confused if the caller is the GALE RUNNER or the 44363. Group and Station hail both boats.

CG 44393
2nd Boat

Is the second boat and the recalled crew for it begins arriving at the Station. They begin to dress out in anti-exposure suits and then change their minds, opting for dry suits. The crew heads down to the boat and passes the communications room. They overhear, "Capsized..." but think it is in reference to the sail boat.

MK3 Schlimme
1st Boat Engineer

Yells, "We're still on the bar!"

BM2 Bosley
OOD/ 1st Boat Coxswain

Replies, "Find me buoy 3!"

SA Wingo
1st Boat Crewmember

Can see the lights of the town of La Push, but doesn't see Buoy 3 which is too far back around the eastern side of James Island to be visible.

BMCM LaForge
OIC/ 2nd Boat Surfman

And Dr. Noble hear the 44363 say they rolled. The OIC can't see the MLB's navigation lights, but for a moment sees its spotlight sweeping rapidly towards the south from what he thinks is the seaward side of James Island. The OIC now knows the 44363 is in trouble (too close to rocky James Island) and calls the station to get the second boat underway. He also tells the station to call Group PA and get a helicopter dispatched.

FA DaMello
Comms watchstander

Calls the OIC back and passes that Group's duty officer wants to talk with him because Group is still concerned the call is a hoax.

	BMCM LaForge OIC/ 2nd Boat Surfman	And Dr. Noble return to the Station and the OIC tells the SDO that the 44363 is in trouble. BMCM LaForge phones Group PA and says he has, "A serious situation and still [needs] the HH-65A helicopter launched" and also requests an HH-60 helicopter from Astoria, OR.
0049	GALE RUNNER Sailing Vessel	Passes their full position to Group PA.
Approx. 0049	SA Wingo 1 st Boat Crewmember	Hears someone shout something. The boat is hit by a wave on the port quarter and pitch-poles, end over end. Upon re-righting itself, the 44363 rests on the rocks and he knows it is out of the water because the engine noise is different. The mast and entire top of the cabin have sheared off. BM2 Bosley and SN Miniken are gone. The ship's clock recovered from the wreckage of the 44363 was stopped at exactly 00h:49m:03s. CG 44363 has been underway for about 15 minutes.
	MK3 Schlimme 1 st Boat Engineer	Takes control of the 44363.
	SA Wingo 1 st Boat Crewmember	Panics and says, "We have to get out of here" and begins to unclip his surf belt.
	MK3 Schlimme 1 st Boat Engineer	Convinces Wingo that it's safest to stay with the boat and to clip back in. He asks Wingo for the boat's radio and tries to call the station with their position.
	SA Wingo 1 st Boat Crewmember	Looks down at the radio while Schlimme makes the call and sees that it's broken. Wingo realizes that MK3 Schlimme "Was just doing it to calm me down, and it worked because suddenly I was super calm. He saved my life by keeping me on the boat."
	MK3 Schlimme 1 st Boat Engineer	Tries to get himself and SA Wingo down into the forward compartment of the 44363, but can't because the handle of the watertight door is jammed from the boat's impact with rocks. Seeing another wave approaching, Schlimme yells, "Hold on!"
	SA Wingo 1 st Boat Crewmember	Feels the boat roll for a third time after the 44363 is knocked off the rock it was resting on and pushed against the rock cliffs. Underwater, he notes a "tremendous quiet." When the 44363 rights again, MK3 Schlimme is gone and Wingo sees a body float by the boat. He can't throw a life ring to it because both life rings are missing.
		CG 44363 has been underway for about 20 minutes.
		Wingo feels the boat drifting backwards and banging along the rocks into the cove on James Island. He sees a strobe light flashing in the cove, grabs the strobe light from his pyro vest, and turns it on. SA Wingo remembers that he thinks he placed the boat's engines in neutral, but doesn't secure them. Wingo grabs his MK-79 flare kit, fires five flares into the sky and two horizontally towards the beach to illuminate it. Like Schlimme, he tries to get into the forward compartment where there is a portable VHF radio and more flares, but also finds the door jammed.
Approx. 0055	BMCM LaForge OIC/ 2nd Boat Surfman	Is off the phone with Group PA after asking for helicopters and someone at the station tells him they've spotted red flares. The OIC finds Dr. Noble and says, "Let's go back to the bar."
	BM1 Placido SDO/ 1 st Boat Surfman	Shouts, "I'm going" and runs down to the 44393.
	Dr. Noble CG History Author	Parks at the bar overlook with BMCM LaForge and sees a red flare in the sky.

	BM1 Placido SDO/ 1 st Boat Surfman	Gets down to the 44393 and gives a quick brief on the mission. At this point, the second boat crew doesn't know the 44363 is in trouble. He later said that, "I wanted to stick my nose close to the bar and look around before trying to get across. I had no Goddam clue what the bar was doing."
0058	CG 44393 2 nd Boat	Gets underway with BM1 Placido as Surfman and three other crewmen. By chance, BM3 Martin is on second boat, but should have been on the ready boat. Because of his pregnant wife, the surfmen had given him as much time on second boat as possible. CG 44363 got underway approximately 24 minutes earlier.
	BM1 Placido SDO/ 1 st Boat Surfman	Sees a red flare in the sky shortly after leaving the boat basin. He thinks it could be from the 44363. He decides that they must cross the bar.
	Dr. Noble CG History Author	And BMCM LaForge have been at the overlook for a few minutes and see the 44393 leaving the protection of the river. The OIC thinks he can help keep track of the 44393 and advise them if they begin to get set towards James Island. In his own words, Dr. Noble remembers seeing the, "Small white boat rising. Rising. Rising. Rising until it seemed to stand on its stern. White water almost enveloping the small boat. Then the plunge downward."
	BMCM LaForge OIC/ 2nd Boat Surfman	Uses the VHF radio in his truck to communicate back and forth with the 44393 on the bar. As the 44393 heads farther out to sea, he can tell that the length of the swells underneath the boat are lengthening out. He is able to see the 44393 getting set north towards James Island and advises the boat. Dr. Noble and the OIC see more red flares from the western part of James Island.
Approx. 0100	Group Port Angeles	<p>Duty Officer first called the Group's Operations Officer around 0030. He now calls the Group's Senior Duty Officer (SDO) in his duty room and informs him of the case. The SDO tells him to hit the SAR alarm at the Air Station.</p> <p>Next, the Group Duty Officer calls the Group Commanding Officer again and tells him that the helicopter is launching because they have lost communications with the 44363 and have spotted red flares. Until that time, the CO did not know that 44363 had gotten underway from Station Quillayute River. Group CO CAPT Volk drives into the Air Station and assigns a non-rate in the command center to scribe everything he sees and hears as the case goes on.</p>
0107	SA Wingo 1 st Boat Crewmember	<p>Floats with the 44363, gauging his progress into the cove by the illumination from the boat's aft deck light light. He notices the time on his watch: 0107.</p> <p>Starts praying, "Not a prayer of all the things I would or wouldn't do if I was saved, it was just an all-out cry for help: 'Please get my boat to shore.'" The boat's stern swings around and points towards the beach at the far back of the cove.</p> <p>SA Wingo thinks he sees a tree towards shore, unclips his surf belt, hops down into knee-deep water, and wades into the beach. CG 44363 comes to its final resting place at the back of the northern cove in James Island.</p>
0110	CG 44393 2 nd Boat	Crosses the bar.
0110	Group Port Angeles	Watchstander TC3 Marshall transmits an Urgent Marine Information Broadcast.

	BM1 Placido SDO/ 1 st Boat Surfman	Remembers that his, "Crew performed like they were supposed to... They constantly fed me information. I felt like a machine. I absorbed the information and my body performed the necessary motions." Eventually he sees flares both to the north (from the 44363) and from the south (from the GALE RUNNER).
		He remembers, "I knew which ones were ours. I started to push back in and had to decide: Should I go for the sailboat, or our boat? It was one of the hardest decisions I ever had to make. I [later] saw the helicopter starting to search for our boat. I knew the helo could probably help out our boat better than I could, so I headed for the sailboat."
0121	BM1 Placido SDO/ 1 st Boat Surfman	Radios, "We are on handheld. Our antenna was damaged by a breaker."
	BMCM LaForge OIC/ 2nd Boat Surfman	Advises the 44393 to head to the "Q" sea buoy and stay in deep water.
	CG 44393 2 nd Boat	Eventually depletes the battery on their portable VHF radio and loses all communications with the station and BMCM LaForge at the overlook. They proceed to the "Q" buoy.
	BMCM LaForge OIC/ 2nd Boat Surfman	Calls Group again for helicopter assistance because he has a sailboat in distress, a missing MLB, and another MLB he's lost communications with.
0123	CG 6589 Air Station Port Angeles	Takes off from Air Station PA. BM2 Bosley, MK3 Schlimme, and SN Miniken are already dead.
	BMCM LaForge OIC/ 2nd Boat Surfman	And Dr. Noble return to the station.
After 0130	Group Port Angeles	Commanding Officer (CO) CAPT Volk calls nearby units to request additional surface assets. The 110' cutter CUTTYHUNK is in Neah Bay and is dispatched towards La Push. CAPT Volk calls CWO2 Robert Coster, the CO of the Station Neah Bay, and asks if he can send one of his lifeboats south to help. CWO2 Coster drives in to his station and reviews the conditions. He makes the difficult decision that he cannot safely send his crews. CAPT Volk conferences with the CO of Group Astoria and CWO2 Randy Lewis, the CO of Station Grays Harbor. CWO2 Lewis also declines sending his station's 52' MLB due to the conditions. Later, CAPT Volk says that both stations' CO's, "Made the right decision."
0157	CG 6589 Air Station Port Angeles	Arrives on scene, is briefed about the situation by BMCM LaForge, and commences a search near James Island.
0159	GALE RUNNER Sailing Vessel	Passes their accurate position to the Coast Guard after reestablishing communications. They are not on the bar, but farther south near "The Needles," a group of jagged rock features sticking out from the ocean, about three miles from the bar.
0201	BMCM LaForge OIC/ 2nd Boat Surfman	Orders a beach search for survivors and several crewmembers, local police, and National Park Rangers set out for First Beach in anti-exposure coveralls and helmets.

0204	CG 6003 Air Station Astoria	Launches from Air Station Astoria.
	BMCM LaForge OIC/ 2nd Boat Surfman	Has to decide where to send resources: to the GALE RUNNER or to James Island for his lifeboat crew? He radios the CG 6589 back and recommends they leave James Island and proceed to the GALE RUNNER's position because it is only minutes away from the rocks. The OIC advises the watchstander to keep off the radio as much as possible because the helicopter may only have a brief window to transmit that they're in trouble too. BMCM LaForge has 14 lives and three Coast Guard assets in his hands.
0205	CG 6589 Air Station Port Angeles	Diverts from the vicinity of James Island and flies south towards The Needles. To make an approach on the GALE RUNNER, they must fly over, around, and through the 190' tall rock islands. The helicopter is being buffeted by winds and keeps fighting to make new approaches as the sailboat is washed over by breaking waves and drifts between the rock pinnacles.
	FA DaMello Comms watchstander	Is relieved of the communications watch to help the beach party. At First Beach, he and two other members run down the beach, dodging waves.
	SA Wingo 1 st Boat Crewmember	Sees a helicopter searchlight in the distance and CG 44393, and activates the night end of his MK-124 signal flare.
0219	CG 6589 Air Station Port Angeles	Arrives on scene with the GALE RUNNER to commence the hoist.
0227	CG 6585 Air Station Port Angeles	Launches from Air Station PA.
0234	CG 44393 2 nd Boat	Arrives at the "Q" buoy and is tasked by the Station to stay there. They remain there for about six hours until daylight and the chance to return across the bar.
0242	CG 6589 Air Station Port Angeles	Overstresses its hoist, but manages to hoist both crewmembers off the GALE RUNNER.
0251	CG 6589 Air Station Port Angeles	Lands at Station QR's ball field to pass the survivors to an ambulance and depart for Station Neah Bay to refuel.
0253	CG 6003 Air Station Astoria	Arrives on scene and spots a strobe light flashing from the cliff at the back of the cove on James Island.
0320	FA DaMello Comms watchstander	On First Beach sees a flashing light down the beach and starts running towards it. While running, DaMello and another member of the beach party are hit by a log that surges towards them on a wave. The wave knocks DaMello down and the log pins him underwater. FN DaMello sees his life and family flashing before his eyes and takes a breath of seawater. DaMello's arm is dislocated by the log, but it releases him and he gets to his feet. The light seen up the beach belongs to a National Park Ranger helping with the search.
	BMCM LaForge OIC/ 2nd Boat Surfman	Heads out to First Beach with another beach party. He is overheard saying to himself, "I should have trained them more, I should have trained them more."
0334	SN Miniken 1 st Boat Crewmember	Is found unconscious without socks or boots on by the other beach party on First Beach. The beach crew performs CPR at the scene and an ambulance takes him to the hospital in Forks, WA. Taking shifts with compressions, the team of responders gives him CPR for a total of four hours.

0432	CG 6003 Air Station Astoria	Observes BM2 Bosley and MK3 Schlimme floating in the cove on James Island. They request the county's high angle rescue team be contacted to rescue SA Wingo on the cliff.
0505	CG 44393 2 nd Boat	Loses communications with the Station after its portable VHF radio dies.
0508	CG 6013 Air Station Astoria	Leaves Air Station Astoria, OR to assist in the search.
0630	CG 6013 Air Station Astoria	Deploys a rescue swimmer to the cliff SA Wingo is hanging onto. SA Wingo is in good condition.
0633	CG 6585 Air Station Port Angeles	Transfers two additional portable VHF radios to 44393.
0734	CG 44393 2 nd Boat	Safely crosses the bar back into the Quillayute River and moors at Station Quillayute River. They have been underway for six hours and 36 minutes. Until they moor and see the other slip empty, they are unaware that CG 44363 has been lost.
Approx. 0815	CG 6013 Air Station Astoria	Deploys the high-angle rescue team to retrieve SA Wingo from the cliff and hoists him to safety.
0932	BM2 Bosley OOD/ 1 st Boat Coxswain	And MK3 Schlimme are recovered from the cove on James Island by 6013's rescue swimmer. The rescue swimmer states that the wreck of 44363 is in "bad shape" and is leaking fuel.
1030	FA Ballard Non-rate	And the rest of the station are notified that SN Miniken has been pronounced dead at Forks Community Hospital.
1050	CG 6013 Air Station Astoria	Hoists the remaining five rescue team members and its rescue swimmer from the beach. The helicopter drops off the remaining Clallam County rescue team and departs for Air Station Astoria.

Aftermath

Findings from the official report, signed by CG Commandant ADM Kramek

BM2 Bosley OOD/ 1 st Boat Coxswain	Is found by the investigators to, "...not have enough rough weather bar crossings at night in a 44' MLB to prepare him for the conditions that MLB 44363 encountered on 12 February 1997 and should not have attempted to cross the bar."
	The investigators are of the opinion that BM2 Bosley viewed the updated weather forecast and had ample time to pass it to the SDO or OIC. Had either of them received this information, a Surfman would have been on board when the call came in.
MK3 Schlimme 1 st Boat Engineer	And SN Miniken, and BM2 Bosley's autopsies list their cause of death as blunt force trauma to the head.
BMCM LaForge OIC/ 2nd Boat Surfman	Was found by the investigators to have "made several key decisions... which increased the chances of survival for both the sailboat and the MLB 4363 crews."

Investigation	<p>Finds that there were no mechanical issues with 44363 to cause the accident. The boat is so badly damaged it is cut into three pieces and hoisted off the island by a helicopter for disposal.</p> <p>According to investigators, “The proximate cause of this casualty was the coxswain’s failure to safely navigate MLB 44363, causing the boat to capsize and founder in the surf conditions near James Island.”</p> <p>But the report also highlighted excessive personnel turnover at the unit. In February 1997, “only two non-rates had been at the station longer than one year, and because of ...high turnover of personnel, a majority of the Station training is focused on providing basic, introductory skills to help new personnel get their boat crew qualifications... Due to the high turnover of personnel, the Station’s operational readiness was diminished in the area of advanced skills/techniques.”</p> <p>At this time, of the 17 crewmembers filling boat crew positions at the station, 12 had been there less than one year (~70%). Also, despite four Surfman billets, only three surfmen were assigned at the unit, including the OIC and XPO.</p> <p>A 1961 editorial about the TRIUMPH-MERMAID disaster at Stations Point Adams/ Cape Disappointment noted similar concerns about crew inexperience at those units.</p>
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Discussion

46. What was it like “playing” your specific part?

47. What do you feel when the SAR alarm goes off?

- Do our risk management tools help here?
- How do you handle this?

48. What was the culture of response and operations like in 1997? How is it today?

- Coast Guard attitudes about risk
- “You have to go out, but you don’t have to come back” (then)
- “Us, ours, them, theirs” (now: balancing risk-taking with being risk-averse)
- Crew selection, support and oversight from experienced SDOs, etc.
- The Coast Guard has supported and related to its small boat stations

49. What parts of the Coast Guard system were related to this mishap? Are they the same or different today?

- Surfman assignment process
- Risk management culture/tools
- Station experience level/qualification process
- Station staffing
- Group nighttime radio guard

50. What were the effects of high turnover?

- Training focused on basic qualifications instead of advanced skills
- Today’s D13 surf stations have ~40% annual turnover, exacerbated with non-rate transfers for A-School

51. Are you prepared to operate without the normal aids and references you rely on?

- In 1997, crews never practiced nighttime rough bar crossings without bar lights
- What aids and references do we rely on today?
- Can we practice taking those away and adapting?
- Do we have “backup plans” for operating in nighttime, low viz, ATON discreps, etc.?

52. Compare communications issues in 1997 and today.

- How much time passed between the initial call and when the CG asked for a position?
- Station watchstanders used to sleep in the comms room to overhear any traffic from the Group
 - Today, Sector could be conversing with a vessel in the middle of the night for 30 minutes without anyone at the station being aware of it
- There was no Rescue 21 in 1997, so targeting a vessel’s location using radio lines of bearing was imprecise
 - This highlights the importance of R21 Geo Display and promptly asking for lat/long positions
- Simple advice to have a vessel standby and wait in deep water can buy time to gather all the information and prevent a worsening situation

53. Why should we get an accurate position and observe the bar before launching?

- The GALE RUNNER’s true position might have been ascertained before the 44363 crossed the bar near James Island
- Even today, vessels often pass geographic references that don’t match their precise location
- This information can impact asset and crew selection, and overall sense of urgency

54. Compare weather forecasting and reporting in 1997 and today.

- None of the 1997 crew or command could have gotten on their phone and seen the forecast or buoy readings
- Despite modern technology, there is still plenty of information that we need to pass manually today

10. Final questions or comments?

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For more on the CG 44363 disaster: www.uscg44363.com



12 FEBRUARY 1997

A training remembering the CG 44363 disaster

FA DAMELLO



(scan for diagrams)

Introduction

- Sailing vessel GALE RUNNER is transiting from San Francisco, CA to Puget Sound, WA with a crew of two
- CG Station Quillayute River (QR) in La Push, WA is the next station north of Station Grays Harbor. It:
 - Has a BMCM Officer in Charge (OIC) and BM1 Executive Petty Officer (XPO)
 - Has two 44' motor lifeboats (MLB)
 - Reports to Group/Air Station Port Angeles (PA), WA, (the 1997 equivalent of a Sector)
 - Has a hazardous river bar crossing in order to get into the harbor at La Push, WA
 - Has a set of stadium-like "bar lights" fixed on James Island next to the bar for night transits
 - In February 1997, they are inoperative
 - The Officer of the Day (OOD) reports to a Surfman Duty Officer (SDO)
- On 11-12 February the duty section is comprised of 10 ready boat crew members, a watchstander, and several additional non-rated members
- On 11 February, Dr. Dennis Noble, a retired Coast Guard Senior Chief Petty Officer and notable history author reports to the station for a few days to stay on board while researching a book he is writing on lifeboat stations
- The following facts are taken verbatim from the USCG Administrative Investigation and Dr. Dennis Noble's book
- Reading takes about 40 minutes with 14 speakers and one facilitator
- Consider turning off the lights and having any members without speaking parts close their eyes.
- Each reader should say their highlighted parts by speaking the time, name, and details, for example, "At 0700 FA DaMello assumes the station's communications watch..."

Tuesday 11 FEB 1997

Time	Member	Details
Morning	GALE RUNNER Sailing Vessel	Is in Westport, WA and stops in at CG Station Grays Harbor. GALE RUNNER receives the weather forecast and decides to get underway to continue north.
0700	FA DaMello Comms watchstander	Assumes the Station's communications watch until 0700 on 12FEB97.
1640	FA DaMello Comms watchstander	Receives the updated NOAA weather forecast which calls for NW wind 35-40kt and seas building to 14'. For 12 February, the forecast predicts NW winds 30kt and combined seas 18'.
Approx. 1730	BM1 Placido SDO/ 1 st Boat Surfman	<p>Gets together with OOD BM2 Bosley and drives to the station's bar overlook to observe last light bar conditions. He observes that seas aren't bad and he feels comfortable going home on recall for the night, about 15 minutes away.</p> <p>He later said, "From the look of the bar and what Bosley had told me about the weather, there was no need for me to stay aboard."</p>
1740	BM2 Bosley OOD/ 1 st Boat Coxswain	Views the NOAA forecast on the computer and logs his initials, "D.A.B." to acknowledge it.

Evening	GALE RUNNER Sailing Vessel	Begins to encounter heavy weather and decides to head for the QR bar entrance to seek safe harbor.
After 2130	BM2 Bosley OOD/ 1 st Boat Coxswain	Does his evening round with MK3 Schlimme and FN Matthews and drives out to the bar overlook to check things out. FN Matthews recalls BM2 and MK3 saying that, “they [hope] they [don’t] get a case [tonight].”
Between 2130- 2200	BMCM LaForge OIC/ 2nd Boat Surfman	Returns from an appointment in Port Angeles and checks in with the OOD at the station. BM2 Bosley does not pass the 1640 weather forecast, but tells the OIC that the weather is supposed to pick up overnight. Without knowing of the forecast details, the OIC agrees with the OOD that the ready boat Surfman can remain on recall for the night. The OIC leaves for his home, 5 minutes away from the station.
2130	Dr. Noble CG History Author	Finishes his conversations with the crew and goes to bed.
Approx. 2200	BM2 Bosley OOD/ 1 st Boat Coxswain	Calls the SDO who remembers Bosley saying, “Nothing [is] going on. The winds [have] picked up a little bit... the weather [is] supposed to pick up later [tomorrow].”
2200	FA DaMello Comms watchstander	Passes the radio guard to Group PA for the night and sets up the cot to sleep in the comms room.

Wednesday 12 FEB 1997

Approx. 0015	GALE RUNNER Sailing Vessel	Hails Station QR on VHF 16 to obtain a bar report. Telecommunications Specialist Third Class (TC3) Marshall at Group PA answers for Station QR, consults the status board and reports, “no restrictions.”
	FA DaMello Comms watchstander	Wakes up to the radio traffic between Group and the GALE RUNNER and notices high winds outside. The Station’s anemometer is registering gusts of 50kt. On his own initiative, DaMello remembers the 1640 forecast for 18’ seas and intercoms TC3 Marshall at Group to tell her about the wind he’s seeing and the forecast for seas. He says he thinks that if the OOD knew about the 50kt gusts, then he would put a restriction on the bar.
	Group Port Angeles	Watchstander TC3 Marshall tells FA DaMello to hail the GAIL RUNNER and pass them the current weather conditions.
	FA DaMello Comms watchstander	Hails the sailing vessel and asks, “Are you crossing the bar?”
	GALE RUNNER Sailing Vessel	Crewmember Marcia Infante replies, “Affirmative. We are at the entrance now.” She doesn’t pass a GPS position.
	FA DaMello Comms watchstander	Passes the latest winds and advises the GALE RUNNER that the bar could be breaking. Next, FA DaMello calls BM2 Bosley in the OOD room to brief him of the weather and situation.
	BM2 Bosley OOD/ 1 st Boat Coxswain	Comes into comms and asks DaMello if he has GALE RUNNER’s position. DaMello says that the caller has not relayed their position. Bosley tells DaMello to call the GALE RUNNER and obtain their position. Bosley phones SDO BM1 Placido at his home and informs him of the radio call and that he thinks that it’s a bad idea for the sailboat to come across the bar. BM1 asks if he has a position for the sailboat. To keep listening for information, Bosely places the SDO on hold.

	FA DaMello Comms watchstander	Asks the GALE RUNNER for their position. He hears, "We're at 47, 51..." and then static silence.
	GALE RUNNER Sailing Vessel	Crewmember Ken Schlag is steering the sailing vessel and Marcia Infante is on the radio. Suddenly, the sailboat is struck by a rogue wave, knocked down, and dismasted. The radio antenna is damaged and Ken Schlag is thrown overboard. He is tethered with a safety harness and manages to pull himself back onboard. Portholes are blown out by the wave and the GALE RUNNER begins taking on water.
	FA DaMello Comms watchstander	Tries again to hail the boat, "Sailing vessel, this is Quillayute River on 22, over."
Approx. 00:26	GALE RUNNER Sailing Vessel	Crewmember Marcia Infante breaks the silence, "MAYDAY! MAYDAY! THIS IS SAILING VESSEL GALE RUNNER! U.S. COAST GUARD! WE'RE TAKING ON WATER!"
	GALE RUNNER Sailing Vessel	Crewmember Marcia Infante repeats her mayday calls every few minutes. She looks at the GPS plotter to reference the boat's position, but sees a black screen and figures that the GPS is broken. In fact, the GPS is in screensaver mode and she could have pushed any button to bring the chart and GPS position back up on the display.
	FA DaMello Comms watchstander	Only hears static after the mayday call. Group also hears static and suggests Station switch radio sites. DaMello says that he has already tried that.
Approx. 00:26	BM2 Bosley OOD/ 1 st Boat Coxswain	Has gathered this key information in a very short period: there is a sailing vessel that says it is at the entrance to the bar, it has begun taking on water, and the CG has lost communications with it. BM2 Bosley hits the SAR alarm and pipes, "Ready boat crew lay to the ready boat! Sailboat on the bar taking on water."
	BM2 Bosley OOD/ 1 st Boat Coxswain	Takes the SDO phone call off hold and says, "I'm heading for the door."
	BM1 Placido SDO/ 1 st Boat Surfman	Replies, "Call Master Chief [the OIC]. I'm right behind you" and gets in his car to drive back to the station.
		Later, BM1 Placido said that, "If I had known how bad the bar was, I would have told Bosley to wait until I could get to the station."
	SA Wingo 1 st Boat Crewmember	Runs out of his barracks room with SN Miniken and down to the boat.
	Group Port Angeles	Watchstander TC3 Marshall passes that the Group has received more radio transmissions from a frantic woman who doesn't understand Station QR's instructions.
		Group's Duty Officer briefs the Group Commanding Officer, CAPT Volk, at the direction of the Group Senior Duty Officer. The Group is still trying to gather information and is not yet trying to launch a helicopter.
0030	FA DaMello Comms watchstander	Calls and notifies BMCM LaForge of the case and BMCM comes back to the station from his home.
0031	FA DaMello Comms watchstander	Recalls the second boat crew in accordance with the unit's standing orders.
	BM2 Bosley OOD/ 1 st Boat Coxswain	Is one of the first down to the ready boat, CG 44363, and urgently wants to get underway. He runs back up to the station and yells, "Where is my crew?!"

	BMCM LaForge OIC/ 2nd Boat Surfman	Stops at the bar overlook to scan for signs of a sailboat before arriving back at the Station. He notes that there is reduced visibility, but that he can still see the “Q” buoy a mile from the bar. Winds are 30kt with stronger gusts.
0034	BM2 Bosley OOD/ 1 st Boat Coxswain	Gets CG 44363 underway for the SAR case. BM2 Bosley doesn’t brief his crew on the mission and the four are all wearing Mustang anti-exposure suits. If he believed the sailboat taking on water was on the bar, he would have thought the situation was very urgent.
	SA Wingo 1 st Boat Crewmember	Hands out pyro vests and SN Miniken hands out surf belts as the boat gets underway. Wingo and Miniken clip into D-rings and later, SA Wingo said that he had presumed MK3 Schlimme clipped in, but he wasn’t certain if BM2 Bosley wore his belt or clipped it in. No one on 44363 puts on a helmet, even though policy requires them to and no one speaks up about it. Bosley’s helmet was clipped behind his coxswain chair and everyone else’s helmets were stowed below in their SAR bags.
	BMCM LaForge OIC/ 2nd Boat Surfman	Is still at the overlook and observes the 44363 leaving the boat basin. He does not see its navigation lights energized. The OIC radios the 44363 and informs them that he does not see a sailboat in the immediate area and orders BM2 Bosley, “To check out the bar to see if they could cross.” The OIC heads back to the station.
0043	Group Port Angeles	Watchstander TC3 Marshall intercoms Station QR to have the ready boat standby because they think the case might be a hoax. There has been a rash of hoax calls with a young voice in northwestern Washington over the past two weeks.
	MK3 Schlimme 1 st Boat Engineer	Comes over to the starboard side of the 44363 as it gets underway, adjusts the radar, and then returns the engineer’s spot on the port side of the coxswain. While outbound, he reminds BM2 Bosley to not let the lube oil pressures get too high.
	BM2 Bosley OOD/ 1 st Boat Coxswain	Replies, “Yeah, I got it.”
	SN Miniken 1 st Boat Crewmember	Operates the port spotlight.
	SA Wingo 1 st Boat Crewmember	Is ordered by BM2 Bosley to man the starboard spotlight and illuminate Wash Rock.
	MK3 Schlimme 1 st Boat Engineer	Yells at Bosley, “Let’s get the fuck out of here,” just before passing Wash Rock.
	BM2 Bosley OOD/ 1 st Boat Coxswain	Replies, “Fuck that!” Schlimme may have been indicating a desire to go back to the station or instead, to go out to deeper water past the bar.
	FA Ballard Non-rate	Assists FA DaMello in comms and calls the 44363 to pass the Group’s instructions to have the ready boat standby.
	BM2 Bosley OOD/ 1 st Boat Coxswain	Responds, “Standby, we’re a little busy,” likely because BM2 Bosley is focused on negotiating the rough seas on the bar while heading outbound. Regarding the possibility of a hoax, Bosley tells the crew, “I hope not!”
Approx. 0044	SA Wingo 1 st Boat Crewmember	Is told by BM2 Bosley to aim the spotlight starboard towards James Island around the time the 44363 is at Wash Rock. Bosley wants to keep the island off the starboard beam. The 44363 is 100-150 yards off of the island.
0045	BM2 Bosley OOD/ 1 st Boat Coxswain	Radios the station that the 44363 has safely crossed the bar and that it is 16-18’ past the bar and evening out. Winds are from the WSW.

	Dr. Noble CG History Author	Joins BMCM LaForge on another trip out to the bar overlook. While driving there, the two hear the 44363 say they made it safely across the bar. BMCM LaForge thinks that the 44363 is likely turning away from James Island and toward the sea buoy into deeper (safer) water.
	SA Wingo 1 st Boat Crewmember	Hears Bosley radio the station that it is 15-16' out (a factual inconsistency) and later said, "I was about to call BS. Those waves were a lot higher than 15-16' and it wasn't getting better, but I was like, 'oh well.'"
		The 44363 is not transiting south on the safe route outbound to the "Q" buoy, but is actually being set north towards the edge of James Island.
		SA Wingo spots a rock and yells, "Rock starboard side! Ten feet!" The boat hits something.
Approx. 0048	BM2 Bosley OOD/ 1 st Boat Coxswain	Yells, "What was that!?" Someone else shouts, "Wave port side!"
	SA Wingo 1 st Boat Crewmember	Sees an enormous wave off the port bow and the boat is rolled over to starboard. SA Wingo hits his head on something and tastes blood. The boat rights itself with its bow pointing towards James Island. When the boat comes up, SA Wingo is twisted in his belt and wrapped up in the canvas dodger. The mast is bent flat to the port side. Wingo reaches for the spotlight and realizes it has broken off the top of the cabin and is gone. The motor lifeboat turns towards the island with way on. The 44363 has been underway for approximately 14 minutes.
Approx. 0048	BM2 Bosley OOD/ 1 st Boat Coxswain	Radios, "Capsized and disoriented."
	FA DaMello Comms watchstander	Hears the call about the boat being capsized, but he and Group PA are confused if the caller is the GALE RUNNER or the 44363. Group and Station hail both boats.
	CG 44393 2 nd Boat	Is the second boat and the recalled crew for it begins arriving at the Station. They begin to dress out in anti-exposure suits and then change their minds, opting for dry suits. The crew heads down to the boat and passes the communications room. They overhear, "Capsized..." but think it is in reference to the sail boat.
	MK3 Schlimme 1 st Boat Engineer	Yells, "We're still on the bar!"
	BM2 Bosley OOD/ 1 st Boat Coxswain	Replies, "Find me buoy 3!"
	SA Wingo 1 st Boat Crewmember	Can see the lights of the town of La Push, but doesn't see Buoy 3 which is too far back around the eastern side of James Island to be visible.
	BMCM LaForge OIC/ 2nd Boat Surfman	And Dr. Noble hear the 44363 say they rolled. The OIC can't see the MLB's navigation lights, but for a moment sees its spotlight sweeping rapidly towards the south from what he thinks is the seaward side of James Island. The OIC now knows the 44363 is in trouble (too close to rocky James Island) and calls the station to get the second boat underway. He also tells the station to call Group PA and get a helicopter dispatched.
	FA DaMello Comms watchstander	Calls the OIC back and passes that Group's duty officer wants to talk with him because Group is still concerned the call is a hoax.

	BMCM LaForge OIC/ 2nd Boat Surfman	And Dr. Noble return to the Station and the OIC tells the SDO that the 44363 is in trouble. BMCM LaForge phones Group PA and says he has, "A serious situation and still [needs] the HH-65A helicopter launched" and also requests an HH-60 helicopter from Astoria, OR.
0049	GALE RUNNER Sailing Vessel	Passes their full position to Group PA.
Approx. 0049	SA Wingo 1 st Boat Crewmember	Hears someone shout something. The boat is hit by a wave on the port quarter and pitch-poles, end over end. Upon re-righting itself, the 44363 rests on the rocks and he knows it is out of the water because the engine noise is different. The mast and entire top of the cabin have sheared off. BM2 Bosley and SN Miniken are gone. The ship's clock recovered from the wreckage of the 44363 was stopped at exactly 00h:49m:03s. CG 44363 has been underway for about 15 minutes.
	MK3 Schlimme 1 st Boat Engineer	Takes control of the 44363.
	SA Wingo 1 st Boat Crewmember	Panics and says, "We have to get out of here" and begins to unclip his surf belt.
	MK3 Schlimme 1 st Boat Engineer	Convinces Wingo that it's safest to stay with the boat and to clip back in. He asks Wingo for the boat's radio and tries to call the station with their position.
	SA Wingo 1 st Boat Crewmember	Looks down at the radio while Schlimme makes the call and sees that it's broken. Wingo realizes that MK3 Schlimme "Was just doing it to calm me down, and it worked because suddenly I was super calm. He saved my life by keeping me on the boat."
	MK3 Schlimme 1 st Boat Engineer	Tries to get himself and SA Wingo down into the forward compartment of the 44363, but can't because the handle of the watertight door is jammed from the boat's impact with rocks. Seeing another wave approaching, Schlimme yells, "Hold on!"
	SA Wingo 1 st Boat Crewmember	Feels the boat roll for a third time after the 44363 is knocked off the rock it was resting on and pushed against the rock cliffs. Underwater, he notes a "tremendous quiet." When the 44363 rights again, MK3 Schlimme is gone and Wingo sees a body float by the boat. He can't throw a life ring to it because both life rings are missing.
		CG 44363 has been underway for about 20 minutes.
		Wingo feels the boat drifting backwards and banging along the rocks into the cove on James Island. He sees a strobe light flashing in the cove, grabs the strobe light from his pyro vest, and turns it on. SA Wingo remembers that he thinks he placed the boat's engines in neutral, but doesn't secure them. Wingo grabs his MK-79 flare kit, fires five flares into the sky and two horizontally towards the beach to illuminate it. Like Schlimme, he tries to get into the forward compartment where there is a portable VHF radio and more flares, but also finds the door jammed.
Approx. 0055	BMCM LaForge OIC/ 2nd Boat Surfman	Is off the phone with Group PA after asking for helicopters and someone at the station tells him they've spotted red flares. The OIC finds Dr. Noble and says, "Let's go back to the bar."
	BM1 Placido SDO/ 1 st Boat Surfman	Shouts, "I'm going" and runs down to the 44393.
	Dr. Noble CG History Author	Parks at the bar overlook with BMCM LaForge and sees a red flare in the sky.

	BM1 Placido SDO/ 1 st Boat Surfman	Gets down to the 44393 and gives a quick brief on the mission. At this point, the second boat crew doesn't know the 44363 is in trouble. He later said that, "I wanted to stick my nose close to the bar and look around before trying to get across. I had no Goddam clue what the bar was doing."
0058	CG 44393 2 nd Boat	Gets underway with BM1 Placido as Surfman and three other crewmen. By chance, BM3 Martin is on second boat, but should have been on the ready boat. Because of his pregnant wife, the surfmen had given him as much time on second boat as possible. CG 44363 got underway approximately 24 minutes earlier.
	BM1 Placido SDO/ 1 st Boat Surfman	Sees a red flare in the sky shortly after leaving the boat basin. He thinks it could be from the 44363. He decides that they must cross the bar.
	Dr. Noble CG History Author	And BMCM LaForge have been at the overlook for a few minutes and see the 44393 leaving the protection of the river. The OIC thinks he can help keep track of the 44393 and advise them if they begin to get set towards James Island. In his own words, Dr. Noble remembers seeing the, "Small white boat rising. Rising. Rising. Rising until it seemed to stand on its stern. White water almost enveloping the small boat. Then the plunge downward."
	BMCM LaForge OIC/ 2nd Boat Surfman	Uses the VHF radio in his truck to communicate back and forth with the 44393 on the bar. As the 44393 heads farther out to sea, he can tell that the length of the swells underneath the boat are lengthening out. He is able to see the 44393 getting set north towards James Island and advises the boat. Dr. Noble and the OIC see more red flares from the western part of James Island.
Approx. 0100	Group Port Angeles	Duty Officer first called the Group's Operations Officer around 0030. He now calls the Group's Senior Duty Officer (SDO) in his duty room and informs him of the case. The SDO tells him to hit the SAR alarm at the Air Station. Next, the Group Duty Officer calls the Group Commanding Officer again and tells him that the helicopter is launching because they have lost communications with the 44363 and have spotted red flares. Until that time, the CO did not know that 44363 had gotten underway from Station Quillayute River. Group CO CAPT Volk drives into the Air Station and assigns a non-rate in the command center to scribe everything he sees and hears as the case goes on.
0107	SA Wingo 1 st Boat Crewmember	Floats with the 44363, gauging his progress into the cove by the illumination from the boat's aft deck light light. He notices the time on his watch: 0107. Starts praying, "Not a prayer of all the things I would or wouldn't do if I was saved, it was just an all-out cry for help: 'Please get my boat to shore.'" The boat's stern swings around and points towards the beach at the far back of the cove. SA Wingo thinks he sees a tree towards shore, unclips his surf belt, hops down into knee-deep water, and wades into the beach. CG 44363 comes to its final resting place at the back of the northern cove in James Island.
0110	CG 44393 2 nd Boat	Crosses the bar.
0110	Group Port Angeles	Watchstander TC3 Marshall transmits an Urgent Marine Information Broadcast.

	BM1 Placido SDO/ 1 st Boat Surfman	Remembers that his, "Crew performed like they were supposed to... They constantly fed me information. I felt like a machine. I absorbed the information and my body performed the necessary motions." Eventually he sees flares both to the north (from the 44363) and from the south (from the GALE RUNNER).
		He remembers, "I knew which ones were ours. I started to push back in and had to decide: Should I go for the sailboat, or our boat? It was one of the hardest decisions I ever had to make. I [later] saw the helicopter starting to search for our boat. I knew the helo could probably help out our boat better than I could, so I headed for the sailboat."
0121	BM1 Placido SDO/ 1 st Boat Surfman	Radios, "We are on handheld. Our antenna was damaged by a breaker."
	BMCM LaForge OIC/ 2nd Boat Surfman	Advises the 44393 to head to the "Q" sea buoy and stay in deep water.
	CG 44393 2 nd Boat	Eventually depletes the battery on their portable VHF radio and loses all communications with the station and BMCM LaForge at the overlook. They proceed to the "Q" buoy.
	BMCM LaForge OIC/ 2nd Boat Surfman	Calls Group again for helicopter assistance because he has a sailboat in distress, a missing MLB, and another MLB he's lost communications with.
0123	CG 6589 Air Station Port Angeles	Takes off from Air Station PA. BM2 Bosley, MK3 Schlimme, and SN Miniken are already dead.
	BMCM LaForge OIC/ 2nd Boat Surfman	And Dr. Noble return to the station.
After 0130	Group Port Angeles	Commanding Officer (CO) CAPT Volk calls nearby units to request additional surface assets. The 110' cutter CUTTYHUNK is in Neah Bay and is dispatched towards La Push. CAPT Volk calls CWO2 Robert Coster, the CO of the Station Neah Bay, and asks if he can send one of his lifeboats south to help. CWO2 Coster drives in to his station and reviews the conditions. He makes the difficult decision that he cannot safely send his crews. CAPT Volk conferences with the CO of Group Astoria and CWO2 Randy Lewis, the CO of Station Grays Harbor. CWO2 Lewis also declines sending his station's 52' MLB due to the conditions. Later, CAPT Volk says that both stations' CO's, "Made the right decision."
0157	CG 6589 Air Station Port Angeles	Arrives on scene, is briefed about the situation by BMCM LaForge, and commences a search near James Island.
0159	GALE RUNNER Sailing Vessel	Passes their accurate position to the Coast Guard after reestablishing communications. They are not on the bar, but farther south near "The Needles," a group of jagged rock features sticking out from the ocean, about three miles from the bar.
0201	BMCM LaForge OIC/ 2nd Boat Surfman	Orders a beach search for survivors and several crewmembers, local police, and National Park Rangers set out for First Beach in anti-exposure coveralls and helmets.

0204	CG 6003 Air Station Astoria	Launches from Air Station Astoria.
	BMCM LaForge OIC/ 2nd Boat Surfman	Has to decide where to send resources: to the GALE RUNNER or to James Island for his lifeboat crew? He radios the CG 6589 back and recommends they leave James Island and proceed to the GALE RUNNER's position because it is only minutes away from the rocks. The OIC advises the watchstander to keep off the radio as much as possible because the helicopter may only have a brief window to transmit that they're in trouble too. BMCM LaForge has 14 lives and three Coast Guard assets in his hands.
0205	CG 6589 Air Station Port Angeles	Diverts from the vicinity of James Island and flies south towards The Needles. To make an approach on the GALE RUNNER, they must fly over, around, and through the 190' tall rock islands. The helicopter is being buffeted by winds and keeps fighting to make new approaches as the sailboat is washed over by breaking waves and drifts between the rock pinnacles.
	FA DaMello Comms watchstander	Is relieved of the communications watch to help the beach party. At First Beach, he and two other members run down the beach, dodging waves.
	SA Wingo 1 st Boat Crewmember	Sees a helicopter searchlight in the distance and CG 44393, and activates the night end of his MK-124 signal flare.
0219	CG 6589 Air Station Port Angeles	Arrives on scene with the GALE RUNNER to commence the hoist.
0227	CG 6585 Air Station Port Angeles	Launches from Air Station PA.
0234	CG 44393 2 nd Boat	Arrives at the "Q" buoy and is tasked by the Station to stay there. They remain there for about six hours until daylight and the chance to return across the bar.
0242	CG 6589 Air Station Port Angeles	Overstresses its hoist, but manages to hoist both crewmembers off the GALE RUNNER.
0251	CG 6589 Air Station Port Angeles	Lands at Station QR's ball field to pass the survivors to an ambulance and depart for Station Neah Bay to refuel.
0253	CG 6003 Air Station Astoria	Arrives on scene and spots a strobe light flashing from the cliff at the back of the cove on James Island.
0320	FA DaMello Comms watchstander	On First Beach sees a flashing light down the beach and starts running towards it. While running, DaMello and another member of the beach party are hit by a log that surges towards them on a wave. The wave knocks DaMello down and the log pins him underwater. FN DaMello sees his life and family flashing before his eyes and takes a breath of seawater. DaMello's arm is dislocated by the log, but it releases him and he gets to his feet. The light seen up the beach belongs to a National Park Ranger helping with the search.
	BMCM LaForge OIC/ 2nd Boat Surfman	Heads out to First Beach with another beach party. He is overheard saying to himself, "I should have trained them more, I should have trained them more."
0334	SN Miniken 1 st Boat Crewmember	Is found unconscious without socks or boots on by the other beach party on First Beach. The beach crew performs CPR at the scene and an ambulance takes him to the hospital in Forks, WA. Taking shifts with compressions, the team of responders gives him CPR for a total of four hours.

0432	CG 6003 Air Station Astoria	Observes BM2 Bosley and MK3 Schlimme floating in the cove on James Island. They request the county's high angle rescue team be contacted to rescue SA Wingo on the cliff.
0505	CG 44393 2 nd Boat	Loses communications with the Station after its portable VHF radio dies.
0508	CG 6013 Air Station Astoria	Leaves Air Station Astoria, OR to assist in the search.
0630	CG 6013 Air Station Astoria	Deploys a rescue swimmer to the cliff SA Wingo is hanging onto. SA Wingo is in good condition.
0633	CG 6585 Air Station Port Angeles	Transfers two additional portable VHF radios to 44393.
0734	CG 44393 2 nd Boat	Safely crosses the bar back into the Quillayute River and moors at Station Quillayute River. They have been underway for six hours and 36 minutes. Until they moor and see the other slip empty, they are unaware that CG 44363 has been lost.
Approx. 0815	CG 6013 Air Station Astoria	Deploys the high-angle rescue team to retrieve SA Wingo from the cliff and hoists him to safety.
0932	BM2 Bosley OOD/ 1 st Boat Coxswain	And MK3 Schlimme are recovered from the cove on James Island by 6013's rescue swimmer. The rescue swimmer states that the wreck of 44363 is in "bad shape" and is leaking fuel.
1030	FA Ballard Non-rate	And the rest of the station are notified that SN Miniken has been pronounced dead at Forks Community Hospital.
1050	CG 6013 Air Station Astoria	Hoists the remaining five rescue team members and its rescue swimmer from the beach. The helicopter drops off the remaining Clallam County rescue team and departs for Air Station Astoria.

Aftermath

Findings from the official report, signed by CG Commandant ADM Kramek

BM2 Bosley OOD/ 1 st Boat Coxswain	Is found by the investigators to, "...not have enough rough weather bar crossings at night in a 44' MLB to prepare him for the conditions that MLB 44363 encountered on 12 February 1997 and should not have attempted to cross the bar."
	The investigators are of the opinion that BM2 Bosley viewed the updated weather forecast and had ample time to pass it to the SDO or OIC. Had either of them received this information, a Surfman would have been on board when the call came in.
MK3 Schlimme 1 st Boat Engineer	And SN Miniken, and BM2 Bosley's autopsies list their cause of death as blunt force trauma to the head.
BMCM LaForge OIC/ 2nd Boat Surfman	Was found by the investigators to have "made several key decisions... which increased the chances of survival for both the sailboat and the MLB 4363 crews."

Investigation	<p>Finds that there were no mechanical issues with 44363 to cause the accident. The boat is so badly damaged it is cut into three pieces and hoisted off the island by a helicopter for disposal.</p> <p>According to investigators, “The proximate cause of this casualty was the coxswain’s failure to safely navigate MLB 44363, causing the boat to capsize and founder in the surf conditions near James Island.”</p> <p>But the report also highlighted excessive personnel turnover at the unit. In February 1997, “only two non-rates had been at the station longer than one year, and because of ...high turnover of personnel, a majority of the Station training is focused on providing basic, introductory skills to help new personnel get their boat crew qualifications... Due to the high turnover of personnel, the Station’s operational readiness was diminished in the area of advanced skills/techniques.”</p> <p>At this time, of the 17 crewmembers filling boat crew positions at the station, 12 had been there less than one year (~70%). Also, despite four Surfman billets, only three surfmen were assigned at the unit, including the OIC and XPO.</p> <p>A 1961 editorial about the TRIUMPH-MERMAID disaster at Stations Point Adams/ Cape Disappointment noted similar concerns about crew inexperience at those units.</p>
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Discussion

55. What was it like “playing” your specific part?

56. What do you feel when the SAR alarm goes off?

- Do our risk management tools help here?
- How do you handle this?

57. What was the culture of response and operations like in 1997? How is it today?

- Coast Guard attitudes about risk
- “You have to go out, but you don’t have to come back” (then)
- “Us, ours, them, theirs” (now: balancing risk-taking with being risk-averse)
- Crew selection, support and oversight from experienced SDOs, etc.
- The Coast Guard has supported and related to its small boat stations

58. What parts of the Coast Guard system were related to this mishap? Are they the same or different today?

- Surfman assignment process
- Risk management culture/tools
- Station experience level/qualification process
- Station staffing
- Group nighttime radio guard

59. What were the effects of high turnover?

- Training focused on basic qualifications instead of advanced skills
- Today’s D13 surf stations have ~40% annual turnover, exacerbated with non-rate transfers for A-School

60. Are you prepared to operate without the normal aids and references you rely on?

- In 1997, crews never practiced nighttime rough bar crossings without bar lights
- What aids and references do we rely on today?
- Can we practice taking those away and adapting?
- Do we have “backup plans” for operating in nighttime, low viz, ATON discreps, etc.?

61. Compare communications issues in 1997 and today.

- How much time passed between the initial call and when the CG asked for a position?
- Station watchstanders used to sleep in the comms room to overhear any traffic from the Group
 - Today, Sector could be conversing with a vessel in the middle of the night for 30 minutes without anyone at the station being aware of it
- There was no Rescue 21 in 1997, so targeting a vessel’s location using radio lines of bearing was imprecise
 - This highlights the importance of R21 Geo Display and promptly asking for lat/long positions
- Simple advice to have a vessel standby and wait in deep water can buy time to gather all the information and prevent a worsening situation

62. Why should we get an accurate position and observe the bar before launching?

- The GALE RUNNER’s true position might have been ascertained before the 44363 crossed the bar near James Island
- Even today, vessels often pass geographic references that don’t match their precise location
- This information can impact asset and crew selection, and overall sense of urgency

63. Compare weather forecasting and reporting in 1997 and today.

- None of the 1997 crew or command could have gotten on their phone and seen the forecast or buoy readings
- Despite modern technology, there is still plenty of information that we need to pass manually today

10. Final questions or comments?

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For more on the CG 44363 disaster: www.uscg44363.com



12 FEBRUARY 1997

A training remembering the CG 44363 disaster

DR. NOBLE



(scan for diagrams)

Introduction

- Sailing vessel GALE RUNNER is transiting from San Francisco, CA to Puget Sound, WA with a crew of two
- CG Station Quillayute River (**QR**) in La Push, WA is the next station north of Station Grays Harbor. It:
 - Has a BMCM Officer in Charge (**OIC**) and BM1 Executive Petty Officer (**XPO**)
 - Has two 44' motor lifeboats (**MLB**)
 - Reports to Group/Air Station Port Angeles (**PA**), WA, (the 1997 equivalent of a Sector)
 - Has a hazardous river bar crossing in order to get into the harbor at La Push, WA
 - Has a set of stadium-like "bar lights" fixed on James Island next to the bar for night transits
 - In February 1997, they are inoperative
 - The Officer of the Day (**OOD**) reports to a Surfman Duty Officer (**SDO**)
- On 11-12 February the duty section is comprised of 10 ready boat crew members, a watchstander, and several additional non-rated members
- On 11 February, Dr. Dennis Noble, a retired Coast Guard Senior Chief Petty Officer and notable history author reports to the station for a few days to stay on board while researching a book he is writing on lifeboat stations
- The following facts are taken verbatim from the USCG Administrative Investigation and Dr. Dennis Noble's book
- Reading takes about 40 minutes with 14 speakers and one facilitator
- Consider turning off the lights and having any members without speaking parts close their eyes.
- Each reader should say their **highlighted parts by speaking the time, name, and details, for example**, "At 0700 FA DaMello assumes the station's communications watch..."

Tuesday 11 FEB 1997

Time	Member	Details
Morning	GALE RUNNER Sailing Vessel	Is in Westport, WA and stops in at CG Station Grays Harbor. GALE RUNNER receives the weather forecast and decides to get underway to continue north.
0700	FA DaMello Comms watchstander	Assumes the Station's communications watch until 0700 on 12FEB97.
1640	FA DaMello Comms watchstander	Receives the updated NOAA weather forecast which calls for NW wind 35-40kt and seas building to 14'. For 12 February, the forecast predicts NW winds 30kt and combined seas 18'.
Approx. 1730	BM1 Placido SDO/ 1 st Boat Surfman	<p>Gets together with OOD BM2 Bosley and drives to the station's bar overlook to observe last light bar conditions. He observes that seas aren't bad and he feels comfortable going home on recall for the night, about 15 minutes away.</p> <p>He later said, "From the look of the bar and what Bosley had told me about the weather, there was no need for me to stay aboard."</p>
1740	BM2 Bosley OOD/ 1 st Boat Coxswain	Views the NOAA forecast on the computer and logs his initials, "D.A.B." to acknowledge it.

Evening	GALE RUNNER Sailing Vessel	Begins to encounter heavy weather and decides to head for the QR bar entrance to seek safe harbor.
After 2130	BM2 Bosley OOD/ 1 st Boat Coxswain	Does his evening round with MK3 Schlimme and FN Matthews and drives out to the bar overlook to check things out. FN Matthews recalls BM2 and MK3 saying that, "they [hope] they [don't] get a case [tonight]."
Between 2130- 2200	BMCM LaForge OIC/ 2nd Boat Surfman	Returns from an appointment in Port Angeles and checks in with the OOD at the station. BM2 Bosley does not pass the 1640 weather forecast, but tells the OIC that the weather is supposed to pick up overnight. Without knowing of the forecast details, the OIC agrees with the OOD that the ready boat Surfman can remain on recall for the night. The OIC leaves for his home, 5 minutes away from the station.
2130	Dr. Noble CG History Author	Finishes his conversations with the crew and goes to bed.
Approx. 2200	BM2 Bosley OOD/ 1 st Boat Coxswain	Calls the SDO who remembers Bosley saying, "Nothing [is] going on. The winds [have] picked up a little bit... the weather [is] supposed to pick up later [tomorrow]."
2200	FA DaMello Comms watchstander	Passes the radio guard to Group PA for the night and sets up the cot to sleep in the comms room.

Wednesday 12 FEB 1997

Approx. 0015	GALE RUNNER Sailing Vessel	Hails Station QR on VHF 16 to obtain a bar report. Telecommunications Specialist Third Class (TC3) Marshall at Group PA answers for Station QR, consults the status board and reports, "no restrictions."
	FA DaMello Comms watchstander	Wakes up to the radio traffic between Group and the GALE RUNNER and notices high winds outside. The Station's anemometer is registering gusts of 50kt. On his own initiative, DaMello remembers the 1640 forecast for 18' seas and intercoms TC3 Marshall at Group to tell her about the wind he's seeing and the forecast for seas. He says he thinks that if the OOD knew about the 50kt gusts, then he would put a restriction on the bar.
	Group Port Angeles	Watchstander TC3 Marshall tells FA DaMello to hail the GAIL RUNNER and pass them the current weather conditions.
	FA DaMello Comms watchstander	Hails the sailing vessel and asks, "Are you crossing the bar?"
	GALE RUNNER Sailing Vessel	Crewmember Marcia Infante replies, "Affirmative. We are at the entrance now." She doesn't pass a GPS position.
	FA DaMello Comms watchstander	Passes the latest winds and advises the GALE RUNNER that the bar could be breaking. Next, FA DaMello calls BM2 Bosley in the OOD room to brief him of the weather and situation.
	BM2 Bosley OOD/ 1 st Boat Coxswain	Comes into comms and asks DaMello if he has GALE RUNNER's position. DaMello says that the caller has not relayed their position. Bosley tells DaMello to call the GALE RUNNER and obtain their position. Bosley phones SDO BM1 Placido at his home and informs him of the radio call and that he thinks that it's a bad idea for the sailboat to come across the bar. BM1 asks if he has a position for the sailboat. To keep listening for information, Bosely places the SDO on hold.

	FA DaMello Comms watchstander	Asks the GALE RUNNER for their position. He hears, "We're at 47, 51..." and then static silence.
	GALE RUNNER Sailing Vessel	Crewmember Ken Schlag is steering the sailing vessel and Marcia Infante is on the radio. Suddenly, the sailboat is struck by a rogue wave, knocked down, and dismasted. The radio antenna is damaged and Ken Schlag is thrown overboard. He is tethered with a safety harness and manages to pull himself back onboard. Portholes are blown out by the wave and the GALE RUNNER begins taking on water.
	FA DaMello Comms watchstander	Tries again to hail the boat, "Sailing vessel, this is Quillayute River on 22, over."
Approx. 00:26	GALE RUNNER Sailing Vessel	Crewmember Marcia Infante breaks the silence, "MAYDAY! MAYDAY! THIS IS SAILING VESSEL <i>GALE RUNNER</i> ! U.S. COAST GUARD! WE'RE TAKING ON WATER!"
	GALE RUNNER Sailing Vessel	Crewmember Marcia Infante repeats her mayday calls every few minutes. She looks at the GPS plotter to reference the boat's position, but sees a black screen and figures that the GPS is broken. In fact, the GPS is in screensaver mode and she could have pushed any button to bring the chart and GPS position back up on the display.
	FA DaMello Comms watchstander	Only hears static after the mayday call. Group also hears static and suggests Station switch radio sites. DaMello says that he has already tried that.
Approx. 00:26	BM2 Bosley OOD/ 1 st Boat Coxswain	Has gathered this key information in a very short period: there is a sailing vessel that says it is at the entrance to the bar, it has begun taking on water, and the CG has lost communications with it. BM2 Bosley hits the SAR alarm and pipes, "Ready boat crew lay to the ready boat! Sailboat on the bar taking on water."
	BM2 Bosley OOD/ 1 st Boat Coxswain	Takes the SDO phone call off hold and says, "I'm heading for the door."
	BM1 Placido SDO/ 1 st Boat Surfman	Replies, "Call Master Chief [the OIC]. I'm right behind you" and gets in his car to drive back to the station.
		Later, BM1 Placido said that, "If I had known how bad the bar was, I would have told Bosley to wait until I could get to the station."
	SA Wingo 1 st Boat Crewmember	Runs out of his barracks room with SN Miniken and down to the boat.
	Group Port Angeles	Watchstander TC3 Marshall passes that the Group has received more radio transmissions from a frantic woman who doesn't understand Station QR's instructions.
		Group's Duty Officer briefs the Group Commanding Officer, CAPT Volk, at the direction of the Group Senior Duty Officer. The Group is still trying to gather information and is not yet trying to launch a helicopter.
0030	FA DaMello Comms watchstander	Calls and notifies BMCM LaForge of the case and BMCM comes back to the station from his home.
0031	FA DaMello Comms watchstander	Recalls the second boat crew in accordance with the unit's standing orders.
	BM2 Bosley OOD/ 1 st Boat Coxswain	Is one of the first down to the ready boat, CG 44363, and urgently wants to get underway. He runs back up to the station and yells, "Where is my crew?!"

	BMCM LaForge OIC/ 2nd Boat Surfman	Stops at the bar overlook to scan for signs of a sailboat before arriving back at the Station. He notes that there is reduced visibility, but that he can still see the "Q" buoy a mile from the bar. Winds are 30kt with stronger gusts.
0034	BM2 Bosley OOD/ 1 st Boat Coxswain	Gets CG 44363 underway for the SAR case. BM2 Bosley doesn't brief his crew on the mission and the four are all wearing Mustang anti-exposure suits. If he believed the sailboat taking on water was on the bar, he would have thought the situation was very urgent.
	SA Wingo 1 st Boat Crewmember	Hands out pyro vests and SN Miniken hands out surf belts as the boat gets underway. Wingo and Miniken clip into D-rings and later, SA Wingo said that he had presumed MK3 Schlimme clipped in, but he wasn't certain if BM2 Bosley wore his belt or clipped it in. No one on 44363 puts on a helmet, even though policy requires them to and no one speaks up about it. Bosley's helmet was clipped behind his coxswain chair and everyone else's helmets were stowed below in their SAR bags.
	BMCM LaForge OIC/ 2nd Boat Surfman	Is still at the overlook and observes the 44363 leaving the boat basin. He does not see its navigation lights energized. The OIC radios the 44363 and informs them that he does not see a sailboat in the immediate area and orders BM2 Bosley, "To check out the bar to see if they could cross." The OIC heads back to the station.
0043	Group Port Angeles	Watchstander TC3 Marshall intercoms Station QR to have the ready boat standby because they think the case might be a hoax. There has been a rash of hoax calls with a young voice in northwestern Washington over the past two weeks.
	MK3 Schlimme 1 st Boat Engineer	Comes over to the starboard side of the 44363 as it gets underway, adjusts the radar, and then returns the engineer's spot on the port side of the coxswain. While outbound, he reminds BM2 Bosley to not let the lube oil pressures get too high.
	BM2 Bosley OOD/ 1 st Boat Coxswain	Replies, "Yeah, I got it."
	SN Miniken 1 st Boat Crewmember	Operates the port spotlight.
	SA Wingo 1 st Boat Crewmember	Is ordered by BM2 Bosley to man the starboard spotlight and illuminate Wash Rock.
	MK3 Schlimme 1 st Boat Engineer	Yells at Bosley, "Let's get the fuck out of here," just before passing Wash Rock.
	BM2 Bosley OOD/ 1 st Boat Coxswain	Replies, "Fuck that!" Schlimme may have been indicating a desire to go back to the station or instead, to go out to deeper water past the bar.
	FA Ballard Non-rate	Assists FA DaMello in comms and calls the 44363 to pass the Group's instructions to have the ready boat standby.
	BM2 Bosley OOD/ 1 st Boat Coxswain	Responds, "Standby, we're a little busy," likely because BM2 Bosley is focused on negotiating the rough seas on the bar while heading outbound. Regarding the possibility of a hoax, Bosley tells the crew, "I hope not!"
Approx. 0044	SA Wingo 1 st Boat Crewmember	Is told by BM2 Bosley to aim the spotlight starboard towards James Island around the time the 44363 is at Wash Rock. Bosley wants to keep the island off the starboard beam. The 44363 is 100-150 yards off of the island.
0045	BM2 Bosley OOD/ 1 st Boat Coxswain	Radios the station that the 44363 has safely crossed the bar and that it is 16-18' past the bar and evening out. Winds are from the WSW.

Dr. Noble
CG History Author

Joins BMCM LaForge on another trip out to the bar overlook. While driving there, the two hear the 44363 say they made it safely across the bar. BMCM LaForge thinks that the 44363 is likely turning away from James Island and toward the sea buoy into deeper (safer) water.

SA Wingo
1st Boat Crewmember

Hears Bosley radio the station that it is 15-16' out (a factual inconsistency) and later said, "I was about to call BS. Those waves were a lot higher than 15-16' and it wasn't getting better, but I was like, 'oh well.'"

The 44363 is not transiting south on the safe route outbound to the "Q" buoy, but is actually being set north towards the edge of James Island.

SA Wingo spots a rock and yells, "Rock starboard side! Ten feet!" The boat hits something.

Approx.
0048

BM2 Bosley
OOD/ 1st Boat Coxswain

Yells, "What was that!?" Someone else shouts, "Wave port side!"

SA Wingo
1st Boat Crewmember

Sees an enormous wave off the port bow and the boat is rolled over to starboard. SA Wingo hits his head on something and tastes blood. The boat rights itself with its bow pointing towards James Island. When the boat comes up, SA Wingo is twisted in his belt and wrapped up in the canvas dodger. The mast is bent flat to the port side. Wingo reaches for the spotlight and realizes it has broken off the top of the cabin and is gone. The motor lifeboat turns towards the island with way on. The 44363 has been underway for approximately 14 minutes.

Approx.
0048

BM2 Bosley
OOD/ 1st Boat Coxswain

Radios, "Capsized and disoriented."

FA DaMello
Comms watchstander

Hears the call about the boat being capsized, but he and Group PA are confused if the caller is the GALE RUNNER or the 44363. Group and Station hail both boats.

CG 44393
2nd Boat

Is the second boat and the recalled crew for it begins arriving at the Station. They begin to dress out in anti-exposure suits and then change their minds, opting for dry suits. The crew heads down to the boat and passes the communications room. They overhear, "Capsized..." but think it is in reference to the sail boat.

MK3 Schlimme
1st Boat Engineer

Yells, "We're still on the bar!"

BM2 Bosley
OOD/ 1st Boat Coxswain

Replies, "Find me buoy 3!"

SA Wingo
1st Boat Crewmember

Can see the lights of the town of La Push, but doesn't see Buoy 3 which is too far back around the eastern side of James Island to be visible.

BMCM LaForge
OIC/ 2nd Boat Surfman

And Dr. Noble hear the 44363 say they rolled. The OIC can't see the MLB's navigation lights, but for a moment sees its spotlight sweeping rapidly towards the south from what he thinks is the seaward side of James Island. The OIC now knows the 44363 is in trouble (too close to rocky James Island) and calls the station to get the second boat underway. He also tells the station to call Group PA and get a helicopter dispatched.

FA DaMello
Comms watchstander

Calls the OIC back and passes that Group's duty officer wants to talk with him because Group is still concerned the call is a hoax.

	BMCM LaForge OIC/ 2nd Boat Surfman	And Dr. Noble return to the Station and the OIC tells the SDO that the 44363 is in trouble. BMCM LaForge phones Group PA and says he has, "A serious situation and still [needs] the HH-65A helicopter launched" and also requests an HH-60 helicopter from Astoria, OR.
0049	GALE RUNNER Sailing Vessel	Passes their full position to Group PA.
Approx. 0049	SA Wingo 1 st Boat Crewmember	Hears someone shout something. The boat is hit by a wave on the port quarter and pitch-poles, end over end. Upon re-righting itself, the 44363 rests on the rocks and he knows it is out of the water because the engine noise is different. The mast and entire top of the cabin have sheared off. BM2 Bosley and SN Miniken are gone. The ship's clock recovered from the wreckage of the 44363 was stopped at exactly 00h:49m:03s. CG 44363 has been underway for about 15 minutes.
	MK3 Schlimme 1 st Boat Engineer	Takes control of the 44363.
	SA Wingo 1 st Boat Crewmember	Panics and says, "We have to get out of here" and begins to unclip his surf belt.
	MK3 Schlimme 1 st Boat Engineer	Convinces Wingo that it's safest to stay with the boat and to clip back in. He asks Wingo for the boat's radio and tries to call the station with their position.
	SA Wingo 1 st Boat Crewmember	Looks down at the radio while Schlimme makes the call and sees that it's broken. Wingo realizes that MK3 Schlimme "Was just doing it to calm me down, and it worked because suddenly I was super calm. He saved my life by keeping me on the boat."
	MK3 Schlimme 1 st Boat Engineer	Tries to get himself and SA Wingo down into the forward compartment of the 44363, but can't because the handle of the watertight door is jammed from the boat's impact with rocks. Seeing another wave approaching, Schlimme yells, "Hold on!"
	SA Wingo 1 st Boat Crewmember	Feels the boat roll for a third time after the 44363 is knocked off the rock it was resting on and pushed against the rock cliffs. Underwater, he notes a "tremendous quiet." When the 44363 rights again, MK3 Schlimme is gone and Wingo sees a body float by the boat. He can't throw a life ring to it because both life rings are missing.
		CG 44363 has been underway for about 20 minutes.
		Wingo feels the boat drifting backwards and banging along the rocks into the cove on James Island. He sees a strobe light flashing in the cove, grabs the strobe light from his pyro vest, and turns it on. SA Wingo remembers that he thinks he placed the boat's engines in neutral, but doesn't secure them. Wingo grabs his MK-79 flare kit, fires five flares into the sky and two horizontally towards the beach to illuminate it. Like Schlimme, he tries to get into the forward compartment where there is a portable VHF radio and more flares, but also finds the door jammed.
Approx. 0055	BMCM LaForge OIC/ 2nd Boat Surfman	Is off the phone with Group PA after asking for helicopters and someone at the station tells him they've spotted red flares. The OIC finds Dr. Noble and says, "Let's go back to the bar."
	BM1 Placido SDO/ 1 st Boat Surfman	Shouts, "I'm going" and runs down to the 44393.
	Dr. Noble CG History Author	Parks at the bar overlook with BMCM LaForge and sees a red flare in the sky.

	BM1 Placido SDO/ 1 st Boat Surfman	Gets down to the 44393 and gives a quick brief on the mission. At this point, the second boat crew doesn't know the 44363 is in trouble. He later said that, "I wanted to stick my nose close to the bar and look around before trying to get across. I had no Goddam clue what the bar was doing."
0058	CG 44393 2 nd Boat	Gets underway with BM1 Placido as Surfman and three other crewmen. By chance, BM3 Martin is on second boat, but should have been on the ready boat. Because of his pregnant wife, the surfmen had given him as much time on second boat as possible. CG 44363 got underway approximately 24 minutes earlier.
	BM1 Placido SDO/ 1 st Boat Surfman	Sees a red flare in the sky shortly after leaving the boat basin. He thinks it could be from the 44363. He decides that they must cross the bar.
	Dr. Noble CG History Author	And BMCM LaForge have been at the overlook for a few minutes and see the 44393 leaving the protection of the river. The OIC thinks he can help keep track of the 44393 and advise them if they begin to get set towards James Island. In his own words, Dr. Noble remembers seeing the, "Small white boat rising. Rising. Rising. Rising until it seemed to stand on its stern. White water almost enveloping the small boat. Then the plunge downward."
	BMCM LaForge OIC/ 2nd Boat Surfman	Uses the VHF radio in his truck to communicate back and forth with the 44393 on the bar. As the 44393 heads farther out to sea, he can tell that the length of the swells underneath the boat are lengthening out. He is able to see the 44393 getting set north towards James Island and advises the boat. Dr. Noble and the OIC see more red flares from the western part of James Island.
Approx. 0100	Group Port Angeles	Duty Officer first called the Group's Operations Officer around 0030. He now calls the Group's Senior Duty Officer (SDO) in his duty room and informs him of the case. The SDO tells him to hit the SAR alarm at the Air Station. Next, the Group Duty Officer calls the Group Commanding Officer again and tells him that the helicopter is launching because they have lost communications with the 44363 and have spotted red flares. Until that time, the CO did not know that 44363 had gotten underway from Station Quillayute River. Group CO CAPT Volk drives into the Air Station and assigns a non-rate in the command center to scribe everything he sees and hears as the case goes on.
0107	SA Wingo 1 st Boat Crewmember	Floats with the 44363, gauging his progress into the cove by the illumination from the boat's aft deck light light. He notices the time on his watch: 0107. Starts praying, "Not a prayer of all the things I would or wouldn't do if I was saved, it was just an all-out cry for help: 'Please get my boat to shore.'" The boat's stern swings around and points towards the beach at the far back of the cove. SA Wingo thinks he sees a tree towards shore, unclips his surf belt, hops down into knee-deep water, and wades into the beach. CG 44363 comes to its final resting place at the back of the northern cove in James Island.
0110	CG 44393 2 nd Boat	Crosses the bar.
0110	Group Port Angeles	Watchstander TC3 Marshall transmits an Urgent Marine Information Broadcast.

	BM1 Placido SDO/ 1 st Boat Surfman	Remembers that his, "Crew performed like they were supposed to... They constantly fed me information. I felt like a machine. I absorbed the information and my body performed the necessary motions." Eventually he sees flares both to the north (from the 44363) and from the south (from the GALE RUNNER).
		He remembers, "I knew which ones were ours. I started to push back in and had to decide: Should I go for the sailboat, or our boat? It was one of the hardest decisions I ever had to make. I [later] saw the helicopter starting to search for our boat. I knew the helo could probably help out our boat better than I could, so I headed for the sailboat."
0121	BM1 Placido SDO/ 1 st Boat Surfman	Radios, "We are on handheld. Our antenna was damaged by a breaker."
	BMCM LaForge OIC/ 2nd Boat Surfman	Advises the 44393 to head to the "Q" sea buoy and stay in deep water.
	CG 44393 2 nd Boat	Eventually depletes the battery on their portable VHF radio and loses all communications with the station and BMCM LaForge at the overlook. They proceed to the "Q" buoy.
	BMCM LaForge OIC/ 2nd Boat Surfman	Calls Group again for helicopter assistance because he has a sailboat in distress, a missing MLB, and another MLB he's lost communications with.
0123	CG 6589 Air Station Port Angeles	Takes off from Air Station PA. BM2 Bosley, MK3 Schlimme, and SN Miniken are already dead.
	BMCM LaForge OIC/ 2nd Boat Surfman	And Dr. Noble return to the station.
After 0130	Group Port Angeles	Commanding Officer (CO) CAPT Volk calls nearby units to request additional surface assets. The 110' cutter CUTTYHUNK is in Neah Bay and is dispatched towards La Push. CAPT Volk calls CWO2 Robert Coster, the CO of the Station Neah Bay, and asks if he can send one of his lifeboats south to help. CWO2 Coster drives in to his station and reviews the conditions. He makes the difficult decision that he cannot safely send his crews. CAPT Volk conferences with the CO of Group Astoria and CWO2 Randy Lewis, the CO of Station Grays Harbor. CWO2 Lewis also declines sending his station's 52' MLB due to the conditions. Later, CAPT Volk says that both stations' CO's, "Made the right decision."
0157	CG 6589 Air Station Port Angeles	Arrives on scene, is briefed about the situation by BMCM LaForge, and commences a search near James Island.
0159	GALE RUNNER Sailing Vessel	Passes their accurate position to the Coast Guard after reestablishing communications. They are not on the bar, but farther south near "The Needles," a group of jagged rock features sticking out from the ocean, about three miles from the bar.
0201	BMCM LaForge OIC/ 2nd Boat Surfman	Orders a beach search for survivors and several crewmembers, local police, and National Park Rangers set out for First Beach in anti-exposure coveralls and helmets.

0204	CG 6003 Air Station Astoria	Launches from Air Station Astoria.
	BMCM LaForge OIC/ 2nd Boat Surfman	Has to decide where to send resources: to the GALE RUNNER or to James Island for his lifeboat crew? He radios the CG 6589 back and recommends they leave James Island and proceed to the GALE RUNNER's position because it is only minutes away from the rocks. The OIC advises the watchstander to keep off the radio as much as possible because the helicopter may only have a brief window to transmit that they're in trouble too. BMCM LaForge has 14 lives and three Coast Guard assets in his hands.
0205	CG 6589 Air Station Port Angeles	Diverts from the vicinity of James Island and flies south towards The Needles. To make an approach on the GALE RUNNER, they must fly over, around, and through the 190' tall rock islands. The helicopter is being buffeted by winds and keeps fighting to make new approaches as the sailboat is washed over by breaking waves and drifts between the rock pinnacles.
	FA DaMello Comms watchstander	Is relieved of the communications watch to help the beach party. At First Beach, he and two other members run down the beach, dodging waves.
	SA Wingo 1 st Boat Crewmember	Sees a helicopter searchlight in the distance and CG 44393, and activates the night end of his MK-124 signal flare.
0219	CG 6589 Air Station Port Angeles	Arrives on scene with the GALE RUNNER to commence the hoist.
0227	CG 6585 Air Station Port Angeles	Launches from Air Station PA.
0234	CG 44393 2 nd Boat	Arrives at the "Q" buoy and is tasked by the Station to stay there. They remain there for about six hours until daylight and the chance to return across the bar.
0242	CG 6589 Air Station Port Angeles	Overstresses its hoist, but manages to hoist both crewmembers off the GALE RUNNER.
0251	CG 6589 Air Station Port Angeles	Lands at Station QR's ball field to pass the survivors to an ambulance and depart for Station Neah Bay to refuel.
0253	CG 6003 Air Station Astoria	Arrives on scene and spots a strobe light flashing from the cliff at the back of the cove on James Island.
0320	FA DaMello Comms watchstander	On First Beach sees a flashing light down the beach and starts running towards it. While running, DaMello and another member of the beach party are hit by a log that surges towards them on a wave. The wave knocks DaMello down and the log pins him underwater. FN DaMello sees his life and family flashing before his eyes and takes a breath of seawater. DaMello's arm is dislocated by the log, but it releases him and he gets to his feet. The light seen up the beach belongs to a National Park Ranger helping with the search.
	BMCM LaForge OIC/ 2nd Boat Surfman	Heads out to First Beach with another beach party. He is overheard saying to himself, "I should have trained them more, I should have trained them more."
0334	SN Miniken 1 st Boat Crewmember	Is found unconscious without socks or boots on by the other beach party on First Beach. The beach crew performs CPR at the scene and an ambulance takes him to the hospital in Forks, WA. Taking shifts with compressions, the team of responders gives him CPR for a total of four hours.

0432	CG 6003 Air Station Astoria	Observes BM2 Bosley and MK3 Schlimme floating in the cove on James Island. They request the county's high angle rescue team be contacted to rescue SA Wingo on the cliff.
0505	CG 44393 2 nd Boat	Loses communications with the Station after its portable VHF radio dies.
0508	CG 6013 Air Station Astoria	Leaves Air Station Astoria, OR to assist in the search.
0630	CG 6013 Air Station Astoria	Deploys a rescue swimmer to the cliff SA Wingo is hanging onto. SA Wingo is in good condition.
0633	CG 6585 Air Station Port Angeles	Transfers two additional portable VHF radios to 44393.
0734	CG 44393 2 nd Boat	Safely crosses the bar back into the Quillayute River and moors at Station Quillayute River. They have been underway for six hours and 36 minutes. Until they moor and see the other slip empty, they are unaware that CG 44363 has been lost.
Approx. 0815	CG 6013 Air Station Astoria	Deploys the high-angle rescue team to retrieve SA Wingo from the cliff and hoists him to safety.
0932	BM2 Bosley OOD/ 1 st Boat Coxswain	And MK3 Schlimme are recovered from the cove on James Island by 6013's rescue swimmer. The rescue swimmer states that the wreck of 44363 is in "bad shape" and is leaking fuel.
1030	FA Ballard Non-rate	And the rest of the station are notified that SN Miniken has been pronounced dead at Forks Community Hospital.
1050	CG 6013 Air Station Astoria	Hoists the remaining five rescue team members and its rescue swimmer from the beach. The helicopter drops off the remaining Clallam County rescue team and departs for Air Station Astoria.

Aftermath

Findings from the official report, signed by CG Commandant ADM Kramek

BM2 Bosley OOD/ 1 st Boat Coxswain	Is found by the investigators to, "...not have enough rough weather bar crossings at night in a 44' MLB to prepare him for the conditions that MLB 44363 encountered on 12 February 1997 and should not have attempted to cross the bar."
	The investigators are of the opinion that BM2 Bosley viewed the updated weather forecast and had ample time to pass it to the SDO or OIC. Had either of them received this information, a Surfman would have been on board when the call came in.
MK3 Schlimme 1 st Boat Engineer	And SN Miniken, and BM2 Bosley's autopsies list their cause of death as blunt force trauma to the head.
BMCM LaForge OIC/ 2nd Boat Surfman	Was found by the investigators to have "made several key decisions... which increased the chances of survival for both the sailboat and the MLB 4363 crews."

Investigation	<p>Finds that there were no mechanical issues with 44363 to cause the accident. The boat is so badly damaged it is cut into three pieces and hoisted off the island by a helicopter for disposal.</p> <p>According to investigators, “The proximate cause of this casualty was the coxswain’s failure to safely navigate MLB 44363, causing the boat to capsize and founder in the surf conditions near James Island.”</p> <p>But the report also highlighted excessive personnel turnover at the unit. In February 1997, “only two non-rates had been at the station longer than one year, and because of ...high turnover of personnel, a majority of the Station training is focused on providing basic, introductory skills to help new personnel get their boat crew qualifications... Due to the high turnover of personnel, the Station’s operational readiness was diminished in the area of advanced skills/techniques.”</p> <p>At this time, of the 17 crewmembers filling boat crew positions at the station, 12 had been there less than one year (~70%). Also, despite four Surfman billets, only three surfmen were assigned at the unit, including the OIC and XPO.</p> <p>A 1961 editorial about the TRIUMPH-MERMAID disaster at Stations Point Adams/ Cape Disappointment noted similar concerns about crew inexperience at those units.</p>
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Discussion

64. What was it like “playing” your specific part?

65. What do you feel when the SAR alarm goes off?

- Do our risk management tools help here?
- How do you handle this?

66. What was the culture of response and operations like in 1997? How is it today?

- Coast Guard attitudes about risk
- “You have to go out, but you don’t have to come back” (then)
- “Us, ours, them, theirs” (now: balancing risk-taking with being risk-averse)
- Crew selection, support and oversight from experienced SDOs, etc.
- The Coast Guard has supported and related to its small boat stations

67. What parts of the Coast Guard system were related to this mishap? Are they the same or different today?

- Surfman assignment process
- Risk management culture/tools
- Station experience level/qualification process
- Station staffing
- Group nighttime radio guard

68. What were the effects of high turnover?

- Training focused on basic qualifications instead of advanced skills
- Today’s D13 surf stations have ~40% annual turnover, exacerbated with non-rate transfers for A-School

69. Are you prepared to operate without the normal aids and references you rely on?

- In 1997, crews never practiced nighttime rough bar crossings without bar lights
- What aids and references do we rely on today?
- Can we practice taking those away and adapting?
- Do we have “backup plans” for operating in nighttime, low viz, ATON discreps, etc.?

70. Compare communications issues in 1997 and today.

- How much time passed between the initial call and when the CG asked for a position?
- Station watchstanders used to sleep in the comms room to overhear any traffic from the Group
 - Today, Sector could be conversing with a vessel in the middle of the night for 30 minutes without anyone at the station being aware of it
- There was no Rescue 21 in 1997, so targeting a vessel’s location using radio lines of bearing was imprecise
 - This highlights the importance of R21 Geo Display and promptly asking for lat/long positions
- Simple advice to have a vessel standby and wait in deep water can buy time to gather all the information and prevent a worsening situation

71. Why should we get an accurate position and observe the bar before launching?

- The GALE RUNNER’s true position might have been ascertained before the 44363 crossed the bar near James Island
- Even today, vessels often pass geographic references that don’t match their precise location
- This information can impact asset and crew selection, and overall sense of urgency

72. Compare weather forecasting and reporting in 1997 and today.

- None of the 1997 crew or command could have gotten on their phone and seen the forecast or buoy readings
- Despite modern technology, there is still plenty of information that we need to pass manually today

10. Final questions or comments?

References

CDR Hasselbalch, James M. *Investigation into the Capsizing and Subsequent Loss of MLB 44363 and the Death of Three Coast Guard Members That Occurred at Coast Guard Station Quillayute River on 12 FEB 1997*. March, 1997 (including reviews by RADM J. David Spade and ADM Robert E. Kramek).

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For more on the CG 44363 disaster: www.uscg44363.com



12 FEBRUARY 1997

A training remembering the CG 44363 disaster

GALE RUNNER



(scan for diagrams)

Introduction

- Sailing vessel GALE RUNNER is transiting from San Francisco, CA to Puget Sound, WA with a crew of two
- CG Station Quillayute River (QR) in La Push, WA is the next station north of Station Grays Harbor. It:
 - Has a BMCM Officer in Charge (OIC) and BM1 Executive Petty Officer (XPO)
 - Has two 44' motor lifeboats (MLB)
 - Reports to Group/Air Station Port Angeles (PA), WA, (the 1997 equivalent of a Sector)
 - Has a hazardous river bar crossing in order to get into the harbor at La Push, WA
 - Has a set of stadium-like "bar lights" fixed on James Island next to the bar for night transits
 - In February 1997, they are inoperative
 - The Officer of the Day (OOD) reports to a Surfman Duty Officer (SDO)
- On 11-12 February the duty section is comprised of 10 ready boat crew members, a watchstander, and several additional non-rated members
- On 11 February, Dr. Dennis Noble, a retired Coast Guard Senior Chief Petty Officer and notable history author reports to the station for a few days to stay on board while researching a book he is writing on lifeboat stations
- The following facts are taken verbatim from the USCG Administrative Investigation and Dr. Dennis Noble's book
- Reading takes about 40 minutes with 14 speakers and one facilitator
- Consider turning off the lights and having any members without speaking parts close their eyes.
- Each reader should say their highlighted parts by speaking the time, name, and details, for example, "At 0700 FA DaMello assumes the station's communications watch..."

Tuesday 11 FEB 1997

Time	Member	Details
Morning	GALE RUNNER Sailing Vessel	Is in Westport, WA and stops in at CG Station Grays Harbor. GALE RUNNER receives the weather forecast and decides to get underway to continue north.
0700	FA DaMello Comms watchstander	Assumes the Station's communications watch until 0700 on 12FEB97.
1640	FA DaMello Comms watchstander	Receives the updated NOAA weather forecast which calls for NW wind 35-40kt and seas building to 14'. For 12 February, the forecast predicts NW winds 30kt and combined seas 18'.
Approx. 1730	BM1 Placido SDO/ 1 st Boat Surfman	<p>Gets together with OOD BM2 Bosley and drives to the station's bar overlook to observe last light bar conditions. He observes that seas aren't bad and he feels comfortable going home on recall for the night, about 15 minutes away.</p> <p>He later said, "From the look of the bar and what Bosley had told me about the weather, there was no need for me to stay aboard."</p>
1740	BM2 Bosley OOD/ 1 st Boat Coxswain	Views the NOAA forecast on the computer and logs his initials, "D.A.B." to acknowledge it.

Evening	GALE RUNNER Sailing Vessel	Begins to encounter heavy weather and decides to head for the QR bar entrance to seek safe harbor.
After 2130	BM2 Bosley OOD/ 1 st Boat Coxswain	Does his evening round with MK3 Schlimme and FN Matthews and drives out to the bar overlook to check things out. FN Matthews recalls BM2 and MK3 saying that, “they [hope] they [don’t] get a case [tonight].”
Between 2130-2200	BMCM LaForge OIC/ 2nd Boat Surfman	Returns from an appointment in Port Angeles and checks in with the OOD at the station. BM2 Bosley does not pass the 1640 weather forecast, but tells the OIC that the weather is supposed to pick up overnight. Without knowing of the forecast details, the OIC agrees with the OOD that the ready boat Surfman can remain on recall for the night. The OIC leaves for his home, 5 minutes away from the station.
2130	Dr. Noble CG History Author	Finishes his conversations with the crew and goes to bed.
Approx. 2200	BM2 Bosley OOD/ 1 st Boat Coxswain	Calls the SDO who remembers Bosley saying, “Nothing [is] going on. The winds [have] picked up a little bit... the weather [is] supposed to pick up later [tomorrow].”
2200	FA DaMello Comms watchstander	Passes the radio guard to Group PA for the night and sets up the cot to sleep in the comms room.

Wednesday 12 FEB 1997

Approx. 0015	GALE RUNNER Sailing Vessel	Hails Station QR on VHF 16 to obtain a bar report. Telecommunications Specialist Third Class (TC3) Marshall at Group PA answers for Station QR, consults the status board and reports, “no restrictions.”
	FA DaMello Comms watchstander	Wakes up to the radio traffic between Group and the GALE RUNNER and notices high winds outside. The Station’s anemometer is registering gusts of 50kt. On his own initiative, DaMello remembers the 1640 forecast for 18’ seas and intercoms TC3 Marshall at Group to tell her about the wind he’s seeing and the forecast for seas. He says he thinks that if the OOD knew about the 50kt gusts, then he would put a restriction on the bar.
	Group Port Angeles	Watchstander TC3 Marshall tells FA DaMello to hail the GAIL RUNNER and pass them the current weather conditions.
	FA DaMello Comms watchstander	Hails the sailing vessel and asks, “Are you crossing the bar?”
	GALE RUNNER Sailing Vessel	Crewmember Marcia Infante replies, “Affirmative. We are at the entrance now.” She doesn’t pass a GPS position.
	FA DaMello Comms watchstander	Passes the latest winds and advises the GALE RUNNER that the bar could be breaking. Next, FA DaMello calls BM2 Bosley in the OOD room to brief him of the weather and situation.
	BM2 Bosley OOD/ 1 st Boat Coxswain	Comes into comms and asks DaMello if he has GALE RUNNER’s position. DaMello says that the caller has not relayed their position. Bosley tells DaMello to call the GALE RUNNER and obtain their position. Bosley phones SDO BM1 Placido at his home and informs him of the radio call and that he thinks that it’s a bad idea for the sailboat to come across the bar. BM1 asks if he has a position for the sailboat. To keep listening for information, Bosely places the SDO on hold.

	FA DaMello Comms watchstander	Asks the GALE RUNNER for their position. He hears, "We're at 47, 51..." and then static silence.
	GALE RUNNER Sailing Vessel	Crewmember Ken Schlag is steering the sailing vessel and Marcia Infante is on the radio. Suddenly, the sailboat is struck by a rogue wave, knocked down, and dismasted. The radio antenna is damaged and Ken Schlag is thrown overboard. He is tethered with a safety harness and manages to pull himself back onboard. Portholes are blown out by the wave and the GALE RUNNER begins taking on water.
	FA DaMello Comms watchstander	Tries again to hail the boat, "Sailing vessel, this is Quillayute River on 22, over."
Approx. 00:26	GALE RUNNER Sailing Vessel	Crewmember Marcia Infante breaks the silence, "MAYDAY! MAYDAY! THIS IS SAILING VESSEL GALE RUNNER! U.S. COAST GUARD! WE'RE TAKING ON WATER!"
	GALE RUNNER Sailing Vessel	Crewmember Marcia Infante repeats her mayday calls every few minutes. She looks at the GPS plotter to reference the boat's position, but sees a black screen and figures that the GPS is broken. In fact, the GPS is in screensaver mode and she could have pushed any button to bring the chart and GPS position back up on the display.
	FA DaMello Comms watchstander	Only hears static after the mayday call. Group also hears static and suggests Station switch radio sites. DaMello says that he has already tried that.
Approx. 0026	BM2 Bosley OOD/ 1 st Boat Coxswain	Has gathered this key information in a very short period: there is a sailing vessel that says it is at the entrance to the bar, it has begun taking on water, and the CG has lost communications with it. BM2 Bosley hits the SAR alarm and pipes, "Ready boat crew lay to the ready boat! Sailboat on the bar taking on water."
	BM2 Bosley OOD/ 1 st Boat Coxswain	Takes the SDO phone call off hold and says, "I'm heading for the door."
	BM1 Placido SDO/ 1 st Boat Surfman	Replies, "Call Master Chief [the OIC]. I'm right behind you" and gets in his car to drive back to the station.
		Later, BM1 Placido said that, "If I had known how bad the bar was, I would have told Bosley to wait until I could get to the station."
	SA Wingo 1 st Boat Crewmember	Runs out of his barracks room with SN Miniken and down to the boat.
	Group Port Angeles	Watchstander TC3 Marshall passes that the Group has received more radio transmissions from a frantic woman who doesn't understand Station QR's instructions.
		Group's Duty Officer briefs the Group Commanding Officer, CAPT Volk, at the direction of the Group Senior Duty Officer. The Group is still trying to gather information and is not yet trying to launch a helicopter.
0030	FA DaMello Comms watchstander	Calls and notifies BMCM LaForge of the case and BMCM comes back to the station from his home.
0031	FA DaMello Comms watchstander	Recalls the second boat crew in accordance with the unit's standing orders.
	BM2 Bosley OOD/ 1 st Boat Coxswain	Is one of the first down to the ready boat, CG 44363, and urgently wants to get underway. He runs back up to the station and yells, "Where is my crew?!"

	BMCM LaForge OIC/ 2nd Boat Surfman	Stops at the bar overlook to scan for signs of a sailboat before arriving back at the Station. He notes that there is reduced visibility, but that he can still see the "Q" buoy a mile from the bar. Winds are 30kt with stronger gusts.
0034	BM2 Bosley OOD/ 1 st Boat Coxswain	Gets CG 44363 underway for the SAR case. BM2 Bosley doesn't brief his crew on the mission and the four are all wearing Mustang anti-exposure suits. If he believed the sailboat taking on water was on the bar, he would have thought the situation was very urgent.
	SA Wingo 1 st Boat Crewmember	Hands out pyro vests and SN Miniken hands out surf belts as the boat gets underway. Wingo and Miniken clip into D-rings and later, SA Wingo said that he had presumed MK3 Schlimme clipped in, but he wasn't certain if BM2 Bosley wore his belt or clipped it in. No one on 44363 puts on a helmet, even though policy requires them to and no one speaks up about it. Bosley's helmet was clipped behind his coxswain chair and everyone else's helmets were stowed below in their SAR bags.
	BMCM LaForge OIC/ 2nd Boat Surfman	Is still at the overlook and observes the 44363 leaving the boat basin. He does not see its navigation lights energized. The OIC radios the 44363 and informs them that he does not see a sailboat in the immediate area and orders BM2 Bosley, "To check out the bar to see if they could cross." The OIC heads back to the station.
0043	Group Port Angeles	Watchstander TC3 Marshall intercoms Station QR to have the ready boat standby because they think the case might be a hoax. There has been a rash of hoax calls with a young voice in northwestern Washington over the past two weeks.
	MK3 Schlimme 1 st Boat Engineer	Comes over to the starboard side of the 44363 as it gets underway, adjusts the radar, and then returns the engineer's spot on the port side of the coxswain. While outbound, he reminds BM2 Bosley to not let the lube oil pressures get too high.
	BM2 Bosley OOD/ 1 st Boat Coxswain	Replies, "Yeah, I got it."
	SN Miniken 1 st Boat Crewmember	Operates the port spotlight.
	SA Wingo 1 st Boat Crewmember	Is ordered by BM2 Bosley to man the starboard spotlight and illuminate Wash Rock.
	MK3 Schlimme 1 st Boat Engineer	Yells at Bosley, "Let's get the fuck out of here," just before passing Wash Rock.
	BM2 Bosley OOD/ 1 st Boat Coxswain	Replies, "Fuck that!" Schlimme may have been indicating a desire to go back to the station or instead, to go out to deeper water past the bar.
	FA Ballard Non-rate	Assists FA DaMello in comms and calls the 44363 to pass the Group's instructions to have the ready boat standby.
	BM2 Bosley OOD/ 1 st Boat Coxswain	Responds, "Standby, we're a little busy," likely because BM2 Bosley is focused on negotiating the rough seas on the bar while heading outbound. Regarding the possibility of a hoax, Bosley tells the crew, "I hope not!"
Approx. 0044	SA Wingo 1 st Boat Crewmember	Is told by BM2 Bosley to aim the spotlight starboard towards James Island around the time the 44363 is at Wash Rock. Bosley wants to keep the island off the starboard beam. The 44363 is 100-150 yards off of the island.
0045	BM2 Bosley OOD/ 1 st Boat Coxswain	Radios the station that the 44363 has safely crossed the bar and that it is 16-18' past the bar and evening out. Winds are from the WSW.

	Dr. Noble CG History Author	Joins BMCM LaForge on another trip out to the bar overlook. While driving there, the two hear the 44363 say they made it safely across the bar. BMCM LaForge thinks that the 44363 is likely turning away from James Island and toward the sea buoy into deeper (safer) water.
	SA Wingo 1 st Boat Crewmember	Hears Bosley radio the station that it is 15-16' out (a factual inconsistency) and later said, "I was about to call BS. Those waves were a lot higher than 15-16' and it wasn't getting better, but I was like, 'oh well.'"
		The 44363 is not transiting south on the safe route outbound to the "Q" buoy, but is actually being set north towards the edge of James Island.
		SA Wingo spots a rock and yells, "Rock starboard side! Ten feet!" The boat hits something.
Approx. 0048	BM2 Bosley OOD/ 1 st Boat Coxswain	Yells, "What was that!?" Someone else shouts, "Wave port side!"
	SA Wingo 1 st Boat Crewmember	Sees an enormous wave off the port bow and the boat is rolled over to starboard. SA Wingo hits his head on something and tastes blood. The boat rights itself with its bow pointing towards James Island. When the boat comes up, SA Wingo is twisted in his belt and wrapped up in the canvas dodger. The mast is bent flat to the port side. Wingo reaches for the spotlight and realizes it has broken off the top of the cabin and is gone. The motor lifeboat turns towards the island with way on. The 44363 has been underway for approximately 14 minutes.
Approx. 0048	BM2 Bosley OOD/ 1 st Boat Coxswain	Radios, "Capsized and disoriented."
	FA DaMello Comms watchstander	Hears the call about the boat being capsized, but he and Group PA are confused if the caller is the GALE RUNNER or the 44363. Group and Station hail both boats.
	CG 44393 2 nd Boat	Is the second boat and the recalled crew for it begins arriving at the Station. They begin to dress out in anti-exposure suits and then change their minds, opting for dry suits. The crew heads down to the boat and passes the communications room. They overhear, "Capsized..." but think it is in reference to the sail boat.
	MK3 Schlimme 1 st Boat Engineer	Yells, "We're still on the bar!"
	BM2 Bosley OOD/ 1 st Boat Coxswain	Replies, "Find me buoy 3!"
	SA Wingo 1 st Boat Crewmember	Can see the lights of the town of La Push, but doesn't see Buoy 3 which is too far back around the eastern side of James Island to be visible.
	BMCM LaForge OIC/ 2nd Boat Surfman	And Dr. Noble hear the 44363 say they rolled. The OIC can't see the MLB's navigation lights, but for a moment sees its spotlight sweeping rapidly towards the south from what he thinks is the seaward side of James Island. The OIC now knows the 44363 is in trouble (too close to rocky James Island) and calls the station to get the second boat underway. He also tells the station to call Group PA and get a helicopter dispatched.
	FA DaMello Comms watchstander	Calls the OIC back and passes that Group's duty officer wants to talk with him because Group is still concerned the call is a hoax.

	BMCM LaForge OIC/ 2nd Boat Surfman	And Dr. Noble return to the Station and the OIC tells the SDO that the 44363 is in trouble. BMCM LaForge phones Group PA and says he has, "A serious situation and still [needs] the HH-65A helicopter launched" and also requests an HH-60 helicopter from Astoria, OR.
0049	GALE RUNNER Sailing Vessel	Passes their full position to Group PA.
Approx. 0049	SA Wingo 1 st Boat Crewmember	Hears someone shout something. The boat is hit by a wave on the port quarter and pitch-poles, end over end. Upon re-righting itself, the 44363 rests on the rocks and he knows it is out of the water because the engine noise is different. The mast and entire top of the cabin have sheared off. BM2 Bosley and SN Miniken are gone. The ship's clock recovered from the wreckage of the 44363 was stopped at exactly 00h:49m:03s. CG 44363 has been underway for about 15 minutes.
	MK3 Schlimme 1 st Boat Engineer	Takes control of the 44363.
	SA Wingo 1 st Boat Crewmember	Panics and says, "We have to get out of here" and begins to unclip his surf belt.
	MK3 Schlimme 1 st Boat Engineer	Convinces Wingo that it's safest to stay with the boat and to clip back in. He asks Wingo for the boat's radio and tries to call the station with their position.
	SA Wingo 1 st Boat Crewmember	Looks down at the radio while Schlimme makes the call and sees that it's broken. Wingo realizes that MK3 Schlimme "Was just doing it to calm me down, and it worked because suddenly I was super calm. He saved my life by keeping me on the boat."
	MK3 Schlimme 1 st Boat Engineer	Tries to get himself and SA Wingo down into the forward compartment of the 44363, but can't because the handle of the watertight door is jammed from the boat's impact with rocks. Seeing another wave approaching, Schlimme yells, "Hold on!"
	SA Wingo 1 st Boat Crewmember	Feels the boat roll for a third time after the 44363 is knocked off the rock it was resting on and pushed against the rock cliffs. Underwater, he notes a "tremendous quiet." When the 44363 rights again, MK3 Schlimme is gone and Wingo sees a body float by the boat. He can't throw a life ring to it because both life rings are missing. CG 44363 has been underway for about 20 minutes. Wingo feels the boat drifting backwards and banging along the rocks into the cove on James Island. He sees a strobe light flashing in the cove, grabs the strobe light from his pyro vest, and turns it on. SA Wingo remembers that he thinks he placed the boat's engines in neutral, but doesn't secure them. Wingo grabs his MK-79 flare kit, fires five flares into the sky and two horizontally towards the beach to illuminate it. Like Schlimme, he tries to get into the forward compartment where there is a portable VHF radio and more flares, but also finds the door jammed.
Approx. 0055	BMCM LaForge OIC/ 2nd Boat Surfman	Is off the phone with Group PA after asking for helicopters and someone at the station tells him they've spotted red flares. The OIC finds Dr. Noble and says, "Let's go back to the bar."
	BM1 Placido SDO/ 1 st Boat Surfman	Shouts, "I'm going" and runs down to the 44393.
	Dr. Noble CG History Author	Parks at the bar overlook with BMCM LaForge and sees a red flare in the sky.

	BM1 Placido SDO/ 1 st Boat Surfman	Gets down to the 44393 and gives a quick brief on the mission. At this point, the second boat crew doesn't know the 44363 is in trouble. He later said that, "I wanted to stick my nose close to the bar and look around before trying to get across. I had no Goddam clue what the bar was doing."
0058	CG 44393 2 nd Boat	Gets underway with BM1 Placido as Surfman and three other crewmen. By chance, BM3 Martin is on second boat, but should have been on the ready boat. Because of his pregnant wife, the surfmen had given him as much time on second boat as possible. CG 44363 got underway approximately 24 minutes earlier.
	BM1 Placido SDO/ 1 st Boat Surfman	Sees a red flare in the sky shortly after leaving the boat basin. He thinks it could be from the 44363. He decides that they must cross the bar.
	Dr. Noble CG History Author	And BMCM LaForge have been at the overlook for a few minutes and see the 44393 leaving the protection of the river. The OIC thinks he can help keep track of the 44393 and advise them if they begin to get set towards James Island. In his own words, Dr. Noble remembers seeing the, "Small white boat rising. Rising. Rising. Rising until it seemed to stand on its stern. White water almost enveloping the small boat. Then the plunge downward."
	BMCM LaForge OIC/ 2nd Boat Surfman	Uses the VHF radio in his truck to communicate back and forth with the 44393 on the bar. As the 44393 heads farther out to sea, he can tell that the length of the swells underneath the boat are lengthening out. He is able to see the 44393 getting set north towards James Island and advises the boat. Dr. Noble and the OIC see more red flares from the western part of James Island.
Approx. 0100	Group Port Angeles	<p>Duty Officer first called the Group's Operations Officer around 0030. He now calls the Group's Senior Duty Officer (SDO) in his duty room and informs him of the case. The SDO tells him to hit the SAR alarm at the Air Station.</p> <p>Next, the Group Duty Officer calls the Group Commanding Officer again and tells him that the helicopter is launching because they have lost communications with the 44363 and have spotted red flares. Until that time, the CO did not know that 44363 had gotten underway from Station Quillayute River. Group CO CAPT Volk drives into the Air Station and assigns a non-rate in the command center to scribe everything he sees and hears as the case goes on.</p>
0107	SA Wingo 1 st Boat Crewmember	<p>Floats with the 44363, gauging his progress into the cove by the illumination from the boat's aft deck light light. He notices the time on his watch: 0107.</p> <p>Starts praying, "Not a prayer of all the things I would or wouldn't do if I was saved, it was just an all-out cry for help: 'Please get my boat to shore.'" The boat's stern swings around and points towards the beach at the far back of the cove.</p> <p>SA Wingo thinks he sees a tree towards shore, unclips his surf belt, hops down into knee-deep water, and wades into the beach. CG 44363 comes to its final resting place at the back of the northern cove in James Island.</p>
0110	CG 44393 2 nd Boat	Crosses the bar.
0110	Group Port Angeles	Watchstander TC3 Marshall transmits an Urgent Marine Information Broadcast.

	BM1 Placido SDO/ 1 st Boat Surfman	Remembers that his, "Crew performed like they were supposed to... They constantly fed me information. I felt like a machine. I absorbed the information and my body performed the necessary motions." Eventually he sees flares both to the north (from the 44363) and from the south (from the GALE RUNNER).
		He remembers, "I knew which ones were ours. I started to push back in and had to decide: Should I go for the sailboat, or our boat? It was one of the hardest decisions I ever had to make. I [later] saw the helicopter starting to search for our boat. I knew the helo could probably help out our boat better than I could, so I headed for the sailboat."
0121	BM1 Placido SDO/ 1 st Boat Surfman	Radios, "We are on handheld. Our antenna was damaged by a breaker."
	BMCM LaForge OIC/ 2nd Boat Surfman	Advises the 44393 to head to the "Q" sea buoy and stay in deep water.
	CG 44393 2 nd Boat	Eventually depletes the battery on their portable VHF radio and loses all communications with the station and BMCM LaForge at the overlook. They proceed to the "Q" buoy.
	BMCM LaForge OIC/ 2nd Boat Surfman	Calls Group again for helicopter assistance because he has a sailboat in distress, a missing MLB, and another MLB he's lost communications with.
0123	CG 6589 Air Station Port Angeles	Takes off from Air Station PA. BM2 Bosley, MK3 Schlimme, and SN Miniken are already dead.
	BMCM LaForge OIC/ 2nd Boat Surfman	And Dr. Noble return to the station.
After 0130	Group Port Angeles	Commanding Officer (CO) CAPT Volk calls nearby units to request additional surface assets. The 110' cutter CUTTYHUNK is in Neah Bay and is dispatched towards La Push. CAPT Volk calls CWO2 Robert Coster, the CO of the Station Neah Bay, and asks if he can send one of his lifeboats south to help. CWO2 Coster drives in to his station and reviews the conditions. He makes the difficult decision that he cannot safely send his crews. CAPT Volk conferences with the CO of Group Astoria and CWO2 Randy Lewis, the CO of Station Grays Harbor. CWO2 Lewis also declines sending his station's 52' MLB due to the conditions. Later, CAPT Volk says that both stations' CO's, "Made the right decision."
0157	CG 6589 Air Station Port Angeles	Arrives on scene, is briefed about the situation by BMCM LaForge, and commences a search near James Island.
0159	GALE RUNNER Sailing Vessel	Passes their accurate position to the Coast Guard after reestablishing communications. They are not on the bar, but farther south near "The Needles," a group of jagged rock features sticking out from the ocean, about three miles from the bar.
0201	BMCM LaForge OIC/ 2nd Boat Surfman	Orders a beach search for survivors and several crewmembers, local police, and National Park Rangers set out for First Beach in anti-exposure coveralls and helmets.

0204	CG 6003 Air Station Astoria	Launches from Air Station Astoria.
	BMCM LaForge OIC/ 2nd Boat Surfman	Has to decide where to send resources: to the GALE RUNNER or to James Island for his lifeboat crew? He radios the CG 6589 back and recommends they leave James Island and proceed to the GALE RUNNER's position because it is only minutes away from the rocks. The OIC advises the watchstander to keep off the radio as much as possible because the helicopter may only have a brief window to transmit that they're in trouble too. BMCM LaForge has 14 lives and three Coast Guard assets in his hands.
0205	CG 6589 Air Station Port Angeles	Diverts from the vicinity of James Island and flies south towards The Needles. To make an approach on the GALE RUNNER, they must fly over, around, and through the 190' tall rock islands. The helicopter is being buffeted by winds and keeps fighting to make new approaches as the sailboat is washed over by breaking waves and drifts between the rock pinnacles.
	FA DaMello Comms watchstander	Is relieved of the communications watch to help the beach party. At First Beach, he and two other members run down the beach, dodging waves.
	SA Wingo 1 st Boat Crewmember	Sees a helicopter searchlight in the distance and CG 44393, and activates the night end of his MK-124 signal flare.
0219	CG 6589 Air Station Port Angeles	Arrives on scene with the GALE RUNNER to commence the hoist.
0227	CG 6585 Air Station Port Angeles	Launches from Air Station PA.
0234	CG 44393 2 nd Boat	Arrives at the "Q" buoy and is tasked by the Station to stay there. They remain there for about six hours until daylight and the chance to return across the bar.
0242	CG 6589 Air Station Port Angeles	Overstresses its hoist, but manages to hoist both crewmembers off the GALE RUNNER.
0251	CG 6589 Air Station Port Angeles	Lands at Station QR's ball field to pass the survivors to an ambulance and depart for Station Neah Bay to refuel.
0253	CG 6003 Air Station Astoria	Arrives on scene and spots a strobe light flashing from the cliff at the back of the cove on James Island.
0320	FA DaMello Comms watchstander	On First Beach sees a flashing light down the beach and starts running towards it. While running, DaMello and another member of the beach party are hit by a log that surges towards them on a wave. The wave knocks DaMello down and the log pins him underwater. FN DaMello sees his life and family flashing before his eyes and takes a breath of seawater. DaMello's arm is dislocated by the log, but it releases him and he gets to his feet. The light seen up the beach belongs to a National Park Ranger helping with the search.
	BMCM LaForge OIC/ 2nd Boat Surfman	Heads out to First Beach with another beach party. He is overheard saying to himself, "I should have trained them more, I should have trained them more."
0334	SN Miniken 1 st Boat Crewmember	Is found unconscious without socks or boots on by the other beach party on First Beach. The beach crew performs CPR at the scene and an ambulance takes him to the hospital in Forks, WA. Taking shifts with compressions, the team of responders gives him CPR for a total of four hours.

0432	CG 6003 Air Station Astoria	Observes BM2 Bosley and MK3 Schlimme floating in the cove on James Island. They request the county's high angle rescue team be contacted to rescue SA Wingo on the cliff.
0505	CG 44393 2 nd Boat	Loses communications with the Station after its portable VHF radio dies.
0508	CG 6013 Air Station Astoria	Leaves Air Station Astoria, OR to assist in the search.
0630	CG 6013 Air Station Astoria	Deploys a rescue swimmer to the cliff SA Wingo is hanging onto. SA Wingo is in good condition.
0633	CG 6585 Air Station Port Angeles	Transfers two additional portable VHF radios to 44393.
0734	CG 44393 2 nd Boat	Safely crosses the bar back into the Quillayute River and moors at Station Quillayute River. They have been underway for six hours and 36 minutes. Until they moor and see the other slip empty, they are unaware that CG 44363 has been lost.
Approx. 0815	CG 6013 Air Station Astoria	Deploys the high-angle rescue team to retrieve SA Wingo from the cliff and hoists him to safety.
0932	BM2 Bosley OOD/ 1 st Boat Coxswain	And MK3 Schlimme are recovered from the cove on James Island by 6013's rescue swimmer. The rescue swimmer states that the wreck of 44363 is in "bad shape" and is leaking fuel.
1030	FA Ballard Non-rate	And the rest of the station are notified that SN Miniken has been pronounced dead at Forks Community Hospital.
1050	CG 6013 Air Station Astoria	Hoists the remaining five rescue team members and its rescue swimmer from the beach. The helicopter drops off the remaining Clallam County rescue team and departs for Air Station Astoria.

Aftermath

Findings from the official report, signed by CG Commandant ADM Kramek

BM2 Bosley OOD/ 1 st Boat Coxswain	Is found by the investigators to, "...not have enough rough weather bar crossings at night in a 44' MLB to prepare him for the conditions that MLB 44363 encountered on 12 February 1997 and should not have attempted to cross the bar."
	The investigators are of the opinion that BM2 Bosley viewed the updated weather forecast and had ample time to pass it to the SDO or OIC. Had either of them received this information, a Surfman would have been on board when the call came in.
MK3 Schlimme 1 st Boat Engineer	And SN Miniken, and BM2 Bosley's autopsies list their cause of death as blunt force trauma to the head.
BMCM LaForge OIC/ 2nd Boat Surfman	Was found by the investigators to have "made several key decisions... which increased the chances of survival for both the sailboat and the MLB 4363 crews."

Investigation	<p>Finds that there were no mechanical issues with 44363 to cause the accident. The boat is so badly damaged it is cut into three pieces and hoisted off the island by a helicopter for disposal.</p> <p>According to investigators, “The proximate cause of this casualty was the coxswain’s failure to safely navigate MLB 44363, causing the boat to capsize and founder in the surf conditions near James Island.”</p> <p>But the report also highlighted excessive personnel turnover at the unit. In February 1997, “only two non-rates had been at the station longer than one year, and because of ...high turnover of personnel, a majority of the Station training is focused on providing basic, introductory skills to help new personnel get their boat crew qualifications... Due to the high turnover of personnel, the Station’s operational readiness was diminished in the area of advanced skills/techniques.”</p> <p>At this time, of the 17 crewmembers filling boat crew positions at the station, 12 had been there less than one year (~70%). Also, despite four Surfman billets, only three surfmen were assigned at the unit, including the OIC and XPO.</p> <p>A 1961 editorial about the TRIUMPH-MERMAID disaster at Stations Point Adams/ Cape Disappointment noted similar concerns about crew inexperience at those units.</p>
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Discussion

73. What was it like “playing” your specific part?

74. What do you feel when the SAR alarm goes off?

- Do our risk management tools help here?
- How do you handle this?

75. What was the culture of response and operations like in 1997? How is it today?

- Coast Guard attitudes about risk
- “You have to go out, but you don’t have to come back” (then)
- “Us, ours, them, theirs” (now: balancing risk-taking with being risk-averse)
- Crew selection, support and oversight from experienced SDOs, etc.
- The Coast Guard has supported and related to its small boat stations

76. What parts of the Coast Guard system were related to this mishap? Are they the same or different today?

- Surfman assignment process
- Risk management culture/tools
- Station experience level/qualification process
- Station staffing
- Group nighttime radio guard

77. What were the effects of high turnover?

- Training focused on basic qualifications instead of advanced skills
- Today’s D13 surf stations have ~40% annual turnover, exacerbated with non-rate transfers for A-School

78. Are you prepared to operate without the normal aids and references you rely on?

- In 1997, crews never practiced nighttime rough bar crossings without bar lights
- What aids and references do we rely on today?
- Can we practice taking those away and adapting?
- Do we have “backup plans” for operating in nighttime, low viz, ATON discreps, etc.?

79. Compare communications issues in 1997 and today.

- How much time passed between the initial call and when the CG asked for a position?
- Station watchstanders used to sleep in the comms room to overhear any traffic from the Group
 - Today, Sector could be conversing with a vessel in the middle of the night for 30 minutes without anyone at the station being aware of it
- There was no Rescue 21 in 1997, so targeting a vessel’s location using radio lines of bearing was imprecise
 - This highlights the importance of R21 Geo Display and promptly asking for lat/long positions
- Simple advice to have a vessel standby and wait in deep water can buy time to gather all the information and prevent a worsening situation

80. Why should we get an accurate position and observe the bar before launching?

- The GALE RUNNER’s true position might have been ascertained before the 44363 crossed the bar near James Island
- Even today, vessels often pass geographic references that don’t match their precise location
- This information can impact asset and crew selection, and overall sense of urgency

81. Compare weather forecasting and reporting in 1997 and today.

- None of the 1997 crew or command could have gotten on their phone and seen the forecast or buoy readings
- Despite modern technology, there is still plenty of information that we need to pass manually today

10. Final questions or comments?

References

CDR Hasselbalch, James M. *Investigation into the Capsizing and Subsequent Loss of MLB 44363 and the Death of Three Coast Guard Members That Occurred at Coast Guard Station Quillayute River on 12 FEB 1997*. March, 1997 (including reviews by RADM J. David Spade and ADM Robert E. Kramek).

Noble, Dennis L. *The Rescue of the Gale Runner*. University Press of Florida, 2002.



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For more on the CG 44363 disaster: www.uscg44363.com



12 FEBRUARY 1997

A training remembering the CG 44363 disaster

GROUP PORT ANGLES



(scan for diagrams)

Introduction

- Sailing vessel GALE RUNNER is transiting from San Francisco, CA to Puget Sound, WA with a crew of two
- CG Station Quillayute River (QR) in La Push, WA is the next station north of Station Grays Harbor. It:
 - Has a BMCM Officer in Charge (OIC) and BM1 Executive Petty Officer (XPO)
 - Has two 44' motor lifeboats (MLB)
 - Reports to Group/Air Station Port Angeles (PA), WA, (the 1997 equivalent of a Sector)
 - Has a hazardous river bar crossing in order to get into the harbor at La Push, WA
 - Has a set of stadium-like "bar lights" fixed on James Island next to the bar for night transits
 - In February 1997, they are inoperative
 - The Officer of the Day (OOD) reports to a Surfman Duty Officer (SDO)
- On 11-12 February the duty section is comprised of 10 ready boat crew members, a watchstander, and several additional non-rated members
- On 11 February, Dr. Dennis Noble, a retired Coast Guard Senior Chief Petty Officer and notable history author reports to the station for a few days to stay on board while researching a book he is writing on lifeboat stations
- The following facts are taken verbatim from the USCG Administrative Investigation and Dr. Dennis Noble's book
- Reading takes about 40 minutes with 14 speakers and one facilitator
- Consider turning off the lights and having any members without speaking parts close their eyes.
- Each reader should say their highlighted parts by speaking the time, name, and details, for example, "At 0700 FA DaMello assumes the station's communications watch..."

Tuesday 11 FEB 1997

Time	Member	Details
Morning	GALE RUNNER Sailing Vessel	Is in Westport, WA and stops in at CG Station Grays Harbor. GALE RUNNER receives the weather forecast and decides to get underway to continue north.
0700	FA DaMello Comms watchstander	Assumes the Station's communications watch until 0700 on 12FEB97.
1640	FA DaMello Comms watchstander	Receives the updated NOAA weather forecast which calls for NW wind 35-40kt and seas building to 14'. For 12 February, the forecast predicts NW winds 30kt and combined seas 18'.
Approx. 1730	BM1 Placido SDO/ 1 st Boat Surfman	<p>Gets together with OOD BM2 Bosley and drives to the station's bar overlook to observe last light bar conditions. He observes that seas aren't bad and he feels comfortable going home on recall for the night, about 15 minutes away.</p> <p>He later said, "From the look of the bar and what Bosley had told me about the weather, there was no need for me to stay aboard."</p>
1740	BM2 Bosley OOD/ 1 st Boat Coxswain	Views the NOAA forecast on the computer and logs his initials, "D.A.B." to acknowledge it.

Evening	GALE RUNNER Sailing Vessel	Begins to encounter heavy weather and decides to head for the QR bar entrance to seek safe harbor.
After 2130	BM2 Bosley OOD/ 1 st Boat Coxswain	Does his evening round with MK3 Schlimme and FN Matthews and drives out to the bar overlook to check things out. FN Matthews recalls BM2 and MK3 saying that, "they [hope] they [don't] get a case [tonight]."
Between 2130- 2200	BMCM LaForge OIC/ 2nd Boat Surfman	Returns from an appointment in Port Angeles and checks in with the OOD at the station. BM2 Bosley does not pass the 1640 weather forecast, but tells the OIC that the weather is supposed to pick up overnight. Without knowing of the forecast details, the OIC agrees with the OOD that the ready boat Surfman can remain on recall for the night. The OIC leaves for his home, 5 minutes away from the station.
2130	Dr. Noble CG History Author	Finishes his conversations with the crew and goes to bed.
Approx. 2200	BM2 Bosley OOD/ 1 st Boat Coxswain	Calls the SDO who remembers Bosley saying, "Nothing [is] going on. The winds [have] picked up a little bit... the weather [is] supposed to pick up later [tomorrow]."
2200	FA DaMello Comms watchstander	Passes the radio guard to Group PA for the night and sets up the cot to sleep in the comms room.

Wednesday 12 FEB 1997

Approx. 0015	GALE RUNNER Sailing Vessel	Hails Station QR on VHF 16 to obtain a bar report. Telecommunications Specialist Third Class (TC3) Marshall at Group PA answers for Station QR, consults the status board and reports, "no restrictions."
	FA DaMello Comms watchstander	Wakes up to the radio traffic between Group and the GALE RUNNER and notices high winds outside. The Station's anemometer is registering gusts of 50kt. On his own initiative, DaMello remembers the 1640 forecast for 18' seas and intercoms TC3 Marshall at Group to tell her about the wind he's seeing and the forecast for seas. He says he thinks that if the OOD knew about the 50kt gusts, then he would put a restriction on the bar.
	Group Port Angeles	Watchstander TC3 Marshall tells FA DaMello to hail the GAIL RUNNER and pass them the current weather conditions.
	FA DaMello Comms watchstander	Hails the sailing vessel and asks, "Are you crossing the bar?"
	GALE RUNNER Sailing Vessel	Crewmember Marcia Infante replies, "Affirmative. We are at the entrance now." She doesn't pass a GPS position.
	FA DaMello Comms watchstander	Passes the latest winds and advises the GALE RUNNER that the bar could be breaking. Next, FA DaMello calls BM2 Bosley in the OOD room to brief him of the weather and situation.
	BM2 Bosley OOD/ 1 st Boat Coxswain	Comes into comms and asks DaMello if he has GALE RUNNER's position. DaMello says that the caller has not relayed their position. Bosley tells DaMello to call the GALE RUNNER and obtain their position. Bosley phones SDO BM1 Placido at his home and informs him of the radio call and that he thinks that it's a bad idea for the sailboat to come across the bar. BM1 asks if he has a position for the sailboat. To keep listening for information, Bosely places the SDO on hold.

	FA DaMello Comms watchstander	Asks the GALE RUNNER for their position. He hears, "We're at 47, 51..." and then static silence.
	GALE RUNNER Sailing Vessel	Crewmember Ken Schlag is steering the sailing vessel and Marcia Infante is on the radio. Suddenly, the sailboat is struck by a rogue wave, knocked down, and dismasted. The radio antenna is damaged and Ken Schlag is thrown overboard. He is tethered with a safety harness and manages to pull himself back onboard. Portholes are blown out by the wave and the GALE RUNNER begins taking on water.
	FA DaMello Comms watchstander	Tries again to hail the boat, "Sailing vessel, this is Quillayute River on 22, over."
Approx. 00:26	GALE RUNNER Sailing Vessel	Crewmember Marcia Infante breaks the silence, "MAYDAY! MAYDAY! THIS IS SAILING VESSEL GALE RUNNER! U.S. COAST GUARD! WE'RE TAKING ON WATER!"
	GALE RUNNER Sailing Vessel	Crewmember Marcia Infante repeats her mayday calls every few minutes. She looks at the GPS plotter to reference the boat's position, but sees a black screen and figures that the GPS is broken. In fact, the GPS is in screensaver mode and she could have pushed any button to bring the chart and GPS position back up on the display.
	FA DaMello Comms watchstander	Only hears static after the mayday call. Group also hears static and suggests Station switch radio sites. DaMello says that he has already tried that.
Approx. 00:26	BM2 Bosley OOD/ 1 st Boat Coxswain	Has gathered this key information in a very short period: there is a sailing vessel that says it is at the entrance to the bar, it has begun taking on water, and the CG has lost communications with it. BM2 Bosley hits the SAR alarm and pipes, "Ready boat crew lay to the ready boat! Sailboat on the bar taking on water."
	BM2 Bosley OOD/ 1 st Boat Coxswain	Takes the SDO phone call off hold and says, "I'm heading for the door."
	BM1 Placido SDO/ 1 st Boat Surfman	Replies, "Call Master Chief [the OIC]. I'm right behind you" and gets in his car to drive back to the station.
		Later, BM1 Placido said that, "If I had known how bad the bar was, I would have told Bosley to wait until I could get to the station."
	SA Wingo 1 st Boat Crewmember	Runs out of his barracks room with SN Miniken and down to the boat.
	Group Port Angeles	Watchstander TC3 Marshall passes that the Group has received more radio transmissions from a frantic woman who doesn't understand Station QR's instructions.
		Group's Duty Officer briefs the Group Commanding Officer, CAPT Volk, at the direction of the Group Senior Duty Officer. The Group is still trying to gather information and is not yet trying to launch a helicopter.
0030	FA DaMello Comms watchstander	Calls and notifies BMCM LaForge of the case and BMCM comes back to the station from his home.
0031	FA DaMello Comms watchstander	Recalls the second boat crew in accordance with the unit's standing orders.
	BM2 Bosley OOD/ 1 st Boat Coxswain	Is one of the first down to the ready boat, CG 44363, and urgently wants to get underway. He runs back up to the station and yells, "Where is my crew?!"

	BMCM LaForge OIC/ 2nd Boat Surfman	Stops at the bar overlook to scan for signs of a sailboat before arriving back at the Station. He notes that there is reduced visibility, but that he can still see the "Q" buoy a mile from the bar. Winds are 30kt with stronger gusts.
0034	BM2 Bosley OOD/ 1 st Boat Coxswain	Gets CG 44363 underway for the SAR case. BM2 Bosley doesn't brief his crew on the mission and the four are all wearing Mustang anti-exposure suits. If he believed the sailboat taking on water was on the bar, he would have thought the situation was very urgent.
	SA Wingo 1 st Boat Crewmember	Hands out pyro vests and SN Miniken hands out surf belts as the boat gets underway. Wingo and Miniken clip into D-rings and later, SA Wingo said that he had presumed MK3 Schlimme clipped in, but he wasn't certain if BM2 Bosley wore his belt or clipped it in. No one on 44363 puts on a helmet, even though policy requires them to and no one speaks up about it. Bosley's helmet was clipped behind his coxswain chair and everyone else's helmets were stowed below in their SAR bags.
	BMCM LaForge OIC/ 2nd Boat Surfman	Is still at the overlook and observes the 44363 leaving the boat basin. He does not see its navigation lights energized. The OIC radios the 44363 and informs them that he does not see a sailboat in the immediate area and orders BM2 Bosley, "To check out the bar to see if they could cross." The OIC heads back to the station.
0043	Group Port Angeles	Watchstander TC3 Marshall intercoms Station QR to have the ready boat standby because they think the case might be a hoax. There has been a rash of hoax calls with a young voice in northwestern Washington over the past two weeks.
	MK3 Schlimme 1 st Boat Engineer	Comes over to the starboard side of the 44363 as it gets underway, adjusts the radar, and then returns the engineer's spot on the port side of the coxswain. While outbound, he reminds BM2 Bosley to not let the lube oil pressures get too high.
	BM2 Bosley OOD/ 1 st Boat Coxswain	Replies, "Yeah, I got it."
	SN Miniken 1 st Boat Crewmember	Operates the port spotlight.
	SA Wingo 1 st Boat Crewmember	Is ordered by BM2 Bosley to man the starboard spotlight and illuminate Wash Rock.
	MK3 Schlimme 1 st Boat Engineer	Yells at Bosley, "Let's get the fuck out of here," just before passing Wash Rock.
	BM2 Bosley OOD/ 1 st Boat Coxswain	Replies, "Fuck that!" Schlimme may have been indicating a desire to go back to the station or instead, to go out to deeper water past the bar.
	FA Ballard Non-rate	Assists FA DaMello in comms and calls the 44363 to pass the Group's instructions to have the ready boat standby.
	BM2 Bosley OOD/ 1 st Boat Coxswain	Responds, "Standby, we're a little busy," likely because BM2 Bosley is focused on negotiating the rough seas on the bar while heading outbound. Regarding the possibility of a hoax, Bosley tells the crew, "I hope not!"
Approx. 0044	SA Wingo 1 st Boat Crewmember	Is told by BM2 Bosley to aim the spotlight starboard towards James Island around the time the 44363 is at Wash Rock. Bosley wants to keep the island off the starboard beam. The 44363 is 100-150 yards off of the island.
0045	BM2 Bosley OOD/ 1 st Boat Coxswain	Radios the station that the 44363 has safely crossed the bar and that it is 16-18' past the bar and evening out. Winds are from the WSW.

	Dr. Noble CG History Author	Joins BMCM LaForge on another trip out to the bar overlook. While driving there, the two hear the 44363 say they made it safely across the bar. BMCM LaForge thinks that the 44363 is likely turning away from James Island and toward the sea buoy into deeper (safer) water.
	SA Wingo 1 st Boat Crewmember	Hears Bosley radio the station that it is 15-16' out (a factual inconsistency) and later said, "I was about to call BS. Those waves were a lot higher than 15-16' and it wasn't getting better, but I was like, 'oh well.'"
		The 44363 is not transiting south on the safe route outbound to the "Q" buoy, but is actually being set north towards the edge of James Island.
		SA Wingo spots a rock and yells, "Rock starboard side! Ten feet!" The boat hits something.
Approx. 0048	BM2 Bosley OOD/ 1 st Boat Coxswain	Yells, "What was that!?" Someone else shouts, "Wave port side!"
	SA Wingo 1 st Boat Crewmember	Sees an enormous wave off the port bow and the boat is rolled over to starboard. SA Wingo hits his head on something and tastes blood. The boat rights itself with its bow pointing towards James Island. When the boat comes up, SA Wingo is twisted in his belt and wrapped up in the canvas dodger. The mast is bent flat to the port side. Wingo reaches for the spotlight and realizes it has broken off the top of the cabin and is gone. The motor lifeboat turns towards the island with way on. The 44363 has been underway for approximately 14 minutes.
Approx. 0048	BM2 Bosley OOD/ 1 st Boat Coxswain	Radios, "Capsized and disoriented."
	FA DaMello Comms watchstander	Hears the call about the boat being capsized, but he and Group PA are confused if the caller is the GALE RUNNER or the 44363. Group and Station hail both boats.
	CG 44393 2 nd Boat	Is the second boat and the recalled crew for it begins arriving at the Station. They begin to dress out in anti-exposure suits and then change their minds, opting for dry suits. The crew heads down to the boat and passes the communications room. They overhear, "Capsized..." but think it is in reference to the sail boat.
	MK3 Schlimme 1 st Boat Engineer	Yells, "We're still on the bar!"
	BM2 Bosley OOD/ 1 st Boat Coxswain	Replies, "Find me buoy 3!"
	SA Wingo 1 st Boat Crewmember	Can see the lights of the town of La Push, but doesn't see Buoy 3 which is too far back around the eastern side of James Island to be visible.
	BMCM LaForge OIC/ 2nd Boat Surfman	And Dr. Noble hear the 44363 say they rolled. The OIC can't see the MLB's navigation lights, but for a moment sees its spotlight sweeping rapidly towards the south from what he thinks is the seaward side of James Island. The OIC now knows the 44363 is in trouble (too close to rocky James Island) and calls the station to get the second boat underway. He also tells the station to call Group PA and get a helicopter dispatched.
	FA DaMello Comms watchstander	Calls the OIC back and passes that Group's duty officer wants to talk with him because Group is still concerned the call is a hoax.

	BMCM LaForge OIC/ 2nd Boat Surfman	And Dr. Noble return to the Station and the OIC tells the SDO that the 44363 is in trouble. BMCM LaForge phones Group PA and says he has, "A serious situation and still [needs] the HH-65A helicopter launched" and also requests an HH-60 helicopter from Astoria, OR.
0049	GALE RUNNER Sailing Vessel	Passes their full position to Group PA.
Approx. 0049	SA Wingo 1 st Boat Crewmember	Hears someone shout something. The boat is hit by a wave on the port quarter and pitch-poles, end over end. Upon re-righting itself, the 44363 rests on the rocks and he knows it is out of the water because the engine noise is different. The mast and entire top of the cabin have sheared off. BM2 Bosley and SN Miniken are gone. The ship's clock recovered from the wreckage of the 44363 was stopped at exactly 00h:49m:03s. CG 44363 has been underway for about 15 minutes.
	MK3 Schlimme 1 st Boat Engineer	Takes control of the 44363.
	SA Wingo 1 st Boat Crewmember	Panics and says, "We have to get out of here" and begins to unclip his surf belt.
	MK3 Schlimme 1 st Boat Engineer	Convinces Wingo that it's safest to stay with the boat and to clip back in. He asks Wingo for the boat's radio and tries to call the station with their position.
	SA Wingo 1 st Boat Crewmember	Looks down at the radio while Schlimme makes the call and sees that it's broken. Wingo realizes that MK3 Schlimme "Was just doing it to calm me down, and it worked because suddenly I was super calm. He saved my life by keeping me on the boat."
	MK3 Schlimme 1 st Boat Engineer	Tries to get himself and SA Wingo down into the forward compartment of the 44363, but can't because the handle of the watertight door is jammed from the boat's impact with rocks. Seeing another wave approaching, Schlimme yells, "Hold on!"
	SA Wingo 1 st Boat Crewmember	Feels the boat roll for a third time after the 44363 is knocked off the rock it was resting on and pushed against the rock cliffs. Underwater, he notes a "tremendous quiet." When the 44363 rights again, MK3 Schlimme is gone and Wingo sees a body float by the boat. He can't throw a life ring to it because both life rings are missing.
		CG 44363 has been underway for about 20 minutes.
		Wingo feels the boat drifting backwards and banging along the rocks into the cove on James Island. He sees a strobe light flashing in the cove, grabs the strobe light from his pyro vest, and turns it on. SA Wingo remembers that he thinks he placed the boat's engines in neutral, but doesn't secure them. Wingo grabs his MK-79 flare kit, fires five flares into the sky and two horizontally towards the beach to illuminate it. Like Schlimme, he tries to get into the forward compartment where there is a portable VHF radio and more flares, but also finds the door jammed.
Approx. 0055	BMCM LaForge OIC/ 2nd Boat Surfman	Is off the phone with Group PA after asking for helicopters and someone at the station tells him they've spotted red flares. The OIC finds Dr. Noble and says, "Let's go back to the bar."
	BM1 Placido SDO/ 1 st Boat Surfman	Shouts, "I'm going" and runs down to the 44393.
	Dr. Noble CG History Author	Parks at the bar overlook with BMCM LaForge and sees a red flare in the sky.

	BM1 Placido SDO/ 1 st Boat Surfman	Gets down to the 44393 and gives a quick brief on the mission. At this point, the second boat crew doesn't know the 44363 is in trouble. He later said that, "I wanted to stick my nose close to the bar and look around before trying to get across. I had no Goddam clue what the bar was doing."
0058	CG 44393 2 nd Boat	Gets underway with BM1 Placido as Surfman and three other crewmen. By chance, BM3 Martin is on second boat, but should have been on the ready boat. Because of his pregnant wife, the surfmen had given him as much time on second boat as possible. CG 44363 got underway approximately 24 minutes earlier.
	BM1 Placido SDO/ 1 st Boat Surfman	Sees a red flare in the sky shortly after leaving the boat basin. He thinks it could be from the 44363. He decides that they must cross the bar.
	Dr. Noble CG History Author	And BMCM LaForge have been at the overlook for a few minutes and see the 44393 leaving the protection of the river. The OIC thinks he can help keep track of the 44393 and advise them if they begin to get set towards James Island. In his own words, Dr. Noble remembers seeing the, "Small white boat rising. Rising. Rising. Rising until it seemed to stand on its stern. White water almost enveloping the small boat. Then the plunge downward."
	BMCM LaForge OIC/ 2nd Boat Surfman	Uses the VHF radio in his truck to communicate back and forth with the 44393 on the bar. As the 44393 heads farther out to sea, he can tell that the length of the swells underneath the boat are lengthening out. He is able to see the 44393 getting set north towards James Island and advises the boat. Dr. Noble and the OIC see more red flares from the western part of James Island.
Approx. 0100	Group Port Angeles	Duty Officer first called the Group's Operations Officer around 0030. He now calls the Group's Senior Duty Officer (SDO) in his duty room and informs him of the case. The SDO tells him to hit the SAR alarm at the Air Station. Next, the Group Duty Officer calls the Group Commanding Officer again and tells him that the helicopter is launching because they have lost communications with the 44363 and have spotted red flares. Until that time, the CO did not know that 44363 had gotten underway from Station Quillayute River. Group CO CAPT Volk drives into the Air Station and assigns a non-rate in the command center to scribe everything he sees and hears as the case goes on.
0107	SA Wingo 1 st Boat Crewmember	Floats with the 44363, gauging his progress into the cove by the illumination from the boat's aft deck light light. He notices the time on his watch: 0107. Starts praying, "Not a prayer of all the things I would or wouldn't do if I was saved, it was just an all-out cry for help: 'Please get my boat to shore.'" The boat's stern swings around and points towards the beach at the far back of the cove. SA Wingo thinks he sees a tree towards shore, unclips his surf belt, hops down into knee-deep water, and wades into the beach. CG 44363 comes to its final resting place at the back of the northern cove in James Island.
0110	CG 44393 2 nd Boat	Crosses the bar.
0110	Group Port Angeles	Watchstander TC3 Marshall transmits an Urgent Marine Information Broadcast.

	BM1 Placido SDO/ 1 st Boat Surfman	Remembers that his, "Crew performed like they were supposed to... They constantly fed me information. I felt like a machine. I absorbed the information and my body performed the necessary motions." Eventually he sees flares both to the north (from the 44363) and from the south (from the GALE RUNNER).
		He remembers, "I knew which ones were ours. I started to push back in and had to decide: Should I go for the sailboat, or our boat? It was one of the hardest decisions I ever had to make. I [later] saw the helicopter starting to search for our boat. I knew the helo could probably help out our boat better than I could, so I headed for the sailboat."
0121	BM1 Placido SDO/ 1 st Boat Surfman	Radios, "We are on handheld. Our antenna was damaged by a breaker."
	BMCM LaForge OIC/ 2nd Boat Surfman	Advises the 44393 to head to the "Q" sea buoy and stay in deep water.
	CG 44393 2 nd Boat	Eventually depletes the battery on their portable VHF radio and loses all communications with the station and BMCM LaForge at the overlook. They proceed to the "Q" buoy.
	BMCM LaForge OIC/ 2nd Boat Surfman	Calls Group again for helicopter assistance because he has a sailboat in distress, a missing MLB, and another MLB he's lost communications with.
0123	CG 6589 Air Station Port Angeles	Takes off from Air Station PA. BM2 Bosley, MK3 Schlimme, and SN Miniken are already dead.
	BMCM LaForge OIC/ 2nd Boat Surfman	And Dr. Noble return to the station.
After 0130	Group Port Angeles	<p>Commanding Officer (CO) CAPT Volk calls nearby units to request additional surface assets. The 110' cutter CUTTYHUNK is in Neah Bay and is dispatched towards La Push.</p> <p>CAPT Volk calls CWO2 Robert Coster, the CO of the Station Neah Bay, and asks if he can send one of his lifeboats south to help. CWO2 Coster drives in to his station and reviews the conditions. He makes the difficult decision that he cannot safely send his crews.</p> <p>CAPT Volk conferences with the CO of Group Astoria and CWO2 Randy Lewis, the CO of Station Grays Harbor. CWO2 Lewis also declines sending his station's 52' MLB due to the conditions.</p> <p>Later, CAPT Volk says that both stations' CO's, "Made the right decision."</p>
0157	CG 6589 Air Station Port Angeles	Arrives on scene, is briefed about the situation by BMCM LaForge, and commences a search near James Island.
0159	GALE RUNNER Sailing Vessel	Passes their accurate position to the Coast Guard after reestablishing communications. They are not on the bar, but farther south near "The Needles," a group of jagged rock features sticking out from the ocean, about three miles from the bar.
0201	BMCM LaForge OIC/ 2nd Boat Surfman	Orders a beach search for survivors and several crewmembers, local police, and National Park Rangers set out for First Beach in anti-exposure coveralls and helmets.

0204	CG 6003 Air Station Astoria	Launches from Air Station Astoria.
	BMCM LaForge OIC/ 2nd Boat Surfman	Has to decide where to send resources: to the GALE RUNNER or to James Island for his lifeboat crew? He radios the CG 6589 back and recommends they leave James Island and proceed to the GALE RUNNER's position because it is only minutes away from the rocks. The OIC advises the watchstander to keep off the radio as much as possible because the helicopter may only have a brief window to transmit that they're in trouble too. BMCM LaForge has 14 lives and three Coast Guard assets in his hands.
0205	CG 6589 Air Station Port Angeles	Diverts from the vicinity of James Island and flies south towards The Needles. To make an approach on the GALE RUNNER, they must fly over, around, and through the 190' tall rock islands. The helicopter is being buffeted by winds and keeps fighting to make new approaches as the sailboat is washed over by breaking waves and drifts between the rock pinnacles.
	FA DaMello Comms watchstander	Is relieved of the communications watch to help the beach party. At First Beach, he and two other members run down the beach, dodging waves.
	SA Wingo 1 st Boat Crewmember	Sees a helicopter searchlight in the distance and CG 44393, and activates the night end of his MK-124 signal flare.
0219	CG 6589 Air Station Port Angeles	Arrives on scene with the GALE RUNNER to commence the hoist.
0227	CG 6585 Air Station Port Angeles	Launches from Air Station PA.
0234	CG 44393 2 nd Boat	Arrives at the "Q" buoy and is tasked by the Station to stay there. They remain there for about six hours until daylight and the chance to return across the bar.
0242	CG 6589 Air Station Port Angeles	Overstresses its hoist, but manages to hoist both crewmembers off the GALE RUNNER.
0251	CG 6589 Air Station Port Angeles	Lands at Station QR's ball field to pass the survivors to an ambulance and depart for Station Neah Bay to refuel.
0253	CG 6003 Air Station Astoria	Arrives on scene and spots a strobe light flashing from the cliff at the back of the cove on James Island.
0320	FA DaMello Comms watchstander	On First Beach sees a flashing light down the beach and starts running towards it. While running, DaMello and another member of the beach party are hit by a log that surges towards them on a wave. The wave knocks DaMello down and the log pins him underwater. FN DaMello sees his life and family flashing before his eyes and takes a breath of seawater. DaMello's arm is dislocated by the log, but it releases him and he gets to his feet. The light seen up the beach belongs to a National Park Ranger helping with the search.
	BMCM LaForge OIC/ 2nd Boat Surfman	Heads out to First Beach with another beach party. He is overheard saying to himself, "I should have trained them more, I should have trained them more."
0334	SN Miniken 1 st Boat Crewmember	Is found unconscious without socks or boots on by the other beach party on First Beach. The beach crew performs CPR at the scene and an ambulance takes him to the hospital in Forks, WA. Taking shifts with compressions, the team of responders gives him CPR for a total of four hours.

0432	CG 6003 Air Station Astoria	Observes BM2 Bosley and MK3 Schlimme floating in the cove on James Island. They request the county's high angle rescue team be contacted to rescue SA Wingo on the cliff.
0505	CG 44393 2 nd Boat	Loses communications with the Station after its portable VHF radio dies.
0508	CG 6013 Air Station Astoria	Leaves Air Station Astoria, OR to assist in the search.
0630	CG 6013 Air Station Astoria	Deploys a rescue swimmer to the cliff SA Wingo is hanging onto. SA Wingo is in good condition.
0633	CG 6585 Air Station Port Angeles	Transfers two additional portable VHF radios to 44393.
0734	CG 44393 2 nd Boat	Safely crosses the bar back into the Quillayute River and moors at Station Quillayute River. They have been underway for six hours and 36 minutes. Until they moor and see the other slip empty, they are unaware that CG 44363 has been lost.
Approx. 0815	CG 6013 Air Station Astoria	Deploys the high-angle rescue team to retrieve SA Wingo from the cliff and hoists him to safety.
0932	BM2 Bosley OOD/ 1 st Boat Coxswain	And MK3 Schlimme are recovered from the cove on James Island by 6013's rescue swimmer. The rescue swimmer states that the wreck of 44363 is in "bad shape" and is leaking fuel.
1030	FA Ballard Non-rate	And the rest of the station are notified that SN Miniken has been pronounced dead at Forks Community Hospital.
1050	CG 6013 Air Station Astoria	Hoists the remaining five rescue team members and its rescue swimmer from the beach. The helicopter drops off the remaining Clallam County rescue team and departs for Air Station Astoria.

Aftermath

Findings from the official report, signed by CG Commandant ADM Kramek

BM2 Bosley OOD/ 1 st Boat Coxswain	Is found by the investigators to, "...not have enough rough weather bar crossings at night in a 44' MLB to prepare him for the conditions that MLB 44363 encountered on 12 February 1997 and should not have attempted to cross the bar."
	The investigators are of the opinion that BM2 Bosley viewed the updated weather forecast and had ample time to pass it to the SDO or OIC. Had either of them received this information, a Surfman would have been on board when the call came in.
MK3 Schlimme 1 st Boat Engineer	And SN Miniken, and BM2 Bosley's autopsies list their cause of death as blunt force trauma to the head.
BMCM LaForge OIC/ 2nd Boat Surfman	Was found by the investigators to have "made several key decisions... which increased the chances of survival for both the sailboat and the MLB 4363 crews."

Investigation	<p>Finds that there were no mechanical issues with 44363 to cause the accident. The boat is so badly damaged it is cut into three pieces and hoisted off the island by a helicopter for disposal.</p> <p>According to investigators, “The proximate cause of this casualty was the coxswain’s failure to safely navigate MLB 44363, causing the boat to capsize and founder in the surf conditions near James Island.”</p> <p>But the report also highlighted excessive personnel turnover at the unit. In February 1997, “only two non-rates had been at the station longer than one year, and because of ...high turnover of personnel, a majority of the Station training is focused on providing basic, introductory skills to help new personnel get their boat crew qualifications... Due to the high turnover of personnel, the Station’s operational readiness was diminished in the area of advanced skills/techniques.”</p> <p>At this time, of the 17 crewmembers filling boat crew positions at the station, 12 had been there less than one year (~70%). Also, despite four Surfman billets, only three surfmen were assigned at the unit, including the OIC and XPO.</p> <p>A 1961 editorial about the TRIUMPH-MERMAID disaster at Stations Point Adams/ Cape Disappointment noted similar concerns about crew inexperience at those units.</p>
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Discussion

82. What was it like “playing” your specific part?

83. What do you feel when the SAR alarm goes off?

- Do our risk management tools help here?
- How do you handle this?

84. What was the culture of response and operations like in 1997? How is it today?

- Coast Guard attitudes about risk
- “You have to go out, but you don’t have to come back” (then)
- “Us, ours, them, theirs” (now: balancing risk-taking with being risk-averse)
- Crew selection, support and oversight from experienced SDOs, etc.
- The Coast Guard has supported and related to its small boat stations

85. What parts of the Coast Guard system were related to this mishap? Are they the same or different today?

- Surfman assignment process
- Risk management culture/tools
- Station experience level/qualification process
- Station staffing
- Group nighttime radio guard

86. What were the effects of high turnover?

- Training focused on basic qualifications instead of advanced skills
- Today’s D13 surf stations have ~40% annual turnover, exacerbated with non-rate transfers for A-School

87. Are you prepared to operate without the normal aids and references you rely on?

- In 1997, crews never practiced nighttime rough bar crossings without bar lights
- What aids and references do we rely on today?
- Can we practice taking those away and adapting?
- Do we have “backup plans” for operating in nighttime, low viz, ATON discreps, etc.?

88. Compare communications issues in 1997 and today.

- How much time passed between the initial call and when the CG asked for a position?
- Station watchstanders used to sleep in the comms room to overhear any traffic from the Group
 - Today, Sector could be conversing with a vessel in the middle of the night for 30 minutes without anyone at the station being aware of it
- There was no Rescue 21 in 1997, so targeting a vessel’s location using radio lines of bearing was imprecise
 - This highlights the importance of R21 Geo Display and promptly asking for lat/long positions
- Simple advice to have a vessel standby and wait in deep water can buy time to gather all the information and prevent a worsening situation

89. Why should we get an accurate position and observe the bar before launching?

- The GALE RUNNER’s true position might have been ascertained before the 44363 crossed the bar near James Island
- Even today, vessels often pass geographic references that don’t match their precise location
- This information can impact asset and crew selection, and overall sense of urgency

90. Compare weather forecasting and reporting in 1997 and today.

- None of the 1997 crew or command could have gotten on their phone and seen the forecast or buoy readings
- Despite modern technology, there is still plenty of information that we need to pass manually today

10. Final questions or comments?

References

CDR Hasselbalch, James M. *Investigation into the Capsizing and Subsequent Loss of MLB 44363 and the Death of Three Coast Guard Members That Occurred at Coast Guard Station Quillayute River on 12 FEB 1997*. March, 1997 (including reviews by RADM J. David Spade and ADM Robert E. Kramek).

Noble, Dennis L. *The Rescue of the Gale Runner*. University Press of Florida, 2002.



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For more on the CG 44363 disaster: www.uscg44363.com



12 FEBRUARY 1997

A training remembering the CG 44363 disaster

BMCM LAFORGE



(scan for diagrams)

Introduction

- Sailing vessel GALE RUNNER is transiting from San Francisco, CA to Puget Sound, WA with a crew of two
- CG Station Quillayute River (**QR**) in La Push, WA is the next station north of Station Grays Harbor. It:
 - Has a BMCM Officer in Charge (**OIC**) and BM1 Executive Petty Officer (**XPO**)
 - Has two 44' motor lifeboats (**MLB**)
 - Reports to Group/Air Station Port Angeles (**PA**), WA, (the 1997 equivalent of a Sector)
 - Has a hazardous river bar crossing in order to get into the harbor at La Push, WA
 - Has a set of stadium-like "bar lights" fixed on James Island next to the bar for night transits
 - In February 1997, they are inoperative
 - The Officer of the Day (**OOD**) reports to a Surfman Duty Officer (**SDO**)
- On 11-12 February the duty section is comprised of 10 ready boat crew members, a watchstander, and several additional non-rated members
- On 11 February, Dr. Dennis Noble, a retired Coast Guard Senior Chief Petty Officer and notable history author reports to the station for a few days to stay on board while researching a book he is writing on lifeboat stations
- The following facts are taken verbatim from the USCG Administrative Investigation and Dr. Dennis Noble's book
- Reading takes about 40 minutes with 14 speakers and one facilitator
- Consider turning off the lights and having any members without speaking parts close their eyes.
- Each reader should say their **highlighted parts by speaking the time, name, and details, for example**, "At 0700 FA DaMello assumes the station's communications watch..."

Tuesday 11 FEB 1997

Time	Member	Details
Morning	GALE RUNNER Sailing Vessel	Is in Westport, WA and stops in at CG Station Grays Harbor. GALE RUNNER receives the weather forecast and decides to get underway to continue north.
0700	FA DaMello Comms watchstander	Assumes the Station's communications watch until 0700 on 12FEB97.
1640	FA DaMello Comms watchstander	Receives the updated NOAA weather forecast which calls for NW wind 35-40kt and seas building to 14'. For 12 February, the forecast predicts NW winds 30kt and combined seas 18'.
Approx. 1730	BM1 Placido SDO/ 1 st Boat Surfman	<p>Gets together with OOD BM2 Bosley and drives to the station's bar overlook to observe last light bar conditions. He observes that seas aren't bad and he feels comfortable going home on recall for the night, about 15 minutes away.</p> <p>He later said, "From the look of the bar and what Bosley had told me about the weather, there was no need for me to stay aboard."</p>
1740	BM2 Bosley OOD/ 1 st Boat Coxswain	Views the NOAA forecast on the computer and logs his initials, "D.A.B." to acknowledge it.

Evening	GALE RUNNER Sailing Vessel	Begins to encounter heavy weather and decides to head for the QR bar entrance to seek safe harbor.
After 2130	BM2 Bosley OOD/ 1 st Boat Coxswain	Does his evening round with MK3 Schlimme and FN Matthews and drives out to the bar overlook to check things out. FN Matthews recalls BM2 and MK3 saying that, "they [hope] they [don't] get a case [tonight]."
Between 2130- 2200	BMCM LaForge OIC/ 2nd Boat Surfman	Returns from an appointment in Port Angeles and checks in with the OOD at the station. BM2 Bosley does not pass the 1640 weather forecast, but tells the OIC that the weather is supposed to pick up overnight. Without knowing of the forecast details, the OIC agrees with the OOD that the ready boat Surfman can remain on recall for the night. The OIC leaves for his home, 5 minutes away from the station.
2130	Dr. Noble CG History Author	Finishes his conversations with the crew and goes to bed.
Approx. 2200	BM2 Bosley OOD/ 1 st Boat Coxswain	Calls the SDO who remembers Bosley saying, "Nothing [is] going on. The winds [have] picked up a little bit... the weather [is] supposed to pick up later [tomorrow]."
2200	FA DaMello Comms watchstander	Passes the radio guard to Group PA for the night and sets up the cot to sleep in the comms room.

Wednesday 12 FEB 1997

Approx. 0015	GALE RUNNER Sailing Vessel	Hails Station QR on VHF 16 to obtain a bar report. Telecommunications Specialist Third Class (TC3) Marshall at Group PA answers for Station QR, consults the status board and reports, "no restrictions."
	FA DaMello Comms watchstander	Wakes up to the radio traffic between Group and the GALE RUNNER and notices high winds outside. The Station's anemometer is registering gusts of 50kt. On his own initiative, DaMello remembers the 1640 forecast for 18' seas and intercoms TC3 Marshall at Group to tell her about the wind he's seeing and the forecast for seas. He says he thinks that if the OOD knew about the 50kt gusts, then he would put a restriction on the bar.
	Group Port Angeles	Watchstander TC3 Marshall tells FA DaMello to hail the GAIL RUNNER and pass them the current weather conditions.
	FA DaMello Comms watchstander	Hails the sailing vessel and asks, "Are you crossing the bar?"
	GALE RUNNER Sailing Vessel	Crewmember Marcia Infante replies, "Affirmative. We are at the entrance now." She doesn't pass a GPS position.
	FA DaMello Comms watchstander	Passes the latest winds and advises the GALE RUNNER that the bar could be breaking. Next, FA DaMello calls BM2 Bosley in the OOD room to brief him of the weather and situation.
	BM2 Bosley OOD/ 1 st Boat Coxswain	Comes into comms and asks DaMello if he has GALE RUNNER's position. DaMello says that the caller has not relayed their position. Bosley tells DaMello to call the GALE RUNNER and obtain their position. Bosley phones SDO BM1 Placido at his home and informs him of the radio call and that he thinks that it's a bad idea for the sailboat to come across the bar. BM1 asks if he has a position for the sailboat. To keep listening for information, Bosely places the SDO on hold.

	FA DaMello Comms watchstander	Asks the GALE RUNNER for their position. He hears, "We're at 47, 51..." and then static silence.
	GALE RUNNER Sailing Vessel	Crewmember Ken Schlag is steering the sailing vessel and Marcia Infante is on the radio. Suddenly, the sailboat is struck by a rogue wave, knocked down, and dismasted. The radio antenna is damaged and Ken Schlag is thrown overboard. He is tethered with a safety harness and manages to pull himself back onboard. Portholes are blown out by the wave and the GALE RUNNER begins taking on water.
	FA DaMello Comms watchstander	Tries again to hail the boat, "Sailing vessel, this is Quillayute River on 22, over."
Approx. 00:26	GALE RUNNER Sailing Vessel	Crewmember Marcia Infante breaks the silence, "MAYDAY! MAYDAY! THIS IS SAILING VESSEL GALE RUNNER! U.S. COAST GUARD! WE'RE TAKING ON WATER!"
	GALE RUNNER Sailing Vessel	Crewmember Marcia Infante repeats her mayday calls every few minutes. She looks at the GPS plotter to reference the boat's position, but sees a black screen and figures that the GPS is broken. In fact, the GPS is in screensaver mode and she could have pushed any button to bring the chart and GPS position back up on the display.
	FA DaMello Comms watchstander	Only hears static after the mayday call. Group also hears static and suggests Station switch radio sites. DaMello says that he has already tried that.
Approx. 00:26	BM2 Bosley OOD/ 1 st Boat Coxswain	Has gathered this key information in a very short period: there is a sailing vessel that says it is at the entrance to the bar, it has begun taking on water, and the CG has lost communications with it. BM2 Bosley hits the SAR alarm and pipes, "Ready boat crew lay to the ready boat! Sailboat on the bar taking on water."
	BM2 Bosley OOD/ 1 st Boat Coxswain	Takes the SDO phone call off hold and says, "I'm heading for the door."
	BM1 Placido SDO/ 1 st Boat Surfman	Replies, "Call Master Chief [the OIC]. I'm right behind you" and gets in his car to drive back to the station.
		Later, BM1 Placido said that, "If I had known how bad the bar was, I would have told Bosley to wait until I could get to the station."
	SA Wingo 1 st Boat Crewmember	Runs out of his barracks room with SN Miniken and down to the boat.
	Group Port Angeles	Watchstander TC3 Marshall passes that the Group has received more radio transmissions from a frantic woman who doesn't understand Station QR's instructions.
		Group's Duty Officer briefs the Group Commanding Officer, CAPT Volk, at the direction of the Group Senior Duty Officer. The Group is still trying to gather information and is not yet trying to launch a helicopter.
0030	FA DaMello Comms watchstander	Calls and notifies BMCM LaForge of the case and BMCM comes back to the station from his home.
0031	FA DaMello Comms watchstander	Recalls the second boat crew in accordance with the unit's standing orders.
	BM2 Bosley OOD/ 1 st Boat Coxswain	Is one of the first down to the ready boat, CG 44363, and urgently wants to get underway. He runs back up to the station and yells, "Where is my crew?!"

	BMCM LaForge OIC/ 2nd Boat Surfman	Stops at the bar overlook to scan for signs of a sailboat before arriving back at the Station. He notes that there is reduced visibility, but that he can still see the "Q" buoy a mile from the bar. Winds are 30kt with stronger gusts.
0034	BM2 Bosley OOD/ 1 st Boat Coxswain	Gets CG 44363 underway for the SAR case. BM2 Bosley doesn't brief his crew on the mission and the four are all wearing Mustang anti-exposure suits. If he believed the sailboat taking on water was on the bar, he would have thought the situation was very urgent.
	SA Wingo 1 st Boat Crewmember	Hands out pyro vests and SN Miniken hands out surf belts as the boat gets underway. Wingo and Miniken clip into D-rings and later, SA Wingo said that he had presumed MK3 Schlimme clipped in, but he wasn't certain if BM2 Bosley wore his belt or clipped it in. No one on 44363 puts on a helmet, even though policy requires them to and no one speaks up about it. Bosley's helmet was clipped behind his coxswain chair and everyone else's helmets were stowed below in their SAR bags.
	BMCM LaForge OIC/ 2nd Boat Surfman	Is still at the overlook and observes the 44363 leaving the boat basin. He does not see its navigation lights energized. The OIC radios the 44363 and informs them that he does not see a sailboat in the immediate area and orders BM2 Bosley, "To check out the bar to see if they could cross." The OIC heads back to the station.
0043	Group Port Angeles	Watchstander TC3 Marshall intercoms Station QR to have the ready boat standby because they think the case might be a hoax. There has been a rash of hoax calls with a young voice in northwestern Washington over the past two weeks.
	MK3 Schlimme 1 st Boat Engineer	Comes over to the starboard side of the 44363 as it gets underway, adjusts the radar, and then returns the engineer's spot on the port side of the coxswain. While outbound, he reminds BM2 Bosley to not let the lube oil pressures get too high.
	BM2 Bosley OOD/ 1 st Boat Coxswain	Replies, "Yeah, I got it."
	SN Miniken 1 st Boat Crewmember	Operates the port spotlight.
	SA Wingo 1 st Boat Crewmember	Is ordered by BM2 Bosley to man the starboard spotlight and illuminate Wash Rock.
	MK3 Schlimme 1 st Boat Engineer	Yells at Bosley, "Let's get the fuck out of here," just before passing Wash Rock.
	BM2 Bosley OOD/ 1 st Boat Coxswain	Replies, "Fuck that!" Schlimme may have been indicating a desire to go back to the station or instead, to go out to deeper water past the bar.
	FA Ballard Non-rate	Assists FA DaMello in comms and calls the 44363 to pass the Group's instructions to have the ready boat standby.
	BM2 Bosley OOD/ 1 st Boat Coxswain	Responds, "Standby, we're a little busy," likely because BM2 Bosley is focused on negotiating the rough seas on the bar while heading outbound. Regarding the possibility of a hoax, Bosley tells the crew, "I hope not!"
Approx. 0044	SA Wingo 1 st Boat Crewmember	Is told by BM2 Bosley to aim the spotlight starboard towards James Island around the time the 44363 is at Wash Rock. Bosley wants to keep the island off the starboard beam. The 44363 is 100-150 yards off of the island.
0045	BM2 Bosley OOD/ 1 st Boat Coxswain	Radios the station that the 44363 has safely crossed the bar and that it is 16-18' past the bar and evening out. Winds are from the WSW.

	Dr. Noble CG History Author	Joins BMCM LaForge on another trip out to the bar overlook. While driving there, the two hear the 44363 say they made it safely across the bar. BMCM LaForge thinks that the 44363 is likely turning away from James Island and toward the sea buoy into deeper (safer) water.
	SA Wingo 1 st Boat Crewmember	Hears Bosley radio the station that it is 15-16' out (a factual inconsistency) and later said, "I was about to call BS. Those waves were a lot higher than 15-16' and it wasn't getting better, but I was like, 'oh well.'"
		The 44363 is not transiting south on the safe route outbound to the "Q" buoy, but is actually being set north towards the edge of James Island.
		SA Wingo spots a rock and yells, "Rock starboard side! Ten feet!" The boat hits something.
Approx. 0048	BM2 Bosley OOD/ 1 st Boat Coxswain	Yells, "What was that!?" Someone else shouts, "Wave port side!"
	SA Wingo 1 st Boat Crewmember	Sees an enormous wave off the port bow and the boat is rolled over to starboard. SA Wingo hits his head on something and tastes blood. The boat rights itself with its bow pointing towards James Island. When the boat comes up, SA Wingo is twisted in his belt and wrapped up in the canvas dodger. The mast is bent flat to the port side. Wingo reaches for the spotlight and realizes it has broken off the top of the cabin and is gone. The motor lifeboat turns towards the island with way on. The 44363 has been underway for approximately 14 minutes.
Approx. 0048	BM2 Bosley OOD/ 1 st Boat Coxswain	Radios, "Capsized and disoriented."
	FA DaMello Comms watchstander	Hears the call about the boat being capsized, but he and Group PA are confused if the caller is the GALE RUNNER or the 44363. Group and Station hail both boats.
	CG 44393 2 nd Boat	Is the second boat and the recalled crew for it begins arriving at the Station. They begin to dress out in anti-exposure suits and then change their minds, opting for dry suits. The crew heads down to the boat and passes the communications room. They overhear, "Capsized..." but think it is in reference to the sail boat.
	MK3 Schlimme 1 st Boat Engineer	Yells, "We're still on the bar!"
	BM2 Bosley OOD/ 1 st Boat Coxswain	Replies, "Find me buoy 3!"
	SA Wingo 1 st Boat Crewmember	Can see the lights of the town of La Push, but doesn't see Buoy 3 which is too far back around the eastern side of James Island to be visible.
	BMCM LaForge OIC/ 2nd Boat Surfman	And Dr. Noble hear the 44363 say they rolled. The OIC can't see the MLB's navigation lights, but for a moment sees its spotlight sweeping rapidly towards the south from what he thinks is the seaward side of James Island. The OIC now knows the 44363 is in trouble (too close to rocky James Island) and calls the station to get the second boat underway. He also tells the station to call Group PA and get a helicopter dispatched.
	FA DaMello Comms watchstander	Calls the OIC back and passes that Group's duty officer wants to talk with him because Group is still concerned the call is a hoax.

	BMCM LaForge OIC/ 2nd Boat Surfman	And Dr. Noble return to the Station and the OIC tells the SDO that the 44363 is in trouble. BMCM LaForge phones Group PA and says he has, "A serious situation and still [needs] the HH-65A helicopter launched" and also requests an HH-60 helicopter from Astoria, OR.
0049	GALE RUNNER Sailing Vessel	Passes their full position to Group PA.
Approx. 0049	SA Wingo 1 st Boat Crewmember	Hears someone shout something. The boat is hit by a wave on the port quarter and pitch-poles, end over end. Upon re-righting itself, the 44363 rests on the rocks and he knows it is out of the water because the engine noise is different. The mast and entire top of the cabin have sheared off. BM2 Bosley and SN Miniken are gone. The ship's clock recovered from the wreckage of the 44363 was stopped at exactly 00h:49m:03s. CG 44363 has been underway for about 15 minutes.
	MK3 Schlimme 1 st Boat Engineer	Takes control of the 44363.
	SA Wingo 1 st Boat Crewmember	Panics and says, "We have to get out of here" and begins to unclip his surf belt.
	MK3 Schlimme 1 st Boat Engineer	Convinces Wingo that it's safest to stay with the boat and to clip back in. He asks Wingo for the boat's radio and tries to call the station with their position.
	SA Wingo 1 st Boat Crewmember	Looks down at the radio while Schlimme makes the call and sees that it's broken. Wingo realizes that MK3 Schlimme "Was just doing it to calm me down, and it worked because suddenly I was super calm. He saved my life by keeping me on the boat."
	MK3 Schlimme 1 st Boat Engineer	Tries to get himself and SA Wingo down into the forward compartment of the 44363, but can't because the handle of the watertight door is jammed from the boat's impact with rocks. Seeing another wave approaching, Schlimme yells, "Hold on!"
	SA Wingo 1 st Boat Crewmember	Feels the boat roll for a third time after the 44363 is knocked off the rock it was resting on and pushed against the rock cliffs. Underwater, he notes a "tremendous quiet." When the 44363 rights again, MK3 Schlimme is gone and Wingo sees a body float by the boat. He can't throw a life ring to it because both life rings are missing.
		CG 44363 has been underway for about 20 minutes.
		Wingo feels the boat drifting backwards and banging along the rocks into the cove on James Island. He sees a strobe light flashing in the cove, grabs the strobe light from his pyro vest, and turns it on. SA Wingo remembers that he thinks he placed the boat's engines in neutral, but doesn't secure them. Wingo grabs his MK-79 flare kit, fires five flares into the sky and two horizontally towards the beach to illuminate it. Like Schlimme, he tries to get into the forward compartment where there is a portable VHF radio and more flares, but also finds the door jammed.
Approx. 0055	BMCM LaForge OIC/ 2nd Boat Surfman	Is off the phone with Group PA after asking for helicopters and someone at the station tells him they've spotted red flares. The OIC finds Dr. Noble and says, "Let's go back to the bar."
	BM1 Placido SDO/ 1 st Boat Surfman	Shouts, "I'm going" and runs down to the 44393.
	Dr. Noble CG History Author	Parks at the bar overlook with BMCM LaForge and sees a red flare in the sky.

	BM1 Placido SDO/ 1 st Boat Surfman	Gets down to the 44393 and gives a quick brief on the mission. At this point, the second boat crew doesn't know the 44363 is in trouble. He later said that, "I wanted to stick my nose close to the bar and look around before trying to get across. I had no Goddam clue what the bar was doing."
0058	CG 44393 2 nd Boat	Gets underway with BM1 Placido as Surfman and three other crewmen. By chance, BM3 Martin is on second boat, but should have been on the ready boat. Because of his pregnant wife, the surfmen had given him as much time on second boat as possible. CG 44363 got underway approximately 24 minutes earlier.
	BM1 Placido SDO/ 1 st Boat Surfman	Sees a red flare in the sky shortly after leaving the boat basin. He thinks it could be from the 44363. He decides that they must cross the bar.
	Dr. Noble CG History Author	And BMCM LaForge have been at the overlook for a few minutes and see the 44393 leaving the protection of the river. The OIC thinks he can help keep track of the 44393 and advise them if they begin to get set towards James Island. In his own words, Dr. Noble remembers seeing the, "Small white boat rising. Rising. Rising. Rising until it seemed to stand on its stern. White water almost enveloping the small boat. Then the plunge downward."
	BMCM LaForge OIC/ 2nd Boat Surfman	Uses the VHF radio in his truck to communicate back and forth with the 44393 on the bar. As the 44393 heads farther out to sea, he can tell that the length of the swells underneath the boat are lengthening out. He is able to see the 44393 getting set north towards James Island and advises the boat. Dr. Noble and the OIC see more red flares from the western part of James Island.
Approx. 0100	Group Port Angeles	Duty Officer first called the Group's Operations Officer around 0030. He now calls the Group's Senior Duty Officer (SDO) in his duty room and informs him of the case. The SDO tells him to hit the SAR alarm at the Air Station. Next, the Group Duty Officer calls the Group Commanding Officer again and tells him that the helicopter is launching because they have lost communications with the 44363 and have spotted red flares. Until that time, the CO did not know that 44363 had gotten underway from Station Quillayute River. Group CO CAPT Volk drives into the Air Station and assigns a non-rate in the command center to scribe everything he sees and hears as the case goes on.
0107	SA Wingo 1 st Boat Crewmember	Floats with the 44363, gauging his progress into the cove by the illumination from the boat's aft deck light light. He notices the time on his watch: 0107. Starts praying, "Not a prayer of all the things I would or wouldn't do if I was saved, it was just an all-out cry for help: 'Please get my boat to shore.'" The boat's stern swings around and points towards the beach at the far back of the cove. SA Wingo thinks he sees a tree towards shore, unclips his surf belt, hops down into knee-deep water, and wades into the beach. CG 44363 comes to its final resting place at the back of the northern cove in James Island.
0110	CG 44393 2 nd Boat	Crosses the bar.
0110	Group Port Angeles	Watchstander TC3 Marshall transmits an Urgent Marine Information Broadcast.

	BM1 Placido SDO/ 1 st Boat Surfman	Remembers that his, "Crew performed like they were supposed to... They constantly fed me information. I felt like a machine. I absorbed the information and my body performed the necessary motions." Eventually he sees flares both to the north (from the 44363) and from the south (from the GALE RUNNER).
		He remembers, "I knew which ones were ours. I started to push back in and had to decide: Should I go for the sailboat, or our boat? It was one of the hardest decisions I ever had to make. I [later] saw the helicopter starting to search for our boat. I knew the helo could probably help out our boat better than I could, so I headed for the sailboat."
0121	BM1 Placido SDO/ 1 st Boat Surfman	Radios, "We are on handheld. Our antenna was damaged by a breaker."
	BMCM LaForge OIC/ 2nd Boat Surfman	Advises the 44393 to head to the "Q" sea buoy and stay in deep water.
	CG 44393 2 nd Boat	Eventually depletes the battery on their portable VHF radio and loses all communications with the station and BMCM LaForge at the overlook. They proceed to the "Q" buoy.
	BMCM LaForge OIC/ 2nd Boat Surfman	Calls Group again for helicopter assistance because he has a sailboat in distress, a missing MLB, and another MLB he's lost communications with.
0123	CG 6589 Air Station Port Angeles	Takes off from Air Station PA. BM2 Bosley, MK3 Schlimme, and SN Miniken are already dead.
	BMCM LaForge OIC/ 2nd Boat Surfman	And Dr. Noble return to the station.
After 0130	Group Port Angeles	Commanding Officer (CO) CAPT Volk calls nearby units to request additional surface assets. The 110' cutter CUTTYHUNK is in Neah Bay and is dispatched towards La Push. CAPT Volk calls CWO2 Robert Coster, the CO of the Station Neah Bay, and asks if he can send one of his lifeboats south to help. CWO2 Coster drives in to his station and reviews the conditions. He makes the difficult decision that he cannot safely send his crews. CAPT Volk conferences with the CO of Group Astoria and CWO2 Randy Lewis, the CO of Station Grays Harbor. CWO2 Lewis also declines sending his station's 52' MLB due to the conditions. Later, CAPT Volk says that both stations' CO's, "Made the right decision."
0157	CG 6589 Air Station Port Angeles	Arrives on scene, is briefed about the situation by BMCM LaForge, and commences a search near James Island.
0159	GALE RUNNER Sailing Vessel	Passes their accurate position to the Coast Guard after reestablishing communications. They are not on the bar, but farther south near "The Needles," a group of jagged rock features sticking out from the ocean, about three miles from the bar.
0201	BMCM LaForge OIC/ 2nd Boat Surfman	Orders a beach search for survivors and several crewmembers, local police, and National Park Rangers set out for First Beach in anti-exposure coveralls and helmets.

0204	CG 6003 Air Station Astoria BMCM LaForge OIC/ 2nd Boat Surfman	Launches from Air Station Astoria. Has to decide where to send resources: to the GALE RUNNER or to James Island for his lifeboat crew? He radios the CG 6589 back and recommends they leave James Island and proceed to the GALE RUNNER's position because it is only minutes away from the rocks. The OIC advises the watchstander to keep off the radio as much as possible because the helicopter may only have a brief window to transmit that they're in trouble too. BMCM LaForge has 14 lives and three Coast Guard assets in his hands.
0205	CG 6589 Air Station Port Angeles FA DaMello Comms watchstander SA Wingo 1 st Boat Crewmember	Diverts from the vicinity of James Island and flies south towards The Needles. To make an approach on the GALE RUNNER, they must fly over, around, and through the 190' tall rock islands. The helicopter is being buffeted by winds and keeps fighting to make new approaches as the sailboat is washed over by breaking waves and drifts between the rock pinnacles. Is relieved of the communications watch to help the beach party. At First Beach, he and two other members run down the beach, dodging waves. Sees a helicopter searchlight in the distance and CG 44393, and activates the night end of his MK-124 signal flare.
0219	CG 6589 Air Station Port Angeles	Arrives on scene with the GALE RUNNER to commence the hoist.
0227	CG 6585 Air Station Port Angeles	Launches from Air Station PA.
0234	CG 44393 2 nd Boat	Arrives at the "Q" buoy and is tasked by the Station to stay there. They remain there for about six hours until daylight and the chance to return across the bar.
0242	CG 6589 Air Station Port Angeles	Overstresses its hoist, but manages to hoist both crewmembers off the GALE RUNNER.
0251	CG 6589 Air Station Port Angeles	Lands at Station QR's ball field to pass the survivors to an ambulance and depart for Station Neah Bay to refuel.
0253	CG 6003 Air Station Astoria	Arrives on scene and spots a strobe light flashing from the cliff at the back of the cove on James Island.
0320	FA DaMello Comms watchstander BMCM LaForge OIC/ 2nd Boat Surfman	On First Beach sees a flashing light down the beach and starts running towards it. While running, DaMello and another member of the beach party are hit by a log that surges towards them on a wave. The wave knocks DaMello down and the log pins him underwater. FN DaMello sees his life and family flashing before his eyes and takes a breath of seawater. DaMello's arm is dislocated by the log, but it releases him and he gets to his feet. The light seen up the beach belongs to a National Park Ranger helping with the search. Heads out to First Beach with another beach party. He is overheard saying to himself, "I should have trained them more, I should have trained them more."
0334	SN Miniken 1 st Boat Crewmember	Is found unconscious without socks or boots on by the other beach party on First Beach. The beach crew performs CPR at the scene and an ambulance takes him to the hospital in Forks, WA. Taking shifts with compressions, the team of responders gives him CPR for a total of four hours.

0432	CG 6003 Air Station Astoria	Observes BM2 Bosley and MK3 Schlimme floating in the cove on James Island. They request the county's high angle rescue team be contacted to rescue SA Wingo on the cliff.
0505	CG 44393 2 nd Boat	Loses communications with the Station after its portable VHF radio dies.
0508	CG 6013 Air Station Astoria	Leaves Air Station Astoria, OR to assist in the search.
0630	CG 6013 Air Station Astoria	Deploys a rescue swimmer to the cliff SA Wingo is hanging onto. SA Wingo is in good condition.
0633	CG 6585 Air Station Port Angeles	Transfers two additional portable VHF radios to 44393.
0734	CG 44393 2 nd Boat	Safely crosses the bar back into the Quillayute River and moors at Station Quillayute River. They have been underway for six hours and 36 minutes. Until they moor and see the other slip empty, they are unaware that CG 44363 has been lost.
Approx. 0815	CG 6013 Air Station Astoria	Deploys the high-angle rescue team to retrieve SA Wingo from the cliff and hoists him to safety.
0932	BM2 Bosley OOD/ 1 st Boat Coxswain	And MK3 Schlimme are recovered from the cove on James Island by 6013's rescue swimmer. The rescue swimmer states that the wreck of 44363 is in "bad shape" and is leaking fuel.
1030	FA Ballard Non-rate	And the rest of the station are notified that SN Miniken has been pronounced dead at Forks Community Hospital.
1050	CG 6013 Air Station Astoria	Hoists the remaining five rescue team members and its rescue swimmer from the beach. The helicopter drops off the remaining Clallam County rescue team and departs for Air Station Astoria.

Aftermath

Findings from the official report, signed by CG Commandant ADM Kramek

BM2 Bosley OOD/ 1 st Boat Coxswain	Is found by the investigators to, "...not have enough rough weather bar crossings at night in a 44' MLB to prepare him for the conditions that MLB 44363 encountered on 12 February 1997 and should not have attempted to cross the bar."
	The investigators are of the opinion that BM2 Bosley viewed the updated weather forecast and had ample time to pass it to the SDO or OIC. Had either of them received this information, a Surfman would have been on board when the call came in.
MK3 Schlimme 1 st Boat Engineer	And SN Miniken, and BM2 Bosley's autopsies list their cause of death as blunt force trauma to the head.
BMCM LaForge OIC/ 2nd Boat Surfman	Was found by the investigators to have "made several key decisions... which increased the chances of survival for both the sailboat and the MLB 4363 crews."

Investigation	<p>Finds that there were no mechanical issues with 44363 to cause the accident. The boat is so badly damaged it is cut into three pieces and hoisted off the island by a helicopter for disposal.</p> <p>According to investigators, “The proximate cause of this casualty was the coxswain’s failure to safely navigate MLB 44363, causing the boat to capsize and founder in the surf conditions near James Island.”</p> <p>But the report also highlighted excessive personnel turnover at the unit. In February 1997, “only two non-rates had been at the station longer than one year, and because of ...high turnover of personnel, a majority of the Station training is focused on providing basic, introductory skills to help new personnel get their boat crew qualifications... Due to the high turnover of personnel, the Station’s operational readiness was diminished in the area of advanced skills/techniques.”</p> <p>At this time, of the 17 crewmembers filling boat crew positions at the station, 12 had been there less than one year (~70%). Also, despite four Surfman billets, only three surfmen were assigned at the unit, including the OIC and XPO.</p> <p>A 1961 editorial about the TRIUMPH-MERMAID disaster at Stations Point Adams/ Cape Disappointment noted similar concerns about crew inexperience at those units.</p>
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Discussion

91. What was it like “playing” your specific part?

92. What do you feel when the SAR alarm goes off?

- Do our risk management tools help here?
- How do you handle this?

93. What was the culture of response and operations like in 1997? How is it today?

- Coast Guard attitudes about risk
- “You have to go out, but you don’t have to come back” (then)
- “Us, ours, them, theirs” (now: balancing risk-taking with being risk-averse)
- Crew selection, support and oversight from experienced SDOs, etc.
- The Coast Guard has supported and related to its small boat stations

94. What parts of the Coast Guard system were related to this mishap? Are they the same or different today?

- Surfman assignment process
- Risk management culture/tools
- Station experience level/qualification process
- Station staffing
- Group nighttime radio guard

95. What were the effects of high turnover?

- Training focused on basic qualifications instead of advanced skills
- Today’s D13 surf stations have ~40% annual turnover, exacerbated with non-rate transfers for A-School

96. Are you prepared to operate without the normal aids and references you rely on?

- In 1997, crews never practiced nighttime rough bar crossings without bar lights
- What aids and references do we rely on today?
- Can we practice taking those away and adapting?
- Do we have “backup plans” for operating in nighttime, low viz, ATON discreps, etc.?

97. Compare communications issues in 1997 and today.

- How much time passed between the initial call and when the CG asked for a position?
- Station watchstanders used to sleep in the comms room to overhear any traffic from the Group
 - Today, Sector could be conversing with a vessel in the middle of the night for 30 minutes without anyone at the station being aware of it
- There was no Rescue 21 in 1997, so targeting a vessel’s location using radio lines of bearing was imprecise
 - This highlights the importance of R21 Geo Display and promptly asking for lat/long positions
- Simple advice to have a vessel standby and wait in deep water can buy time to gather all the information and prevent a worsening situation

98. Why should we get an accurate position and observe the bar before launching?

- The GALE RUNNER’s true position might have been ascertained before the 44363 crossed the bar near James Island
- Even today, vessels often pass geographic references that don’t match their precise location
- This information can impact asset and crew selection, and overall sense of urgency

99. Compare weather forecasting and reporting in 1997 and today.

- None of the 1997 crew or command could have gotten on their phone and seen the forecast or buoy readings
- Despite modern technology, there is still plenty of information that we need to pass manually today

10. Final questions or comments?

References

CDR Hasselbalch, James M. *Investigation into the Capsizing and Subsequent Loss of MLB 44363 and the Death of Three Coast Guard Members That Occurred at Coast Guard Station Quillayute River on 12 FEB 1997*. March, 1997 (including reviews by RADM J. David Spade and ADM Robert E. Kramek).

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For more on the CG 44363 disaster: www.uscg44363.com



12 FEBRUARY 1997

A training remembering the CG 44363 disaster

SN MINIKEN



(scan for diagrams)

Introduction

- Sailing vessel GALE RUNNER is transiting from San Francisco, CA to Puget Sound, WA with a crew of two
- CG Station Quillayute River (QR) in La Push, WA is the next station north of Station Grays Harbor. It:
 - Has a BMCM Officer in Charge (OIC) and BM1 Executive Petty Officer (XPO)
 - Has two 44' motor lifeboats (MLB)
 - Reports to Group/Air Station Port Angeles (PA), WA, (the 1997 equivalent of a Sector)
 - Has a hazardous river bar crossing in order to get into the harbor at La Push, WA
 - Has a set of stadium-like "bar lights" fixed on James Island next to the bar for night transits
 - In February 1997, they are inoperative
 - The Officer of the Day (OOD) reports to a Surfman Duty Officer (SDO)
- On 11-12 February the duty section is comprised of 10 ready boat crew members, a watchstander, and several additional non-rated members
- On 11 February, Dr. Dennis Noble, a retired Coast Guard Senior Chief Petty Officer and notable history author reports to the station for a few days to stay on board while researching a book he is writing on lifeboat stations
- The following facts are taken verbatim from the USCG Administrative Investigation and Dr. Dennis Noble's book
- Reading takes about 40 minutes with 14 speakers and one facilitator
- Consider turning off the lights and having any members without speaking parts close their eyes.
- Each reader should say their highlighted parts by speaking the time, name, and details, for example, "At 0700 FA DaMello assumes the station's communications watch..."

Tuesday 11 FEB 1997

Time	Member	Details
Morning	GALE RUNNER Sailing Vessel	Is in Westport, WA and stops in at CG Station Grays Harbor. GALE RUNNER receives the weather forecast and decides to get underway to continue north.
0700	FA DaMello Comms watchstander	Assumes the Station's communications watch until 0700 on 12FEB97.
1640	FA DaMello Comms watchstander	Receives the updated NOAA weather forecast which calls for NW wind 35-40kt and seas building to 14'. For 12 February, the forecast predicts NW winds 30kt and combined seas 18'.
Approx. 1730	BM1 Placido SDO/ 1 st Boat Surfman	<p>Gets together with OOD BM2 Bosley and drives to the station's bar overlook to observe last light bar conditions. He observes that seas aren't bad and he feels comfortable going home on recall for the night, about 15 minutes away.</p> <p>He later said, "From the look of the bar and what Bosley had told me about the weather, there was no need for me to stay aboard."</p>
1740	BM2 Bosley OOD/ 1 st Boat Coxswain	Views the NOAA forecast on the computer and logs his initials, "D.A.B." to acknowledge it.

Evening	GALE RUNNER Sailing Vessel	Begins to encounter heavy weather and decides to head for the QR bar entrance to seek safe harbor.
After 2130	BM2 Bosley OOD/ 1 st Boat Coxswain	Does his evening round with MK3 Schlimme and FN Matthews and drives out to the bar overlook to check things out. FN Matthews recalls BM2 and MK3 saying that, “they [hope] they [don’t] get a case [tonight].”
Between 2130- 2200	BMCM LaForge OIC/ 2nd Boat Surfman	Returns from an appointment in Port Angeles and checks in with the OOD at the station. BM2 Bosley does not pass the 1640 weather forecast, but tells the OIC that the weather is supposed to pick up overnight. Without knowing of the forecast details, the OIC agrees with the OOD that the ready boat Surfman can remain on recall for the night. The OIC leaves for his home, 5 minutes away from the station.
2130	Dr. Noble CG History Author	Finishes his conversations with the crew and goes to bed.
Approx. 2200	BM2 Bosley OOD/ 1 st Boat Coxswain	Calls the SDO who remembers Bosley saying, “Nothing [is] going on. The winds [have] picked up a little bit... the weather [is] supposed to pick up later [tomorrow].”
2200	FA DaMello Comms watchstander	Passes the radio guard to Group PA for the night and sets up the cot to sleep in the comms room.

Wednesday 12 FEB 1997

Approx. 0015	GALE RUNNER Sailing Vessel	Hails Station QR on VHF 16 to obtain a bar report. Telecommunications Specialist Third Class (TC3) Marshall at Group PA answers for Station QR, consults the status board and reports, “no restrictions.”
	FA DaMello Comms watchstander	Wakes up to the radio traffic between Group and the GALE RUNNER and notices high winds outside. The Station’s anemometer is registering gusts of 50kt. On his own initiative, DaMello remembers the 1640 forecast for 18’ seas and intercoms TC3 Marshall at Group to tell her about the wind he’s seeing and the forecast for seas. He says he thinks that if the OOD knew about the 50kt gusts, then he would put a restriction on the bar.
	Group Port Angeles	Watchstander TC3 Marshall tells FA DaMello to hail the GAIL RUNNER and pass them the current weather conditions.
	FA DaMello Comms watchstander	Hails the sailing vessel and asks, “Are you crossing the bar?”
	GALE RUNNER Sailing Vessel	Crewmember Marcia Infante replies, “Affirmative. We are at the entrance now.” She doesn’t pass a GPS position.
	FA DaMello Comms watchstander	Passes the latest winds and advises the GALE RUNNER that the bar could be breaking. Next, FA DaMello calls BM2 Bosley in the OOD room to brief him of the weather and situation.
	BM2 Bosley OOD/ 1 st Boat Coxswain	Comes into comms and asks DaMello if he has GALE RUNNER’s position. DaMello says that the caller has not relayed their position. Bosley tells DaMello to call the GALE RUNNER and obtain their position. Bosley phones SDO BM1 Placido at his home and informs him of the radio call and that he thinks that it’s a bad idea for the sailboat to come across the bar. BM1 asks if he has a position for the sailboat. To keep listening for information, Bosely places the SDO on hold.

	FA DaMello Comms watchstander	Asks the GALE RUNNER for their position. He hears, "We're at 47, 51..." and then static silence.
	GALE RUNNER Sailing Vessel	Crewmember Ken Schlag is steering the sailing vessel and Marcia Infante is on the radio. Suddenly, the sailboat is struck by a rogue wave, knocked down, and dismantled. The radio antenna is damaged and Ken Schlag is thrown overboard. He is tethered with a safety harness and manages to pull himself back onboard. Portholes are blown out by the wave and the GALE RUNNER begins taking on water.
	FA DaMello Comms watchstander	Tries again to hail the boat, "Sailing vessel, this is Quillayute River on 22, over."
Approx. 00:26	GALE RUNNER Sailing Vessel	Crewmember Marcia Infante breaks the silence, "MAYDAY! MAYDAY! THIS IS SAILING VESSEL GALE RUNNER! U.S. COAST GUARD! WE'RE TAKING ON WATER!"
	GALE RUNNER Sailing Vessel	Crewmember Marcia Infante repeats her mayday calls every few minutes. She looks at the GPS plotter to reference the boat's position, but sees a black screen and figures that the GPS is broken. In fact, the GPS is in screensaver mode and she could have pushed any button to bring the chart and GPS position back up on the display.
	FA DaMello Comms watchstander	Only hears static after the mayday call. Group also hears static and suggests Station switch radio sites. DaMello says that he has already tried that.
Approx. 00:26	BM2 Bosley OOD/ 1 st Boat Coxswain	Has gathered this key information in a very short period: there is a sailing vessel that says it is at the entrance to the bar, it has begun taking on water, and the CG has lost communications with it. BM2 Bosley hits the SAR alarm and pipes, "Ready boat crew lay to the ready boat! Sailboat on the bar taking on water."
	BM2 Bosley OOD/ 1 st Boat Coxswain	Takes the SDO phone call off hold and says, "I'm heading for the door."
	BM1 Placido SDO/ 1 st Boat Surfman	Replies, "Call Master Chief [the OIC]. I'm right behind you" and gets in his car to drive back to the station.
		Later, BM1 Placido said that, "If I had known how bad the bar was, I would have told Bosley to wait until I could get to the station."
	SA Wingo 1 st Boat Crewmember	Runs out of his barracks room with SN Miniken and down to the boat.
	Group Port Angeles	Watchstander TC3 Marshall passes that the Group has received more radio transmissions from a frantic woman who doesn't understand Station QR's instructions.
		Group's Duty Officer briefs the Group Commanding Officer, CAPT Volk, at the direction of the Group Senior Duty Officer. The Group is still trying to gather information and is not yet trying to launch a helicopter.
0030	FA DaMello Comms watchstander	Calls and notifies BMCM LaForge of the case and BMCM comes back to the station from his home.
0031	FA DaMello Comms watchstander	Recalls the second boat crew in accordance with the unit's standing orders.
	BM2 Bosley OOD/ 1 st Boat Coxswain	Is one of the first down to the ready boat, CG 44363, and urgently wants to get underway. He runs back up to the station and yells, "Where is my crew?!"

	BMCM LaForge OIC/ 2nd Boat Surfman	Stops at the bar overlook to scan for signs of a sailboat before arriving back at the Station. He notes that there is reduced visibility, but that he can still see the "Q" buoy a mile from the bar. Winds are 30kt with stronger gusts.
0034	BM2 Bosley OOD/ 1 st Boat Coxswain	Gets CG 44363 underway for the SAR case. BM2 Bosley doesn't brief his crew on the mission and the four are all wearing Mustang anti-exposure suits. If he believed the sailboat taking on water was on the bar, he would have thought the situation was very urgent.
	SA Wingo 1 st Boat Crewmember	Hands out pyro vests and SN Miniken hands out surf belts as the boat gets underway. Wingo and Miniken clip into D-rings and later, SA Wingo said that he had presumed MK3 Schlimme clipped in, but he wasn't certain if BM2 Bosley wore his belt or clipped it in. No one on 44363 puts on a helmet, even though policy requires them to and no one speaks up about it. Bosley's helmet was clipped behind his coxswain chair and everyone else's helmets were stowed below in their SAR bags.
	BMCM LaForge OIC/ 2nd Boat Surfman	Is still at the overlook and observes the 44363 leaving the boat basin. He does not see its navigation lights energized. The OIC radios the 44363 and informs them that he does not see a sailboat in the immediate area and orders BM2 Bosley, "To check out the bar to see if they could cross." The OIC heads back to the station.
0043	Group Port Angeles	Watchstander TC3 Marshall intercoms Station QR to have the ready boat standby because they think the case might be a hoax. There has been a rash of hoax calls with a young voice in northwestern Washington over the past two weeks.
	MK3 Schlimme 1 st Boat Engineer	Comes over to the starboard side of the 44363 as it gets underway, adjusts the radar, and then returns the engineer's spot on the port side of the coxswain. While outbound, he reminds BM2 Bosley to not let the lube oil pressures get too high.
	BM2 Bosley OOD/ 1 st Boat Coxswain	Replies, "Yeah, I got it."
	SN Miniken 1 st Boat Crewmember	Operates the port spotlight.
	SA Wingo 1 st Boat Crewmember	Is ordered by BM2 Bosley to man the starboard spotlight and illuminate Wash Rock.
	MK3 Schlimme 1 st Boat Engineer	Yells at Bosley, "Let's get the fuck out of here," just before passing Wash Rock.
	BM2 Bosley OOD/ 1 st Boat Coxswain	Replies, "Fuck that!" Schlimme may have been indicating a desire to go back to the station or instead, to go out to deeper water past the bar.
	FA Ballard Non-rate	Assists FA DaMello in comms and calls the 44363 to pass the Group's instructions to have the ready boat standby.
	BM2 Bosley OOD/ 1 st Boat Coxswain	Responds, "Standby, we're a little busy," likely because BM2 Bosley is focused on negotiating the rough seas on the bar while heading outbound. Regarding the possibility of a hoax, Bosley tells the crew, "I hope not!"
Approx. 0044	SA Wingo 1 st Boat Crewmember	Is told by BM2 Bosley to aim the spotlight starboard towards James Island around the time the 44363 is at Wash Rock. Bosley wants to keep the island off the starboard beam. The 44363 is 100-150 yards off of the island.
0045	BM2 Bosley OOD/ 1 st Boat Coxswain	Radios the station that the 44363 has safely crossed the bar and that it is 16-18' past the bar and evening out. Winds are from the WSW.

	Dr. Noble CG History Author	Joins BMCM LaForge on another trip out to the bar overlook. While driving there, the two hear the 44363 say they made it safely across the bar. BMCM LaForge thinks that the 44363 is likely turning away from James Island and toward the sea buoy into deeper (safer) water.
	SA Wingo 1 st Boat Crewmember	Hears Bosley radio the station that it is 15-16' out (a factual inconsistency) and later said, "I was about to call BS. Those waves were a lot higher than 15-16' and it wasn't getting better, but I was like, 'oh well.'"
		The 44363 is not transiting south on the safe route outbound to the "Q" buoy, but is actually being set north towards the edge of James Island.
		SA Wingo spots a rock and yells, "Rock starboard side! Ten feet!" The boat hits something.
Approx. 0048	BM2 Bosley OOD/ 1 st Boat Coxswain	Yells, "What was that!?" Someone else shouts, "Wave port side!"
	SA Wingo 1 st Boat Crewmember	Sees an enormous wave off the port bow and the boat is rolled over to starboard. SA Wingo hits his head on something and tastes blood. The boat rights itself with its bow pointing towards James Island. When the boat comes up, SA Wingo is twisted in his belt and wrapped up in the canvas dodger. The mast is bent flat to the port side. Wingo reaches for the spotlight and realizes it has broken off the top of the cabin and is gone. The motor lifeboat turns towards the island with way on. The 44363 has been underway for approximately 14 minutes.
Approx. 0048	BM2 Bosley OOD/ 1 st Boat Coxswain	Radios, "Capsized and disoriented."
	FA DaMello Comms watchstander	Hears the call about the boat being capsized, but he and Group PA are confused if the caller is the GALE RUNNER or the 44363. Group and Station hail both boats.
	CG 44393 2 nd Boat	Is the second boat and the recalled crew for it begins arriving at the Station. They begin to dress out in anti-exposure suits and then change their minds, opting for dry suits. The crew heads down to the boat and passes the communications room. They overhear, "Capsized..." but think it is in reference to the sail boat.
	MK3 Schlimme 1 st Boat Engineer	Yells, "We're still on the bar!"
	BM2 Bosley OOD/ 1 st Boat Coxswain	Replies, "Find me buoy 3!"
	SA Wingo 1 st Boat Crewmember	Can see the lights of the town of La Push, but doesn't see Buoy 3 which is too far back around the eastern side of James Island to be visible.
	BMCM LaForge OIC/ 2nd Boat Surfman	And Dr. Noble hear the 44363 say they rolled. The OIC can't see the MLB's navigation lights, but for a moment sees its spotlight sweeping rapidly towards the south from what he thinks is the seaward side of James Island. The OIC now knows the 44363 is in trouble (too close to rocky James Island) and calls the station to get the second boat underway. He also tells the station to call Group PA and get a helicopter dispatched.
	FA DaMello Comms watchstander	Calls the OIC back and passes that Group's duty officer wants to talk with him because Group is still concerned the call is a hoax.

	BMCM LaForge OIC/ 2nd Boat Surfman	And Dr. Noble return to the Station and the OIC tells the SDO that the 44363 is in trouble. BMCM LaForge phones Group PA and says he has, "A serious situation and still [needs] the HH-65A helicopter launched" and also requests an HH-60 helicopter from Astoria, OR.
0049	GALE RUNNER Sailing Vessel	Passes their full position to Group PA.
Approx. 0049	SA Wingo 1 st Boat Crewmember	Hears someone shout something. The boat is hit by a wave on the port quarter and pitch-poles, end over end. Upon re-righting itself, the 44363 rests on the rocks and he knows it is out of the water because the engine noise is different. The mast and entire top of the cabin have sheared off. BM2 Bosley and SN Miniken are gone. The ship's clock recovered from the wreckage of the 44363 was stopped at exactly 00h:49m:03s. CG 44363 has been underway for about 15 minutes.
	MK3 Schlimme 1 st Boat Engineer	Takes control of the 44363.
	SA Wingo 1 st Boat Crewmember	Panics and says, "We have to get out of here" and begins to unclip his surf belt.
	MK3 Schlimme 1 st Boat Engineer	Convinces Wingo that it's safest to stay with the boat and to clip back in. He asks Wingo for the boat's radio and tries to call the station with their position.
	SA Wingo 1 st Boat Crewmember	Looks down at the radio while Schlimme makes the call and sees that it's broken. Wingo realizes that MK3 Schlimme "Was just doing it to calm me down, and it worked because suddenly I was super calm. He saved my life by keeping me on the boat."
	MK3 Schlimme 1 st Boat Engineer	Tries to get himself and SA Wingo down into the forward compartment of the 44363, but can't because the handle of the watertight door is jammed from the boat's impact with rocks. Seeing another wave approaching, Schlimme yells, "Hold on!"
	SA Wingo 1 st Boat Crewmember	Feels the boat roll for a third time after the 44363 is knocked off the rock it was resting on and pushed against the rock cliffs. Underwater, he notes a "tremendous quiet." When the 44363 rights again, MK3 Schlimme is gone and Wingo sees a body float by the boat. He can't throw a life ring to it because both life rings are missing.
		CG 44363 has been underway for about 20 minutes.
		Wingo feels the boat drifting backwards and banging along the rocks into the cove on James Island. He sees a strobe light flashing in the cove, grabs the strobe light from his pyro vest, and turns it on. SA Wingo remembers that he thinks he placed the boat's engines in neutral, but doesn't secure them. Wingo grabs his MK-79 flare kit, fires five flares into the sky and two horizontally towards the beach to illuminate it. Like Schlimme, he tries to get into the forward compartment where there is a portable VHF radio and more flares, but also finds the door jammed.
Approx. 0055	BMCM LaForge OIC/ 2nd Boat Surfman	Is off the phone with Group PA after asking for helicopters and someone at the station tells him they've spotted red flares. The OIC finds Dr. Noble and says, "Let's go back to the bar."
	BM1 Placido SDO/ 1 st Boat Surfman	Shouts, "I'm going" and runs down to the 44393.
	Dr. Noble CG History Author	Parks at the bar overlook with BMCM LaForge and sees a red flare in the sky.

	BM1 Placido SDO/ 1 st Boat Surfman	Gets down to the 44393 and gives a quick brief on the mission. At this point, the second boat crew doesn't know the 44363 is in trouble. He later said that, "I wanted to stick my nose close to the bar and look around before trying to get across. I had no Goddam clue what the bar was doing."
0058	CG 44393 2 nd Boat	Gets underway with BM1 Placido as Surfman and three other crewmen. By chance, BM3 Martin is on second boat, but should have been on the ready boat. Because of his pregnant wife, the surfmen had given him as much time on second boat as possible. CG 44363 got underway approximately 24 minutes earlier.
	BM1 Placido SDO/ 1 st Boat Surfman	Sees a red flare in the sky shortly after leaving the boat basin. He thinks it could be from the 44363. He decides that they must cross the bar.
	Dr. Noble CG History Author	And BMCM LaForge have been at the overlook for a few minutes and see the 44393 leaving the protection of the river. The OIC thinks he can help keep track of the 44393 and advise them if they begin to get set towards James Island. In his own words, Dr. Noble remembers seeing the, "Small white boat rising. Rising. Rising. Rising until it seemed to stand on its stern. White water almost enveloping the small boat. Then the plunge downward."
	BMCM LaForge OIC/ 2nd Boat Surfman	Uses the VHF radio in his truck to communicate back and forth with the 44393 on the bar. As the 44393 heads farther out to sea, he can tell that the length of the swells underneath the boat are lengthening out. He is able to see the 44393 getting set north towards James Island and advises the boat. Dr. Noble and the OIC see more red flares from the western part of James Island.
Approx. 0100	Group Port Angeles	<p>Duty Officer first called the Group's Operations Officer around 0030. He now calls the Group's Senior Duty Officer (SDO) in his duty room and informs him of the case. The SDO tells him to hit the SAR alarm at the Air Station.</p> <p>Next, the Group Duty Officer calls the Group Commanding Officer again and tells him that the helicopter is launching because they have lost communications with the 44363 and have spotted red flares. Until that time, the CO did not know that 44363 had gotten underway from Station Quillayute River. Group CO CAPT Volk drives into the Air Station and assigns a non-rate in the command center to scribe everything he sees and hears as the case goes on.</p>
0107	SA Wingo 1 st Boat Crewmember	<p>Floats with the 44363, gauging his progress into the cove by the illumination from the boat's aft deck light light. He notices the time on his watch: 0107.</p> <p>Starts praying, "Not a prayer of all the things I would or wouldn't do if I was saved, it was just an all-out cry for help: 'Please get my boat to shore.'" The boat's stern swings around and points towards the beach at the far back of the cove.</p> <p>SA Wingo thinks he sees a tree towards shore, unclips his surf belt, hops down into knee-deep water, and wades into the beach. CG 44363 comes to its final resting place at the back of the northern cove in James Island.</p>
0110	CG 44393 2 nd Boat	Crosses the bar.
0110	Group Port Angeles	Watchstander TC3 Marshall transmits an Urgent Marine Information Broadcast.

	BM1 Placido SDO/ 1 st Boat Surfman	Remembers that his, "Crew performed like they were supposed to... They constantly fed me information. I felt like a machine. I absorbed the information and my body performed the necessary motions." Eventually he sees flares both to the north (from the 44363) and from the south (from the GALE RUNNER).
		He remembers, "I knew which ones were ours. I started to push back in and had to decide: Should I go for the sailboat, or our boat? It was one of the hardest decisions I ever had to make. I [later] saw the helicopter starting to search for our boat. I knew the helo could probably help out our boat better than I could, so I headed for the sailboat."
0121	BM1 Placido SDO/ 1 st Boat Surfman	Radios, "We are on handheld. Our antenna was damaged by a breaker."
	BMCM LaForge OIC/ 2nd Boat Surfman	Advises the 44393 to head to the "Q" sea buoy and stay in deep water.
	CG 44393 2 nd Boat	Eventually depletes the battery on their portable VHF radio and loses all communications with the station and BMCM LaForge at the overlook. They proceed to the "Q" buoy.
	BMCM LaForge OIC/ 2nd Boat Surfman	Calls Group again for helicopter assistance because he has a sailboat in distress, a missing MLB, and another MLB he's lost communications with.
0123	CG 6589 Air Station Port Angeles	Takes off from Air Station PA. BM2 Bosley, MK3 Schlimme, and SN Miniken are already dead.
	BMCM LaForge OIC/ 2nd Boat Surfman	And Dr. Noble return to the station.
After 0130	Group Port Angeles	Commanding Officer (CO) CAPT Volk calls nearby units to request additional surface assets. The 110' cutter CUTTYHUNK is in Neah Bay and is dispatched towards La Push. CAPT Volk calls CWO2 Robert Coster, the CO of the Station Neah Bay, and asks if he can send one of his lifeboats south to help. CWO2 Coster drives in to his station and reviews the conditions. He makes the difficult decision that he cannot safely send his crews. CAPT Volk conferences with the CO of Group Astoria and CWO2 Randy Lewis, the CO of Station Grays Harbor. CWO2 Lewis also declines sending his station's 52' MLB due to the conditions. Later, CAPT Volk says that both stations' CO's, "Made the right decision."
0157	CG 6589 Air Station Port Angeles	Arrives on scene, is briefed about the situation by BMCM LaForge, and commences a search near James Island.
0159	GALE RUNNER Sailing Vessel	Passes their accurate position to the Coast Guard after reestablishing communications. They are not on the bar, but farther south near "The Needles," a group of jagged rock features sticking out from the ocean, about three miles from the bar.
0201	BMCM LaForge OIC/ 2nd Boat Surfman	Orders a beach search for survivors and several crewmembers, local police, and National Park Rangers set out for First Beach in anti-exposure coveralls and helmets.

0204	CG 6003 Air Station Astoria	Launches from Air Station Astoria.
	BMCM LaForge OIC/ 2nd Boat Surfman	Has to decide where to send resources: to the GALE RUNNER or to James Island for his lifeboat crew? He radios the CG 6589 back and recommends they leave James Island and proceed to the GALE RUNNER's position because it is only minutes away from the rocks. The OIC advises the watchstander to keep off the radio as much as possible because the helicopter may only have a brief window to transmit that they're in trouble too. BMCM LaForge has 14 lives and three Coast Guard assets in his hands.
0205	CG 6589 Air Station Port Angeles	Diverts from the vicinity of James Island and flies south towards The Needles. To make an approach on the GALE RUNNER, they must fly over, around, and through the 190' tall rock islands. The helicopter is being buffeted by winds and keeps fighting to make new approaches as the sailboat is washed over by breaking waves and drifts between the rock pinnacles.
	FA DaMello Comms watchstander	Is relieved of the communications watch to help the beach party. At First Beach, he and two other members run down the beach, dodging waves.
	SA Wingo 1 st Boat Crewmember	Sees a helicopter searchlight in the distance and CG 44393, and activates the night end of his MK-124 signal flare.
0219	CG 6589 Air Station Port Angeles	Arrives on scene with the GALE RUNNER to commence the hoist.
0227	CG 6585 Air Station Port Angeles	Launches from Air Station PA.
0234	CG 44393 2 nd Boat	Arrives at the "Q" buoy and is tasked by the Station to stay there. They remain there for about six hours until daylight and the chance to return across the bar.
0242	CG 6589 Air Station Port Angeles	Overstresses its hoist, but manages to hoist both crewmembers off the GALE RUNNER.
0251	CG 6589 Air Station Port Angeles	Lands at Station QR's ball field to pass the survivors to an ambulance and depart for Station Neah Bay to refuel.
0253	CG 6003 Air Station Astoria	Arrives on scene and spots a strobe light flashing from the cliff at the back of the cove on James Island.
0320	FA DaMello Comms watchstander	On First Beach sees a flashing light down the beach and starts running towards it. While running, DaMello and another member of the beach party are hit by a log that surges towards them on a wave. The wave knocks DaMello down and the log pins him underwater. FN DaMello sees his life and family flashing before his eyes and takes a breath of seawater. DaMello's arm is dislocated by the log, but it releases him and he gets to his feet. The light seen up the beach belongs to a National Park Ranger helping with the search.
	BMCM LaForge OIC/ 2nd Boat Surfman	Heads out to First Beach with another beach party. He is overheard saying to himself, "I should have trained them more, I should have trained them more."
0334	SN Miniken 1 st Boat Crewmember	Is found unconscious without socks or boots on by the other beach party on First Beach. The beach crew performs CPR at the scene and an ambulance takes him to the hospital in Forks, WA. Taking shifts with compressions, the team of responders gives him CPR for a total of four hours.

0432	CG 6003 Air Station Astoria	Observes BM2 Bosley and MK3 Schlimme floating in the cove on James Island. They request the county's high angle rescue team be contacted to rescue SA Wingo on the cliff.
0505	CG 44393 2 nd Boat	Loses communications with the Station after its portable VHF radio dies.
0508	CG 6013 Air Station Astoria	Leaves Air Station Astoria, OR to assist in the search.
0630	CG 6013 Air Station Astoria	Deploys a rescue swimmer to the cliff SA Wingo is hanging onto. SA Wingo is in good condition.
0633	CG 6585 Air Station Port Angeles	Transfers two additional portable VHF radios to 44393.
0734	CG 44393 2 nd Boat	Safely crosses the bar back into the Quillayute River and moors at Station Quillayute River. They have been underway for six hours and 36 minutes. Until they moor and see the other slip empty, they are unaware that CG 44363 has been lost.
Approx. 0815	CG 6013 Air Station Astoria	Deploys the high-angle rescue team to retrieve SA Wingo from the cliff and hoists him to safety.
0932	BM2 Bosley OOD/ 1 st Boat Coxswain	And MK3 Schlimme are recovered from the cove on James Island by 6013's rescue swimmer. The rescue swimmer states that the wreck of 44363 is in "bad shape" and is leaking fuel.
1030	FA Ballard Non-rate	And the rest of the station are notified that SN Miniken has been pronounced dead at Forks Community Hospital.
1050	CG 6013 Air Station Astoria	Hoists the remaining five rescue team members and its rescue swimmer from the beach. The helicopter drops off the remaining Clallam County rescue team and departs for Air Station Astoria.

Aftermath

Findings from the official report, signed by CG Commandant ADM Kramek

BM2 Bosley OOD/ 1 st Boat Coxswain	Is found by the investigators to, "...not have enough rough weather bar crossings at night in a 44' MLB to prepare him for the conditions that MLB 44363 encountered on 12 February 1997 and should not have attempted to cross the bar."
	The investigators are of the opinion that BM2 Bosley viewed the updated weather forecast and had ample time to pass it to the SDO or OIC. Had either of them received this information, a Surfman would have been on board when the call came in.
MK3 Schlimme 1 st Boat Engineer	And SN Miniken, and BM2 Bosley's autopsies list their cause of death as blunt force trauma to the head.
BMCM LaForge OIC/ 2nd Boat Surfman	Was found by the investigators to have "made several key decisions... which increased the chances of survival for both the sailboat and the MLB 4363 crews."

Investigation	<p>Finds that there were no mechanical issues with 44363 to cause the accident. The boat is so badly damaged it is cut into three pieces and hoisted off the island by a helicopter for disposal.</p> <p>According to investigators, “The proximate cause of this casualty was the coxswain’s failure to safely navigate MLB 44363, causing the boat to capsize and founder in the surf conditions near James Island.”</p> <p>But the report also highlighted excessive personnel turnover at the unit. In February 1997, “only two non-rates had been at the station longer than one year, and because of ...high turnover of personnel, a majority of the Station training is focused on providing basic, introductory skills to help new personnel get their boat crew qualifications... Due to the high turnover of personnel, the Station’s operational readiness was diminished in the area of advanced skills/techniques.”</p> <p>At this time, of the 17 crewmembers filling boat crew positions at the station, 12 had been there less than one year (~70%). Also, despite four Surfman billets, only three surfmen were assigned at the unit, including the OIC and XPO.</p> <p>A 1961 editorial about the TRIUMPH-MERMAID disaster at Stations Point Adams/ Cape Disappointment noted similar concerns about crew inexperience at those units.</p>
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Discussion

- 100. What was it like “playing” your specific part?**
- 101. What do you feel when the SAR alarm goes off?**
 - Do our risk management tools help here?
 - How do you handle this?
- 102. What was the culture of response and operations like in 1997? How is it today?**
 - Coast Guard attitudes about risk
 - “You have to go out, but you don’t have to come back” (then)
 - “Us, ours, them, theirs” (now: balancing risk-taking with being risk-averse)
 - Crew selection, support and oversight from experienced SDOs, etc.
 - The Coast Guard has supported and related to its small boat stations
- 103. What parts of the Coast Guard system were related to this mishap? Are they the same or different today?**
 - Surfman assignment process
 - Risk management culture/tools
 - Station experience level/qualification process
 - Station staffing
 - Group nighttime radio guard
- 104. What were the effects of high turnover?**
 - Training focused on basic qualifications instead of advanced skills
 - Today’s D13 surf stations have ~40% annual turnover, exacerbated with non-rate transfers for A-School

- 105. Are you prepared to operate without the normal aids and references you rely on?**
-In 1997, crews never practiced nighttime rough bar crossings without bar lights
-What aids and references do we rely on today?
-Can we practice taking those away and adapting?
-Do we have “backup plans” for operating in nighttime, low viz, ATON discreps, etc.?
- 106. Compare communications issues in 1997 and today.**
-How much time passed between the initial call and when the CG asked for a position?
-Station watchstanders used to sleep in the comms room to overhear any traffic from the Group
 -Today, Sector could be conversing with a vessel in the middle of the night for 30 minutes without anyone at the station being aware of it
-There was no Rescue 21 in 1997, so targeting a vessel’s location using radio lines of bearing was imprecise
 -This highlights the importance of R21 Geo Display and promptly asking for lat/long positions
-Simple advice to have a vessel standby and wait in deep water can buy time to gather all the information and prevent a worsening situation
- 107. Why should we get an accurate position and observe the bar before launching?**
-The GALE RUNNER’s true position might have been ascertained before the 44363 crossed the bar near James Island
-Even today, vessels often pass geographic references that don’t match their precise location
-This information can impact asset and crew selection, and overall sense of urgency
- 108. Compare weather forecasting and reporting in 1997 and today.**
-None of the 1997 crew or command could have gotten on their phone and seen the forecast or buoy readings
-Despite modern technology, there is still plenty of information that we need to pass manually today
- 10. Final questions or comments?**

References

CDR Hasselbalch, James M. *Investigation into the Capsizing and Subsequent Loss of MLB 44363 and the Death of Three Coast Guard Members That Occurred at Coast Guard Station Quillayute River on 12 FEB 1997*. March, 1997 (including reviews by RADM J. David Spade and ADM Robert E. Kramek).

Noble, Dennis L. *The Rescue of the Gale Runner*. University Press of Florida, 2002.



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For more on the CG 44363 disaster: www.uscg44363.com



12 FEBRUARY 1997

A training remembering the CG 44363 disaster

BM1 PLACIDO



(scan for diagrams)

Introduction

- Sailing vessel GALE RUNNER is transiting from San Francisco, CA to Puget Sound, WA with a crew of two
- CG Station Quillayute River (QR) in La Push, WA is the next station north of Station Grays Harbor. It:
 - Has a BMCM Officer in Charge (OIC) and BM1 Executive Petty Officer (XPO)
 - Has two 44' motor lifeboats (MLB)
 - Reports to Group/Air Station Port Angeles (PA), WA, (the 1997 equivalent of a Sector)
 - Has a hazardous river bar crossing in order to get into the harbor at La Push, WA
 - Has a set of stadium-like "bar lights" fixed on James Island next to the bar for night transits
 - In February 1997, they are inoperative
 - The Officer of the Day (OOD) reports to a Surfman Duty Officer (SDO)
- On 11-12 February the duty section is comprised of 10 ready boat crew members, a watchstander, and several additional non-rated members
- On 11 February, Dr. Dennis Noble, a retired Coast Guard Senior Chief Petty Officer and notable history author reports to the station for a few days to stay on board while researching a book he is writing on lifeboat stations
- The following facts are taken verbatim from the USCG Administrative Investigation and Dr. Dennis Noble's book
- Reading takes about 40 minutes with 14 speakers and one facilitator
- Consider turning off the lights and having any members without speaking parts close their eyes.
- Each reader should say their highlighted parts by speaking the time, name, and details, for example, "At 0700 FA DaMello assumes the station's communications watch..."

Tuesday 11 FEB 1997

Time	Member	Details
Morning	GALE RUNNER Sailing Vessel	Is in Westport, WA and stops in at CG Station Grays Harbor. GALE RUNNER receives the weather forecast and decides to get underway to continue north.
0700	FA DaMello Comms watchstander	Assumes the Station's communications watch until 0700 on 12FEB97.
1640	FA DaMello Comms watchstander	Receives the updated NOAA weather forecast which calls for NW wind 35-40kt and seas building to 14'. For 12 February, the forecast predicts NW winds 30kt and combined seas 18'.
Approx. 1730	BM1 Placido SDO/ 1 st Boat Surfman	<p>Gets together with OOD BM2 Bosley and drives to the station's bar overlook to observe last light bar conditions. He observes that seas aren't bad and he feels comfortable going home on recall for the night, about 15 minutes away.</p> <p>He later said, "From the look of the bar and what Bosley had told me about the weather, there was no need for me to stay aboard."</p>
1740	BM2 Bosley OOD/ 1 st Boat Coxswain	Views the NOAA forecast on the computer and logs his initials, "D.A.B." to acknowledge it.

Evening	GALE RUNNER Sailing Vessel	Begins to encounter heavy weather and decides to head for the QR bar entrance to seek safe harbor.
After 2130	BM2 Bosley OOD/ 1 st Boat Coxswain	Does his evening round with MK3 Schlimme and FN Matthews and drives out to the bar overlook to check things out. FN Matthews recalls BM2 and MK3 saying that, “they [hope] they [don’t] get a case [tonight].”
Between 2130- 2200	BMCM LaForge OIC/ 2nd Boat Surfman	Returns from an appointment in Port Angeles and checks in with the OOD at the station. BM2 Bosley does not pass the 1640 weather forecast, but tells the OIC that the weather is supposed to pick up overnight. Without knowing of the forecast details, the OIC agrees with the OOD that the ready boat Surfman can remain on recall for the night. The OIC leaves for his home, 5 minutes away from the station.
2130	Dr. Noble CG History Author	Finishes his conversations with the crew and goes to bed.
Approx. 2200	BM2 Bosley OOD/ 1 st Boat Coxswain	Calls the SDO who remembers Bosley saying, “Nothing [is] going on. The winds [have] picked up a little bit... the weather [is] supposed to pick up later [tomorrow].”
2200	FA DaMello Comms watchstander	Passes the radio guard to Group PA for the night and sets up the cot to sleep in the comms room.

Wednesday 12 FEB 1997

Approx. 0015	GALE RUNNER Sailing Vessel	Hails Station QR on VHF 16 to obtain a bar report. Telecommunications Specialist Third Class (TC3) Marshall at Group PA answers for Station QR, consults the status board and reports, “no restrictions.”
	FA DaMello Comms watchstander	Wakes up to the radio traffic between Group and the GALE RUNNER and notices high winds outside. The Station’s anemometer is registering gusts of 50kt. On his own initiative, DaMello remembers the 1640 forecast for 18’ seas and intercoms TC3 Marshall at Group to tell her about the wind he’s seeing and the forecast for seas. He says he thinks that if the OOD knew about the 50kt gusts, then he would put a restriction on the bar.
	Group Port Angeles	Watchstander TC3 Marshall tells FA DaMello to hail the GAIL RUNNER and pass them the current weather conditions.
	FA DaMello Comms watchstander	Hails the sailing vessel and asks, “Are you crossing the bar?”
	GALE RUNNER Sailing Vessel	Crewmember Marcia Infante replies, “Affirmative. We are at the entrance now.” She doesn’t pass a GPS position.
	FA DaMello Comms watchstander	Passes the latest winds and advises the GALE RUNNER that the bar could be breaking. Next, FA DaMello calls BM2 Bosley in the OOD room to brief him of the weather and situation.
	BM2 Bosley OOD/ 1 st Boat Coxswain	Comes into comms and asks DaMello if he has GALE RUNNER’s position. DaMello says that the caller has not relayed their position. Bosley tells DaMello to call the GALE RUNNER and obtain their position. Bosley phones SDO BM1 Placido at his home and informs him of the radio call and that he thinks that it’s a bad idea for the sailboat to come across the bar. BM1 asks if he has a position for the sailboat. To keep listening for information, Bosely places the SDO on hold.

	FA DaMello Comms watchstander	Asks the GALE RUNNER for their position. He hears, "We're at 47, 51..." and then static silence.
	GALE RUNNER Sailing Vessel	Crewmember Ken Schlag is steering the sailing vessel and Marcia Infante is on the radio. Suddenly, the sailboat is struck by a rogue wave, knocked down, and dismantled. The radio antenna is damaged and Ken Schlag is thrown overboard. He is tethered with a safety harness and manages to pull himself back onboard. Portholes are blown out by the wave and the GALE RUNNER begins taking on water.
	FA DaMello Comms watchstander	Tries again to hail the boat, "Sailing vessel, this is Quillayute River on 22, over."
Approx. 00:26	GALE RUNNER Sailing Vessel	Crewmember Marcia Infante breaks the silence, "MAYDAY! MAYDAY! THIS IS SAILING VESSEL GALE RUNNER! U.S. COAST GUARD! WE'RE TAKING ON WATER!"
	GALE RUNNER Sailing Vessel	Crewmember Marcia Infante repeats her mayday calls every few minutes. She looks at the GPS plotter to reference the boat's position, but sees a black screen and figures that the GPS is broken. In fact, the GPS is in screensaver mode and she could have pushed any button to bring the chart and GPS position back up on the display.
	FA DaMello Comms watchstander	Only hears static after the mayday call. Group also hears static and suggests Station switch radio sites. DaMello says that he has already tried that.
Approx. 00:26	BM2 Bosley OOD/ 1 st Boat Coxswain	Has gathered this key information in a very short period: there is a sailing vessel that says it is at the entrance to the bar, it has begun taking on water, and the CG has lost communications with it. BM2 Bosley hits the SAR alarm and pipes, "Ready boat crew lay to the ready boat! Sailboat on the bar taking on water."
	BM2 Bosley OOD/ 1 st Boat Coxswain	Takes the SDO phone call off hold and says, "I'm heading for the door."
	BM1 Placido SDO/ 1 st Boat Surfman	Replies, "Call Master Chief [the OIC]. I'm right behind you" and gets in his car to drive back to the station.
		Later, BM1 Placido said that, "If I had known how bad the bar was, I would have told Bosley to wait until I could get to the station."
	SA Wingo 1 st Boat Crewmember	Runs out of his barracks room with SN Miniken and down to the boat.
	Group Port Angeles	Watchstander TC3 Marshall passes that the Group has received more radio transmissions from a frantic woman who doesn't understand Station QR's instructions.
		Group's Duty Officer briefs the Group Commanding Officer, CAPT Volk, at the direction of the Group Senior Duty Officer. The Group is still trying to gather information and is not yet trying to launch a helicopter.
0030	FA DaMello Comms watchstander	Calls and notifies BMCM LaForge of the case and BMCM comes back to the station from his home.
0031	FA DaMello Comms watchstander	Recalls the second boat crew in accordance with the unit's standing orders.
	BM2 Bosley OOD/ 1 st Boat Coxswain	Is one of the first down to the ready boat, CG 44363, and urgently wants to get underway. He runs back up to the station and yells, "Where is my crew?!"

	BMCM LaForge OIC/ 2nd Boat Surfman	Stops at the bar overlook to scan for signs of a sailboat before arriving back at the Station. He notes that there is reduced visibility, but that he can still see the “Q” buoy a mile from the bar. Winds are 30kt with stronger gusts.
0034	BM2 Bosley OOD/ 1 st Boat Coxswain	Gets CG 44363 underway for the SAR case. BM2 Bosley doesn’t brief his crew on the mission and the four are all wearing Mustang anti-exposure suits. If he believed the sailboat taking on water was on the bar, he would have thought the situation was very urgent.
	SA Wingo 1 st Boat Crewmember	Hands out pyro vests and SN Miniken hands out surf belts as the boat gets underway. Wingo and Miniken clip into D-rings and later, SA Wingo said that he had presumed MK3 Schlimme clipped in, but he wasn’t certain if BM2 Bosley wore his belt or clipped it in. No one on 44363 puts on a helmet, even though policy requires them to and no one speaks up about it. Bosley’s helmet was clipped behind his coxswain chair and everyone else’s helmets were stowed below in their SAR bags.
	BMCM LaForge OIC/ 2nd Boat Surfman	Is still at the overlook and observes the 44363 leaving the boat basin. He does not see its navigation lights energized. The OIC radios the 44363 and informs them that he does not see a sailboat in the immediate area and orders BM2 Bosley, “To check out the bar to see if they could cross.” The OIC heads back to the station.
0043	Group Port Angeles	Watchstander TC3 Marshall intercoms Station QR to have the ready boat standby because they think the case might be a hoax. There has been a rash of hoax calls with a young voice in northwestern Washington over the past two weeks.
	MK3 Schlimme 1 st Boat Engineer	Comes over to the starboard side of the 44363 as it gets underway, adjusts the radar, and then returns the engineer’s spot on the port side of the coxswain. While outbound, he reminds BM2 Bosley to not let the lube oil pressures get too high.
	BM2 Bosley OOD/ 1 st Boat Coxswain	Replies, “Yeah, I got it.”
	SN Miniken 1 st Boat Crewmember	Operates the port spotlight.
	SA Wingo 1 st Boat Crewmember	Is ordered by BM2 Bosley to man the starboard spotlight and illuminate Wash Rock.
	MK3 Schlimme 1 st Boat Engineer	Yells at Bosley, “Let’s get the fuck out of here,” just before passing Wash Rock.
	BM2 Bosley OOD/ 1 st Boat Coxswain	Replies, “Fuck that!” Schlimme may have been indicating a desire to go back to the station or instead, to go out to deeper water past the bar.
	FA Ballard Non-rate	Assists FA DaMello in comms and calls the 44363 to pass the Group’s instructions to have the ready boat standby.
	BM2 Bosley OOD/ 1 st Boat Coxswain	Responds, “Standby, we’re a little busy,” likely because BM2 Bosley is focused on negotiating the rough seas on the bar while heading outbound. Regarding the possibility of a hoax, Bosley tells the crew, “I hope not!”
Approx. 0044	SA Wingo 1 st Boat Crewmember	Is told by BM2 Bosley to aim the spotlight starboard towards James Island around the time the 44363 is at Wash Rock. Bosley wants to keep the island off the starboard beam. The 44363 is 100-150 yards off of the island.
0045	BM2 Bosley OOD/ 1 st Boat Coxswain	Radios the station that the 44363 has safely crossed the bar and that it is 16-18’ past the bar and evening out. Winds are from the WSW.

	Dr. Noble CG History Author	Joins BMCM LaForge on another trip out to the bar overlook. While driving there, the two hear the 44363 say they made it safely across the bar. BMCM LaForge thinks that the 44363 is likely turning away from James Island and toward the sea buoy into deeper (safer) water.
	SA Wingo 1 st Boat Crewmember	Hears Bosley radio the station that it is 15-16' out (a factual inconsistency) and later said, "I was about to call BS. Those waves were a lot higher than 15-16' and it wasn't getting better, but I was like, 'oh well.'"
		The 44363 is not transiting south on the safe route outbound to the "Q" buoy, but is actually being set north towards the edge of James Island.
		SA Wingo spots a rock and yells, "Rock starboard side! Ten feet!" The boat hits something.
Approx. 0048	BM2 Bosley OOD/ 1 st Boat Coxswain	Yells, "What was that!?" Someone else shouts, "Wave port side!"
	SA Wingo 1 st Boat Crewmember	Sees an enormous wave off the port bow and the boat is rolled over to starboard. SA Wingo hits his head on something and tastes blood. The boat rights itself with its bow pointing towards James Island. When the boat comes up, SA Wingo is twisted in his belt and wrapped up in the canvas dodger. The mast is bent flat to the port side. Wingo reaches for the spotlight and realizes it has broken off the top of the cabin and is gone. The motor lifeboat turns towards the island with way on. The 44363 has been underway for approximately 14 minutes.
Approx. 0048	BM2 Bosley OOD/ 1 st Boat Coxswain	Radios, "Capsized and disoriented."
	FA DaMello Comms watchstander	Hears the call about the boat being capsized, but he and Group PA are confused if the caller is the GALE RUNNER or the 44363. Group and Station hail both boats.
	CG 44393 2 nd Boat	Is the second boat and the recalled crew for it begins arriving at the Station. They begin to dress out in anti-exposure suits and then change their minds, opting for dry suits. The crew heads down to the boat and passes the communications room. They overhear, "Capsized..." but think it is in reference to the sail boat.
	MK3 Schlimme 1 st Boat Engineer	Yells, "We're still on the bar!"
	BM2 Bosley OOD/ 1 st Boat Coxswain	Replies, "Find me buoy 3!"
	SA Wingo 1 st Boat Crewmember	Can see the lights of the town of La Push, but doesn't see Buoy 3 which is too far back around the eastern side of James Island to be visible.
	BMCM LaForge OIC/ 2nd Boat Surfman	And Dr. Noble hear the 44363 say they rolled. The OIC can't see the MLB's navigation lights, but for a moment sees its spotlight sweeping rapidly towards the south from what he thinks is the seaward side of James Island. The OIC now knows the 44363 is in trouble (too close to rocky James Island) and calls the station to get the second boat underway. He also tells the station to call Group PA and get a helicopter dispatched.
	FA DaMello Comms watchstander	Calls the OIC back and passes that Group's duty officer wants to talk with him because Group is still concerned the call is a hoax.

	BMCM LaForge OIC/ 2nd Boat Surfman	And Dr. Noble return to the Station and the OIC tells the SDO that the 44363 is in trouble. BMCM LaForge phones Group PA and says he has, "A serious situation and still [needs] the HH-65A helicopter launched" and also requests an HH-60 helicopter from Astoria, OR.
0049	GALE RUNNER Sailing Vessel	Passes their full position to Group PA.
Approx. 0049	SA Wingo 1 st Boat Crewmember	Hears someone shout something. The boat is hit by a wave on the port quarter and pitch-poles, end over end. Upon re-righting itself, the 44363 rests on the rocks and he knows it is out of the water because the engine noise is different. The mast and entire top of the cabin have sheared off. BM2 Bosley and SN Miniken are gone. The ship's clock recovered from the wreckage of the 44363 was stopped at exactly 00h:49m:03s. CG 44363 has been underway for about 15 minutes.
	MK3 Schlimme 1 st Boat Engineer	Takes control of the 44363.
	SA Wingo 1 st Boat Crewmember	Panics and says, "We have to get out of here" and begins to unclip his surf belt.
	MK3 Schlimme 1 st Boat Engineer	Convinces Wingo that it's safest to stay with the boat and to clip back in. He asks Wingo for the boat's radio and tries to call the station with their position.
	SA Wingo 1 st Boat Crewmember	Looks down at the radio while Schlimme makes the call and sees that it's broken. Wingo realizes that MK3 Schlimme "Was just doing it to calm me down, and it worked because suddenly I was super calm. He saved my life by keeping me on the boat."
	MK3 Schlimme 1 st Boat Engineer	Tries to get himself and SA Wingo down into the forward compartment of the 44363, but can't because the handle of the watertight door is jammed from the boat's impact with rocks. Seeing another wave approaching, Schlimme yells, "Hold on!"
	SA Wingo 1 st Boat Crewmember	Feels the boat roll for a third time after the 44363 is knocked off the rock it was resting on and pushed against the rock cliffs. Underwater, he notes a "tremendous quiet." When the 44363 rights again, MK3 Schlimme is gone and Wingo sees a body float by the boat. He can't throw a life ring to it because both life rings are missing.
		CG 44363 has been underway for about 20 minutes.
		Wingo feels the boat drifting backwards and banging along the rocks into the cove on James Island. He sees a strobe light flashing in the cove, grabs the strobe light from his pyro vest, and turns it on. SA Wingo remembers that he thinks he placed the boat's engines in neutral, but doesn't secure them. Wingo grabs his MK-79 flare kit, fires five flares into the sky and two horizontally towards the beach to illuminate it. Like Schlimme, he tries to get into the forward compartment where there is a portable VHF radio and more flares, but also finds the door jammed.
Approx. 0055	BMCM LaForge OIC/ 2nd Boat Surfman	Is off the phone with Group PA after asking for helicopters and someone at the station tells him they've spotted red flares. The OIC finds Dr. Noble and says, "Let's go back to the bar."
	BM1 Placido SDO/ 1 st Boat Surfman	Shouts, "I'm going" and runs down to the 44393.
	Dr. Noble CG History Author	Parks at the bar overlook with BMCM LaForge and sees a red flare in the sky.

	BM1 Placido SDO/ 1 st Boat Surfman	Gets down to the 44393 and gives a quick brief on the mission. At this point, the second boat crew doesn't know the 44363 is in trouble. He later said that, "I wanted to stick my nose close to the bar and look around before trying to get across. I had no Goddam clue what the bar was doing."
0058	CG 44393 2 nd Boat	Gets underway with BM1 Placido as Surfman and three other crewmen. By chance, BM3 Martin is on second boat, but should have been on the ready boat. Because of his pregnant wife, the surfmen had given him as much time on second boat as possible. CG 44363 got underway approximately 24 minutes earlier.
	BM1 Placido SDO/ 1 st Boat Surfman	Sees a red flare in the sky shortly after leaving the boat basin. He thinks it could be from the 44363. He decides that they must cross the bar.
	Dr. Noble CG History Author	And BMCM LaForge have been at the overlook for a few minutes and see the 44393 leaving the protection of the river. The OIC thinks he can help keep track of the 44393 and advise them if they begin to get set towards James Island. In his own words, Dr. Noble remembers seeing the, "Small white boat rising. Rising. Rising. Rising until it seemed to stand on its stern. White water almost enveloping the small boat. Then the plunge downward."
	BMCM LaForge OIC/ 2nd Boat Surfman	Uses the VHF radio in his truck to communicate back and forth with the 44393 on the bar. As the 44393 heads farther out to sea, he can tell that the length of the swells underneath the boat are lengthening out. He is able to see the 44393 getting set north towards James Island and advises the boat. Dr. Noble and the OIC see more red flares from the western part of James Island.
Approx. 0100	Group Port Angeles	Duty Officer first called the Group's Operations Officer around 0030. He now calls the Group's Senior Duty Officer (SDO) in his duty room and informs him of the case. The SDO tells him to hit the SAR alarm at the Air Station. Next, the Group Duty Officer calls the Group Commanding Officer again and tells him that the helicopter is launching because they have lost communications with the 44363 and have spotted red flares. Until that time, the CO did not know that 44363 had gotten underway from Station Quillayute River. Group CO CAPT Volk drives into the Air Station and assigns a non-rate in the command center to scribe everything he sees and hears as the case goes on.
0107	SA Wingo 1 st Boat Crewmember	Floats with the 44363, gauging his progress into the cove by the illumination from the boat's aft deck light light. He notices the time on his watch: 0107. Starts praying, "Not a prayer of all the things I would or wouldn't do if I was saved, it was just an all-out cry for help: 'Please get my boat to shore.'" The boat's stern swings around and points towards the beach at the far back of the cove. SA Wingo thinks he sees a tree towards shore, unclips his surf belt, hops down into knee-deep water, and wades into the beach. CG 44363 comes to its final resting place at the back of the northern cove in James Island.
0110	CG 44393 2 nd Boat	Crosses the bar.
0110	Group Port Angeles	Watchstander TC3 Marshall transmits an Urgent Marine Information Broadcast.

	BM1 Placido SDO/ 1 st Boat Surfman	Remembers that his, "Crew performed like they were supposed to... They constantly fed me information. I felt like a machine. I absorbed the information and my body performed the necessary motions." Eventually he sees flares both to the north (from the 44363) and from the south (from the GALE RUNNER). He remembers, "I knew which ones were ours. I started to push back in and had to decide: Should I go for the sailboat, or our boat? It was one of the hardest decisions I ever had to make. I [later] saw the helicopter starting to search for our boat. I knew the helo could probably help out our boat better than I could, so I headed for the sailboat."
0121	BM1 Placido SDO/ 1 st Boat Surfman	Radios , "We are on handheld. Our antenna was damaged by a breaker."
	BMCM LaForge OIC/ 2nd Boat Surfman CG 44393 2 nd Boat	Advises the 44393 to head to the "Q" sea buoy and stay in deep water. Eventually depletes the battery on their portable VHF radio and loses all communications with the station and BMCM LaForge at the overlook. They proceed to the "Q" buoy.
	BMCM LaForge OIC/ 2nd Boat Surfman	Calls Group again for helicopter assistance because he has a sailboat in distress, a missing MLB, and another MLB he's lost communications with.
0123	CG 6589 Air Station Port Angeles	Takes off from Air Station PA. BM2 Bosley, MK3 Schlimme, and SN Miniken are already dead.
	BMCM LaForge OIC/ 2nd Boat Surfman	And Dr. Noble return to the station.
After 0130	Group Port Angeles	Commanding Officer (CO) CAPT Volk calls nearby units to request additional surface assets. The 110' cutter CUTTYHUNK is in Neah Bay and is dispatched towards La Push. CAPT Volk calls CWO2 Robert Coster, the CO of the Station Neah Bay, and asks if he can send one of his lifeboats south to help. CWO2 Coster drives in to his station and reviews the conditions. He makes the difficult decision that he cannot safely send his crews. CAPT Volk conferences with the CO of Group Astoria and CWO2 Randy Lewis, the CO of Station Grays Harbor. CWO2 Lewis also declines sending his station's 52' MLB due to the conditions. Later, CAPT Volk says that both stations' CO's, "Made the right decision."
0157	CG 6589 Air Station Port Angeles	Arrives on scene, is briefed about the situation by BMCM LaForge, and commences a search near James Island.
0159	GALE RUNNER Sailing Vessel	Passes their accurate position to the Coast Guard after reestablishing communications. They are not on the bar, but farther south near "The Needles," a group of jagged rock features sticking out from the ocean, about three miles from the bar.
0201	BMCM LaForge OIC/ 2nd Boat Surfman	Orders a beach search for survivors and several crewmembers, local police, and National Park Rangers set out for First Beach in anti-exposure coveralls and helmets.

0204	CG 6003 Air Station Astoria	Launches from Air Station Astoria.
	BMCM LaForge OIC/ 2nd Boat Surfman	Has to decide where to send resources: to the GALE RUNNER or to James Island for his lifeboat crew? He radios the CG 6589 back and recommends they leave James Island and proceed to the GALE RUNNER's position because it is only minutes away from the rocks. The OIC advises the watchstander to keep off the radio as much as possible because the helicopter may only have a brief window to transmit that they're in trouble too. BMCM LaForge has 14 lives and three Coast Guard assets in his hands.
0205	CG 6589 Air Station Port Angeles	Diverts from the vicinity of James Island and flies south towards The Needles. To make an approach on the GALE RUNNER, they must fly over, around, and through the 190' tall rock islands. The helicopter is being buffeted by winds and keeps fighting to make new approaches as the sailboat is washed over by breaking waves and drifts between the rock pinnacles.
	FA DaMello Comms watchstander	Is relieved of the communications watch to help the beach party. At First Beach, he and two other members run down the beach, dodging waves.
	SA Wingo 1 st Boat Crewmember	Sees a helicopter searchlight in the distance and CG 44393, and activates the night end of his MK-124 signal flare.
0219	CG 6589 Air Station Port Angeles	Arrives on scene with the GALE RUNNER to commence the hoist.
0227	CG 6585 Air Station Port Angeles	Launches from Air Station PA.
0234	CG 44393 2 nd Boat	Arrives at the "Q" buoy and is tasked by the Station to stay there. They remain there for about six hours until daylight and the chance to return across the bar.
0242	CG 6589 Air Station Port Angeles	Overstresses its hoist, but manages to hoist both crewmembers off the GALE RUNNER.
0251	CG 6589 Air Station Port Angeles	Lands at Station QR's ball field to pass the survivors to an ambulance and depart for Station Neah Bay to refuel.
0253	CG 6003 Air Station Astoria	Arrives on scene and spots a strobe light flashing from the cliff at the back of the cove on James Island.
0320	FA DaMello Comms watchstander	On First Beach sees a flashing light down the beach and starts running towards it. While running, DaMello and another member of the beach party are hit by a log that surges towards them on a wave. The wave knocks DaMello down and the log pins him underwater. FN DaMello sees his life and family flashing before his eyes and takes a breath of seawater. DaMello's arm is dislocated by the log, but it releases him and he gets to his feet. The light seen up the beach belongs to a National Park Ranger helping with the search.
	BMCM LaForge OIC/ 2nd Boat Surfman	Heads out to First Beach with another beach party. He is overheard saying to himself, "I should have trained them more, I should have trained them more."
0334	SN Miniken 1 st Boat Crewmember	Is found unconscious without socks or boots on by the other beach party on First Beach. The beach crew performs CPR at the scene and an ambulance takes him to the hospital in Forks, WA. Taking shifts with compressions, the team of responders gives him CPR for a total of four hours.

0432	CG 6003 Air Station Astoria	Observes BM2 Bosley and MK3 Schlimme floating in the cove on James Island. They request the county's high angle rescue team be contacted to rescue SA Wingo on the cliff.
0505	CG 44393 2 nd Boat	Loses communications with the Station after its portable VHF radio dies.
0508	CG 6013 Air Station Astoria	Leaves Air Station Astoria, OR to assist in the search.
0630	CG 6013 Air Station Astoria	Deploys a rescue swimmer to the cliff SA Wingo is hanging onto. SA Wingo is in good condition.
0633	CG 6585 Air Station Port Angeles	Transfers two additional portable VHF radios to 44393.
0734	CG 44393 2 nd Boat	Safely crosses the bar back into the Quillayute River and moors at Station Quillayute River. They have been underway for six hours and 36 minutes. Until they moor and see the other slip empty, they are unaware that CG 44363 has been lost.
Approx. 0815	CG 6013 Air Station Astoria	Deploys the high-angle rescue team to retrieve SA Wingo from the cliff and hoists him to safety.
0932	BM2 Bosley OOD/ 1 st Boat Coxswain	And MK3 Schlimme are recovered from the cove on James Island by 6013's rescue swimmer. The rescue swimmer states that the wreck of 44363 is in "bad shape" and is leaking fuel.
1030	FA Ballard Non-rate	And the rest of the station are notified that SN Miniken has been pronounced dead at Forks Community Hospital.
1050	CG 6013 Air Station Astoria	Hoists the remaining five rescue team members and its rescue swimmer from the beach. The helicopter drops off the remaining Clallam County rescue team and departs for Air Station Astoria.

Aftermath

Findings from the official report, signed by CG Commandant ADM Kramek

BM2 Bosley OOD/ 1 st Boat Coxswain	Is found by the investigators to, "...not have enough rough weather bar crossings at night in a 44' MLB to prepare him for the conditions that MLB 44363 encountered on 12 February 1997 and should not have attempted to cross the bar."
	The investigators are of the opinion that BM2 Bosley viewed the updated weather forecast and had ample time to pass it to the SDO or OIC. Had either of them received this information, a Surfman would have been on board when the call came in.
MK3 Schlimme 1 st Boat Engineer	And SN Miniken, and BM2 Bosley's autopsies list their cause of death as blunt force trauma to the head.
BMCM LaForge OIC/ 2nd Boat Surfman	Was found by the investigators to have "made several key decisions... which increased the chances of survival for both the sailboat and the MLB 4363 crews."

Investigation	<p>Finds that there were no mechanical issues with 44363 to cause the accident. The boat is so badly damaged it is cut into three pieces and hoisted off the island by a helicopter for disposal.</p> <p>According to investigators, “The proximate cause of this casualty was the coxswain’s failure to safely navigate MLB 44363, causing the boat to capsize and founder in the surf conditions near James Island.”</p> <p>But the report also highlighted excessive personnel turnover at the unit. In February 1997, “only two non-rates had been at the station longer than one year, and because of ...high turnover of personnel, a majority of the Station training is focused on providing basic, introductory skills to help new personnel get their boat crew qualifications... Due to the high turnover of personnel, the Station’s operational readiness was diminished in the area of advanced skills/techniques.”</p> <p>At this time, of the 17 crewmembers filling boat crew positions at the station, 12 had been there less than one year (~70%). Also, despite four Surfman billets, only three surfmen were assigned at the unit, including the OIC and XPO.</p> <p>A 1961 editorial about the TRIUMPH-MERMAID disaster at Stations Point Adams/ Cape Disappointment noted similar concerns about crew inexperience at those units.</p>
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Discussion

- 109. What was it like “playing” your specific part?**
- 110. What do you feel when the SAR alarm goes off?**
 - Do our risk management tools help here?
 - How do you handle this?
- 111. What was the culture of response and operations like in 1997? How is it today?**
 - Coast Guard attitudes about risk
 - “You have to go out, but you don’t have to come back” (then)
 - “Us, ours, them, theirs” (now: balancing risk-taking with being risk-averse)
 - Crew selection, support and oversight from experienced SDOs, etc.
 - The Coast Guard has supported and related to its small boat stations
- 112. What parts of the Coast Guard system were related to this mishap? Are they the same or different today?**
 - Surfman assignment process
 - Risk management culture/tools
 - Station experience level/qualification process
 - Station staffing
 - Group nighttime radio guard
- 113. What were the effects of high turnover?**
 - Training focused on basic qualifications instead of advanced skills
 - Today’s D13 surf stations have ~40% annual turnover, exacerbated with non-rate transfers for A-School

- 114. Are you prepared to operate without the normal aids and references you rely on?**
-In 1997, crews never practiced nighttime rough bar crossings without bar lights
-What aids and references do we rely on today?
-Can we practice taking those away and adapting?
-Do we have “backup plans” for operating in nighttime, low viz, ATON discreps, etc.?
- 115. Compare communications issues in 1997 and today.**
-How much time passed between the initial call and when the CG asked for a position?
-Station watchstanders used to sleep in the comms room to overhear any traffic from the Group
 -Today, Sector could be conversing with a vessel in the middle of the night for 30 minutes without anyone at the station being aware of it
-There was no Rescue 21 in 1997, so targeting a vessel’s location using radio lines of bearing was imprecise
 -This highlights the importance of R21 Geo Display and promptly asking for lat/long positions
-Simple advice to have a vessel standby and wait in deep water can buy time to gather all the information and prevent a worsening situation
- 116. Why should we get an accurate position and observe the bar before launching?**
-The GALE RUNNER’s true position might have been ascertained before the 44363 crossed the bar near James Island
-Even today, vessels often pass geographic references that don’t match their precise location
-This information can impact asset and crew selection, and overall sense of urgency
- 117. Compare weather forecasting and reporting in 1997 and today.**
-None of the 1997 crew or command could have gotten on their phone and seen the forecast or buoy readings
-Despite modern technology, there is still plenty of information that we need to pass manually today
- 10. Final questions or comments?**

References

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For more on the CG 44363 disaster: www.uscg44363.com



12 FEBRUARY 1997

A training remembering the CG 44363 disaster

MK3 SCHLIMME



(scan for diagrams)

Introduction

- Sailing vessel GALE RUNNER is transiting from San Francisco, CA to Puget Sound, WA with a crew of two
- CG Station Quillayute River (**QR**) in La Push, WA is the next station north of Station Grays Harbor. It:
 - Has a BMCM Officer in Charge (**OIC**) and BM1 Executive Petty Officer (**XPO**)
 - Has two 44' motor lifeboats (**MLB**)
 - Reports to Group/Air Station Port Angeles (**PA**), WA, (the 1997 equivalent of a Sector)
 - Has a hazardous river bar crossing in order to get into the harbor at La Push, WA
 - Has a set of stadium-like "bar lights" fixed on James Island next to the bar for night transits
 - In February 1997, they are inoperative
 - The Officer of the Day (**OOD**) reports to a Surfman Duty Officer (**SDO**)
- On 11-12 February the duty section is comprised of 10 ready boat crew members, a watchstander, and several additional non-rated members
- On 11 February, Dr. Dennis Noble, a retired Coast Guard Senior Chief Petty Officer and notable history author reports to the station for a few days to stay on board while researching a book he is writing on lifeboat stations
- The following facts are taken verbatim from the USCG Administrative Investigation and Dr. Dennis Noble's book
- Reading takes about 40 minutes with 14 speakers and one facilitator
- Consider turning off the lights and having any members without speaking parts close their eyes.
- Each reader should say their **highlighted parts by speaking the time, name, and details, for example**, "At 0700 FA DaMello assumes the station's communications watch..."

Tuesday 11 FEB 1997

Time	Member	Details
Morning	GALE RUNNER Sailing Vessel	Is in Westport, WA and stops in at CG Station Grays Harbor. GALE RUNNER receives the weather forecast and decides to get underway to continue north.
0700	FA DaMello Comms watchstander	Assumes the Station's communications watch until 0700 on 12FEB97.
1640	FA DaMello Comms watchstander	Receives the updated NOAA weather forecast which calls for NW wind 35-40kt and seas building to 14'. For 12 February, the forecast predicts NW winds 30kt and combined seas 18'.
Approx. 1730	BM1 Placido SDO/ 1 st Boat Surfman	<p>Gets together with OOD BM2 Bosley and drives to the station's bar overlook to observe last light bar conditions. He observes that seas aren't bad and he feels comfortable going home on recall for the night, about 15 minutes away.</p> <p>He later said, "From the look of the bar and what Bosley had told me about the weather, there was no need for me to stay aboard."</p>
1740	BM2 Bosley OOD/ 1 st Boat Coxswain	Views the NOAA forecast on the computer and logs his initials, "D.A.B." to acknowledge it.

Evening	GALE RUNNER Sailing Vessel	Begins to encounter heavy weather and decides to head for the QR bar entrance to seek safe harbor.
After 2130	BM2 Bosley OOD/ 1 st Boat Coxswain	Does his evening round with MK3 Schlimme and FN Matthews and drives out to the bar overlook to check things out. FN Matthews recalls BM2 and MK3 saying that, “they [hope] they [don’t] get a case [tonight].”
Between 2130- 2200	BMCM LaForge OIC/ 2nd Boat Surfman	Returns from an appointment in Port Angeles and checks in with the OOD at the station. BM2 Bosley does not pass the 1640 weather forecast, but tells the OIC that the weather is supposed to pick up overnight. Without knowing of the forecast details, the OIC agrees with the OOD that the ready boat Surfman can remain on recall for the night. The OIC leaves for his home, 5 minutes away from the station.
2130	Dr. Noble CG History Author	Finishes his conversations with the crew and goes to bed.
Approx. 2200	BM2 Bosley OOD/ 1 st Boat Coxswain	Calls the SDO who remembers Bosley saying, “Nothing [is] going on. The winds [have] picked up a little bit... the weather [is] supposed to pick up later [tomorrow].”
2200	FA DaMello Comms watchstander	Passes the radio guard to Group PA for the night and sets up the cot to sleep in the comms room.

Wednesday 12 FEB 1997

Approx. 0015	GALE RUNNER Sailing Vessel	Hails Station QR on VHF 16 to obtain a bar report. Telecommunications Specialist Third Class (TC3) Marshall at Group PA answers for Station QR, consults the status board and reports, “no restrictions.”
	FA DaMello Comms watchstander	Wakes up to the radio traffic between Group and the GALE RUNNER and notices high winds outside. The Station’s anemometer is registering gusts of 50kt. On his own initiative, DaMello remembers the 1640 forecast for 18’ seas and intercoms TC3 Marshall at Group to tell her about the wind he’s seeing and the forecast for seas. He says he thinks that if the OOD knew about the 50kt gusts, then he would put a restriction on the bar.
	Group Port Angeles	Watchstander TC3 Marshall tells FA DaMello to hail the GAIL RUNNER and pass them the current weather conditions.
	FA DaMello Comms watchstander	Hails the sailing vessel and asks, “Are you crossing the bar?”
	GALE RUNNER Sailing Vessel	Crewmember Marcia Infante replies, “Affirmative. We are at the entrance now.” She doesn’t pass a GPS position.
	FA DaMello Comms watchstander	Passes the latest winds and advises the GALE RUNNER that the bar could be breaking. Next, FA DaMello calls BM2 Bosley in the OOD room to brief him of the weather and situation.
	BM2 Bosley OOD/ 1 st Boat Coxswain	Comes into comms and asks DaMello if he has GALE RUNNER’s position. DaMello says that the caller has not relayed their position. Bosley tells DaMello to call the GALE RUNNER and obtain their position. Bosley phones SDO BM1 Placido at his home and informs him of the radio call and that he thinks that it’s a bad idea for the sailboat to come across the bar. BM1 asks if he has a position for the sailboat. To keep listening for information, Bosely places the SDO on hold.

	FA DaMello Comms watchstander	Asks the GALE RUNNER for their position. He hears, "We're at 47, 51..." and then static silence.
	GALE RUNNER Sailing Vessel	Crewmember Ken Schlag is steering the sailing vessel and Marcia Infante is on the radio. Suddenly, the sailboat is struck by a rogue wave, knocked down, and dismasted. The radio antenna is damaged and Ken Schlag is thrown overboard. He is tethered with a safety harness and manages to pull himself back onboard. Portholes are blown out by the wave and the GALE RUNNER begins taking on water.
	FA DaMello Comms watchstander	Tries again to hail the boat, "Sailing vessel, this is Quillayute River on 22, over."
Approx. 00:26	GALE RUNNER Sailing Vessel	Crewmember Marcia Infante breaks the silence, "MAYDAY! MAYDAY! THIS IS SAILING VESSEL <i>GALE RUNNER</i> ! U.S. COAST GUARD! WE'RE TAKING ON WATER!"
	GALE RUNNER Sailing Vessel	Crewmember Marcia Infante repeats her mayday calls every few minutes. She looks at the GPS plotter to reference the boat's position, but sees a black screen and figures that the GPS is broken. In fact, the GPS is in screensaver mode and she could have pushed any button to bring the chart and GPS position back up on the display.
	FA DaMello Comms watchstander	Only hears static after the mayday call. Group also hears static and suggests Station switch radio sites. DaMello says that he has already tried that.
Approx. 0026	BM2 Bosley OOD/ 1 st Boat Coxswain	Has gathered this key information in a very short period: there is a sailing vessel that says it is at the entrance to the bar, it has begun taking on water, and the CG has lost communications with it. BM2 Bosley hits the SAR alarm and pipes, "Ready boat crew lay to the ready boat! Sailboat on the bar taking on water."
	BM2 Bosley OOD/ 1 st Boat Coxswain	Takes the SDO phone call off hold and says, "I'm heading for the door."
	BM1 Placido SDO/ 1 st Boat Surfman	Replies, "Call Master Chief [the OIC]. I'm right behind you" and gets in his car to drive back to the station.
		Later, BM1 Placido said that, "If I had known how bad the bar was, I would have told Bosley to wait until I could get to the station."
	SA Wingo 1 st Boat Crewmember	Runs out of his barracks room with SN Miniken and down to the boat.
	Group Port Angeles	Watchstander TC3 Marshall passes that the Group has received more radio transmissions from a frantic woman who doesn't understand Station QR's instructions.
		Group's Duty Officer briefs the Group Commanding Officer, CAPT Volk, at the direction of the Group Senior Duty Officer. The Group is still trying to gather information and is not yet trying to launch a helicopter.
0030	FA DaMello Comms watchstander	Calls and notifies BMCM LaForge of the case and BMCM comes back to the station from his home.
0031	FA DaMello Comms watchstander	Recalls the second boat crew in accordance with the unit's standing orders.
	BM2 Bosley OOD/ 1 st Boat Coxswain	Is one of the first down to the ready boat, CG 44363, and urgently wants to get underway. He runs back up to the station and yells, "Where is my crew?!"

	BMCM LaForge OIC/ 2nd Boat Surfman	Stops at the bar overlook to scan for signs of a sailboat before arriving back at the Station. He notes that there is reduced visibility, but that he can still see the "Q" buoy a mile from the bar. Winds are 30kt with stronger gusts.
0034	BM2 Bosley OOD/ 1 st Boat Coxswain	Gets CG 44363 underway for the SAR case. BM2 Bosley doesn't brief his crew on the mission and the four are all wearing Mustang anti-exposure suits. If he believed the sailboat taking on water was on the bar, he would have thought the situation was very urgent.
	SA Wingo 1 st Boat Crewmember	Hands out pyro vests and SN Miniken hands out surf belts as the boat gets underway. Wingo and Miniken clip into D-rings and later, SA Wingo said that he had presumed MK3 Schlimme clipped in, but he wasn't certain if BM2 Bosley wore his belt or clipped it in. No one on 44363 puts on a helmet, even though policy requires them to and no one speaks up about it. Bosley's helmet was clipped behind his coxswain chair and everyone else's helmets were stowed below in their SAR bags.
	BMCM LaForge OIC/ 2nd Boat Surfman	Is still at the overlook and observes the 44363 leaving the boat basin. He does not see its navigation lights energized. The OIC radios the 44363 and informs them that he does not see a sailboat in the immediate area and orders BM2 Bosley, "To check out the bar to see if they could cross." The OIC heads back to the station.
0043	Group Port Angeles	Watchstander TC3 Marshall intercoms Station QR to have the ready boat standby because they think the case might be a hoax. There has been a rash of hoax calls with a young voice in northwestern Washington over the past two weeks.
	MK3 Schlimme 1 st Boat Engineer	Comes over to the starboard side of the 44363 as it gets underway, adjusts the radar, and then returns the engineer's spot on the port side of the coxswain. While outbound, he reminds BM2 Bosley to not let the lube oil pressures get too high.
	BM2 Bosley OOD/ 1 st Boat Coxswain	Replies, "Yeah, I got it."
	SN Miniken 1 st Boat Crewmember	Operates the port spotlight.
	SA Wingo 1 st Boat Crewmember	Is ordered by BM2 Bosley to man the starboard spotlight and illuminate Wash Rock.
	MK3 Schlimme 1 st Boat Engineer	Yells at Bosley, "Let's get the fuck out of here," just before passing Wash Rock.
	BM2 Bosley OOD/ 1 st Boat Coxswain	Replies, "Fuck that!" Schlimme may have been indicating a desire to go back to the station or instead, to go out to deeper water past the bar.
	FA Ballard Non-rate	Assists FA DaMello in comms and calls the 44363 to pass the Group's instructions to have the ready boat standby.
	BM2 Bosley OOD/ 1 st Boat Coxswain	Responds, "Standby, we're a little busy," likely because BM2 Bosley is focused on negotiating the rough seas on the bar while heading outbound. Regarding the possibility of a hoax, Bosley tells the crew, "I hope not!"
Approx. 0044	SA Wingo 1 st Boat Crewmember	Is told by BM2 Bosley to aim the spotlight starboard towards James Island around the time the 44363 is at Wash Rock. Bosley wants to keep the island off the starboard beam. The 44363 is 100-150 yards off of the island.
0045	BM2 Bosley OOD/ 1 st Boat Coxswain	Radios the station that the 44363 has safely crossed the bar and that it is 16-18' past the bar and evening out. Winds are from the WSW.

	Dr. Noble CG History Author	Joins BMCM LaForge on another trip out to the bar overlook. While driving there, the two hear the 44363 say they made it safely across the bar. BMCM LaForge thinks that the 44363 is likely turning away from James Island and toward the sea buoy into deeper (safer) water.
	SA Wingo 1 st Boat Crewmember	Hears Bosley radio the station that it is 15-16' out (a factual inconsistency) and later said, "I was about to call BS. Those waves were a lot higher than 15-16' and it wasn't getting better, but I was like, 'oh well.'"
		The 44363 is not transiting south on the safe route outbound to the "Q" buoy, but is actually being set north towards the edge of James Island.
		SA Wingo spots a rock and yells, "Rock starboard side! Ten feet!" The boat hits something.
Approx. 0048	BM2 Bosley OOD/ 1 st Boat Coxswain	Yells, "What was that!?" Someone else shouts, "Wave port side!"
	SA Wingo 1 st Boat Crewmember	Sees an enormous wave off the port bow and the boat is rolled over to starboard. SA Wingo hits his head on something and tastes blood. The boat rights itself with its bow pointing towards James Island. When the boat comes up, SA Wingo is twisted in his belt and wrapped up in the canvas dodger. The mast is bent flat to the port side. Wingo reaches for the spotlight and realizes it has broken off the top of the cabin and is gone. The motor lifeboat turns towards the island with way on. The 44363 has been underway for approximately 14 minutes.
Approx. 0048	BM2 Bosley OOD/ 1 st Boat Coxswain	Radios, "Capsized and disoriented."
	FA DaMello Comms watchstander	Hears the call about the boat being capsized, but he and Group PA are confused if the caller is the GALE RUNNER or the 44363. Group and Station hail both boats.
	CG 44393 2 nd Boat	Is the second boat and the recalled crew for it begins arriving at the Station. They begin to dress out in anti-exposure suits and then change their minds, opting for dry suits. The crew heads down to the boat and passes the communications room. They overhear, "Capsized..." but think it is in reference to the sail boat.
	MK3 Schlimme 1 st Boat Engineer	Yells, "We're still on the bar!"
	BM2 Bosley OOD/ 1 st Boat Coxswain	Replies, "Find me buoy 3!"
	SA Wingo 1 st Boat Crewmember	Can see the lights of the town of La Push, but doesn't see Buoy 3 which is too far back around the eastern side of James Island to be visible.
	BMCM LaForge OIC/ 2nd Boat Surfman	And Dr. Noble hear the 44363 say they rolled. The OIC can't see the MLB's navigation lights, but for a moment sees its spotlight sweeping rapidly towards the south from what he thinks is the seaward side of James Island. The OIC now knows the 44363 is in trouble (too close to rocky James Island) and calls the station to get the second boat underway. He also tells the station to call Group PA and get a helicopter dispatched.
	FA DaMello Comms watchstander	Calls the OIC back and passes that Group's duty officer wants to talk with him because Group is still concerned the call is a hoax.

	BMCM LaForge OIC/ 2nd Boat Surfman	And Dr. Noble return to the Station and the OIC tells the SDO that the 44363 is in trouble. BMCM LaForge phones Group PA and says he has, "A serious situation and still [needs] the HH-65A helicopter launched" and also requests an HH-60 helicopter from Astoria, OR.
0049	GALE RUNNER Sailing Vessel	Passes their full position to Group PA.
Approx. 0049	SA Wingo 1 st Boat Crewmember	Hears someone shout something. The boat is hit by a wave on the port quarter and pitch-poles, end over end. Upon re-righting itself, the 44363 rests on the rocks and he knows it is out of the water because the engine noise is different. The mast and entire top of the cabin have sheared off. BM2 Bosley and SN Miniken are gone. The ship's clock recovered from the wreckage of the 44363 was stopped at exactly 00h:49m:03s. CG 44363 has been underway for about 15 minutes.
	MK3 Schlimme 1 st Boat Engineer	Takes control of the 44363.
	SA Wingo 1 st Boat Crewmember	Panics and says, "We have to get out of here" and begins to unclip his surf belt.
	MK3 Schlimme 1 st Boat Engineer	Convinces Wingo that it's safest to stay with the boat and to clip back in. He asks Wingo for the boat's radio and tries to call the station with their position.
	SA Wingo 1 st Boat Crewmember	Looks down at the radio while Schlimme makes the call and sees that it's broken. Wingo realizes that MK3 Schlimme "Was just doing it to calm me down, and it worked because suddenly I was super calm. He saved my life by keeping me on the boat."
	MK3 Schlimme 1 st Boat Engineer	Tries to get himself and SA Wingo down into the forward compartment of the 44363, but can't because the handle of the watertight door is jammed from the boat's impact with rocks. Seeing another wave approaching, Schlimme yells, "Hold on!"
	SA Wingo 1 st Boat Crewmember	Feels the boat roll for a third time after the 44363 is knocked off the rock it was resting on and pushed against the rock cliffs. Underwater, he notes a "tremendous quiet." When the 44363 rights again, MK3 Schlimme is gone and Wingo sees a body float by the boat. He can't throw a life ring to it because both life rings are missing.
		CG 44363 has been underway for about 20 minutes.
		Wingo feels the boat drifting backwards and banging along the rocks into the cove on James Island. He sees a strobe light flashing in the cove, grabs the strobe light from his pyro vest, and turns it on. SA Wingo remembers that he thinks he placed the boat's engines in neutral, but doesn't secure them. Wingo grabs his MK-79 flare kit, fires five flares into the sky and two horizontally towards the beach to illuminate it. Like Schlimme, he tries to get into the forward compartment where there is a portable VHF radio and more flares, but also finds the door jammed.
Approx. 0055	BMCM LaForge OIC/ 2nd Boat Surfman	Is off the phone with Group PA after asking for helicopters and someone at the station tells him they've spotted red flares. The OIC finds Dr. Noble and says, "Let's go back to the bar."
	BM1 Placido SDO/ 1 st Boat Surfman	Shouts, "I'm going" and runs down to the 44393.
	Dr. Noble CG History Author	Parks at the bar overlook with BMCM LaForge and sees a red flare in the sky.

	BM1 Placido SDO/ 1 st Boat Surfman	Gets down to the 44393 and gives a quick brief on the mission. At this point, the second boat crew doesn't know the 44363 is in trouble. He later said that, "I wanted to stick my nose close to the bar and look around before trying to get across. I had no Goddam clue what the bar was doing."
0058	CG 44393 2 nd Boat	Gets underway with BM1 Placido as Surfman and three other crewmen. By chance, BM3 Martin is on second boat, but should have been on the ready boat. Because of his pregnant wife, the surfmen had given him as much time on second boat as possible. CG 44363 got underway approximately 24 minutes earlier.
	BM1 Placido SDO/ 1 st Boat Surfman	Sees a red flare in the sky shortly after leaving the boat basin. He thinks it could be from the 44363. He decides that they must cross the bar.
	Dr. Noble CG History Author	And BMCM LaForge have been at the overlook for a few minutes and see the 44393 leaving the protection of the river. The OIC thinks he can help keep track of the 44393 and advise them if they begin to get set towards James Island. In his own words, Dr. Noble remembers seeing the, "Small white boat rising. Rising. Rising. Rising until it seemed to stand on its stern. White water almost enveloping the small boat. Then the plunge downward."
	BMCM LaForge OIC/ 2nd Boat Surfman	Uses the VHF radio in his truck to communicate back and forth with the 44393 on the bar. As the 44393 heads farther out to sea, he can tell that the length of the swells underneath the boat are lengthening out. He is able to see the 44393 getting set north towards James Island and advises the boat. Dr. Noble and the OIC see more red flares from the western part of James Island.
Approx. 0100	Group Port Angeles	Duty Officer first called the Group's Operations Officer around 0030. He now calls the Group's Senior Duty Officer (SDO) in his duty room and informs him of the case. The SDO tells him to hit the SAR alarm at the Air Station. Next, the Group Duty Officer calls the Group Commanding Officer again and tells him that the helicopter is launching because they have lost communications with the 44363 and have spotted red flares. Until that time, the CO did not know that 44363 had gotten underway from Station Quillayute River. Group CO CAPT Volk drives into the Air Station and assigns a non-rate in the command center to scribe everything he sees and hears as the case goes on.
0107	SA Wingo 1 st Boat Crewmember	Floats with the 44363, gauging his progress into the cove by the illumination from the boat's aft deck light light. He notices the time on his watch: 0107. Starts praying, "Not a prayer of all the things I would or wouldn't do if I was saved, it was just an all-out cry for help: 'Please get my boat to shore.'" The boat's stern swings around and points towards the beach at the far back of the cove. SA Wingo thinks he sees a tree towards shore, unclips his surf belt, hops down into knee-deep water, and wades into the beach. CG 44363 comes to its final resting place at the back of the northern cove in James Island.
0110	CG 44393 2 nd Boat	Crosses the bar.
0110	Group Port Angeles	Watchstander TC3 Marshall transmits an Urgent Marine Information Broadcast.

	BM1 Placido SDO/ 1 st Boat Surfman	Remembers that his, "Crew performed like they were supposed to... They constantly fed me information. I felt like a machine. I absorbed the information and my body performed the necessary motions." Eventually he sees flares both to the north (from the 44363) and from the south (from the GALE RUNNER).
		He remembers, "I knew which ones were ours. I started to push back in and had to decide: Should I go for the sailboat, or our boat? It was one of the hardest decisions I ever had to make. I [later] saw the helicopter starting to search for our boat. I knew the helo could probably help out our boat better than I could, so I headed for the sailboat."
0121	BM1 Placido SDO/ 1 st Boat Surfman	Radios, "We are on handheld. Our antenna was damaged by a breaker."
	BMCM LaForge OIC/ 2nd Boat Surfman	Advises the 44393 to head to the "Q" sea buoy and stay in deep water.
	CG 44393 2 nd Boat	Eventually depletes the battery on their portable VHF radio and loses all communications with the station and BMCM LaForge at the overlook. They proceed to the "Q" buoy.
	BMCM LaForge OIC/ 2nd Boat Surfman	Calls Group again for helicopter assistance because he has a sailboat in distress, a missing MLB, and another MLB he's lost communications with.
0123	CG 6589 Air Station Port Angeles	Takes off from Air Station PA. BM2 Bosley, MK3 Schlimme, and SN Miniken are already dead.
	BMCM LaForge OIC/ 2nd Boat Surfman	And Dr. Noble return to the station.
After 0130	Group Port Angeles	Commanding Officer (CO) CAPT Volk calls nearby units to request additional surface assets. The 110' cutter CUTTYHUNK is in Neah Bay and is dispatched towards La Push. CAPT Volk calls CWO2 Robert Coster, the CO of the Station Neah Bay, and asks if he can send one of his lifeboats south to help. CWO2 Coster drives in to his station and reviews the conditions. He makes the difficult decision that he cannot safely send his crews. CAPT Volk conferences with the CO of Group Astoria and CWO2 Randy Lewis, the CO of Station Grays Harbor. CWO2 Lewis also declines sending his station's 52' MLB due to the conditions. Later, CAPT Volk says that both stations' CO's, "Made the right decision."
0157	CG 6589 Air Station Port Angeles	Arrives on scene, is briefed about the situation by BMCM LaForge, and commences a search near James Island.
0159	GALE RUNNER Sailing Vessel	Passes their accurate position to the Coast Guard after reestablishing communications. They are not on the bar, but farther south near "The Needles," a group of jagged rock features sticking out from the ocean, about three miles from the bar.
0201	BMCM LaForge OIC/ 2nd Boat Surfman	Orders a beach search for survivors and several crewmembers, local police, and National Park Rangers set out for First Beach in anti-exposure coveralls and helmets.

0204	CG 6003 Air Station Astoria	Launches from Air Station Astoria.
	BMCM LaForge OIC/ 2nd Boat Surfman	Has to decide where to send resources: to the GALE RUNNER or to James Island for his lifeboat crew? He radios the CG 6589 back and recommends they leave James Island and proceed to the GALE RUNNER's position because it is only minutes away from the rocks. The OIC advises the watchstander to keep off the radio as much as possible because the helicopter may only have a brief window to transmit that they're in trouble too. BMCM LaForge has 14 lives and three Coast Guard assets in his hands.
0205	CG 6589 Air Station Port Angeles	Diverts from the vicinity of James Island and flies south towards The Needles. To make an approach on the GALE RUNNER, they must fly over, around, and through the 190' tall rock islands. The helicopter is being buffeted by winds and keeps fighting to make new approaches as the sailboat is washed over by breaking waves and drifts between the rock pinnacles.
	FA DaMello Comms watchstander	Is relieved of the communications watch to help the beach party. At First Beach, he and two other members run down the beach, dodging waves.
	SA Wingo 1 st Boat Crewmember	Sees a helicopter searchlight in the distance and CG 44393, and activates the night end of his MK-124 signal flare.
0219	CG 6589 Air Station Port Angeles	Arrives on scene with the GALE RUNNER to commence the hoist.
0227	CG 6585 Air Station Port Angeles	Launches from Air Station PA.
0234	CG 44393 2 nd Boat	Arrives at the "Q" buoy and is tasked by the Station to stay there. They remain there for about six hours until daylight and the chance to return across the bar.
0242	CG 6589 Air Station Port Angeles	Overstresses its hoist, but manages to hoist both crewmembers off the GALE RUNNER.
0251	CG 6589 Air Station Port Angeles	Lands at Station QR's ball field to pass the survivors to an ambulance and depart for Station Neah Bay to refuel.
0253	CG 6003 Air Station Astoria	Arrives on scene and spots a strobe light flashing from the cliff at the back of the cove on James Island.
0320	FA DaMello Comms watchstander	On First Beach sees a flashing light down the beach and starts running towards it. While running, DaMello and another member of the beach party are hit by a log that surges towards them on a wave. The wave knocks DaMello down and the log pins him underwater. FN DaMello sees his life and family flashing before his eyes and takes a breath of seawater. DaMello's arm is dislocated by the log, but it releases him and he gets to his feet. The light seen up the beach belongs to a National Park Ranger helping with the search.
	BMCM LaForge OIC/ 2nd Boat Surfman	Heads out to First Beach with another beach party. He is overheard saying to himself, "I should have trained them more, I should have trained them more."
0334	SN Miniken 1 st Boat Crewmember	Is found unconscious without socks or boots on by the other beach party on First Beach. The beach crew performs CPR at the scene and an ambulance takes him to the hospital in Forks, WA. Taking shifts with compressions, the team of responders gives him CPR for a total of four hours.

0432	CG 6003 Air Station Astoria	Observes BM2 Bosley and MK3 Schlimme floating in the cove on James Island. They request the county's high angle rescue team be contacted to rescue SA Wingo on the cliff.
0505	CG 44393 2 nd Boat	Loses communications with the Station after its portable VHF radio dies.
0508	CG 6013 Air Station Astoria	Leaves Air Station Astoria, OR to assist in the search.
0630	CG 6013 Air Station Astoria	Deploys a rescue swimmer to the cliff SA Wingo is hanging onto. SA Wingo is in good condition.
0633	CG 6585 Air Station Port Angeles	Transfers two additional portable VHF radios to 44393.
0734	CG 44393 2 nd Boat	Safely crosses the bar back into the Quillayute River and moors at Station Quillayute River. They have been underway for six hours and 36 minutes. Until they moor and see the other slip empty, they are unaware that CG 44363 has been lost.
Approx. 0815	CG 6013 Air Station Astoria	Deploys the high-angle rescue team to retrieve SA Wingo from the cliff and hoists him to safety.
0932	BM2 Bosley OOD/ 1 st Boat Coxswain	And MK3 Schlimme are recovered from the cove on James Island by 6013's rescue swimmer. The rescue swimmer states that the wreck of 44363 is in "bad shape" and is leaking fuel.
1030	FA Ballard Non-rate	And the rest of the station are notified that SN Miniken has been pronounced dead at Forks Community Hospital.
1050	CG 6013 Air Station Astoria	Hoists the remaining five rescue team members and its rescue swimmer from the beach. The helicopter drops off the remaining Clallam County rescue team and departs for Air Station Astoria.

Aftermath

Findings from the official report, signed by CG Commandant ADM Kramek

BM2 Bosley OOD/ 1 st Boat Coxswain	Is found by the investigators to, "...not have enough rough weather bar crossings at night in a 44' MLB to prepare him for the conditions that MLB 44363 encountered on 12 February 1997 and should not have attempted to cross the bar."
	The investigators are of the opinion that BM2 Bosley viewed the updated weather forecast and had ample time to pass it to the SDO or OIC. Had either of them received this information, a Surfman would have been on board when the call came in.
MK3 Schlimme 1 st Boat Engineer	And SN Miniken, and BM2 Bosley's autopsies list their cause of death as blunt force trauma to the head.
BMCM LaForge OIC/ 2nd Boat Surfman	Was found by the investigators to have "made several key decisions... which increased the chances of survival for both the sailboat and the MLB 4363 crews."

Investigation	<p>Finds that there were no mechanical issues with 44363 to cause the accident. The boat is so badly damaged it is cut into three pieces and hoisted off the island by a helicopter for disposal.</p> <p>According to investigators, “The proximate cause of this casualty was the coxswain’s failure to safely navigate MLB 44363, causing the boat to capsize and founder in the surf conditions near James Island.”</p> <p>But the report also highlighted excessive personnel turnover at the unit. In February 1997, “only two non-rates had been at the station longer than one year, and because of ...high turnover of personnel, a majority of the Station training is focused on providing basic, introductory skills to help new personnel get their boat crew qualifications... Due to the high turnover of personnel, the Station’s operational readiness was diminished in the area of advanced skills/techniques.”</p> <p>At this time, of the 17 crewmembers filling boat crew positions at the station, 12 had been there less than one year (~70%). Also, despite four Surfman billets, only three surfmen were assigned at the unit, including the OIC and XPO.</p> <p>A 1961 editorial about the TRIUMPH-MERMAID disaster at Stations Point Adams/ Cape Disappointment noted similar concerns about crew inexperience at those units.</p>
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Discussion

- 118. What was it like “playing” your specific part?**
- 119. What do you feel when the SAR alarm goes off?**
 - Do our risk management tools help here?
 - How do you handle this?
- 120. What was the culture of response and operations like in 1997? How is it today?**
 - Coast Guard attitudes about risk
 - “You have to go out, but you don’t have to come back” (then)
 - “Us, ours, them, theirs” (now: balancing risk-taking with being risk-averse)
 - Crew selection, support and oversight from experienced SDOs, etc.
 - The Coast Guard has supported and related to its small boat stations
- 121. What parts of the Coast Guard system were related to this mishap? Are they the same or different today?**
 - Surfman assignment process
 - Risk management culture/tools
 - Station experience level/qualification process
 - Station staffing
 - Group nighttime radio guard
- 122. What were the effects of high turnover?**
 - Training focused on basic qualifications instead of advanced skills
 - Today’s D13 surf stations have ~40% annual turnover, exacerbated with non-rate transfers for A-School

- 123. Are you prepared to operate without the normal aids and references you rely on?**
-In 1997, crews never practiced nighttime rough bar crossings without bar lights
-What aids and references do we rely on today?
-Can we practice taking those away and adapting?
-Do we have “backup plans” for operating in nighttime, low viz, ATON discreps, etc.?
- 124. Compare communications issues in 1997 and today.**
-How much time passed between the initial call and when the CG asked for a position?
-Station watchstanders used to sleep in the comms room to overhear any traffic from the Group
 -Today, Sector could be conversing with a vessel in the middle of the night for 30 minutes without anyone at the station being aware of it
-There was no Rescue 21 in 1997, so targeting a vessel’s location using radio lines of bearing was imprecise
 -This highlights the importance of R21 Geo Display and promptly asking for lat/long positions
-Simple advice to have a vessel standby and wait in deep water can buy time to gather all the information and prevent a worsening situation
- 125. Why should we get an accurate position and observe the bar before launching?**
-The GALE RUNNER’s true position might have been ascertained before the 44363 crossed the bar near James Island
-Even today, vessels often pass geographic references that don’t match their precise location
-This information can impact asset and crew selection, and overall sense of urgency
- 126. Compare weather forecasting and reporting in 1997 and today.**
-None of the 1997 crew or command could have gotten on their phone and seen the forecast or buoy readings
-Despite modern technology, there is still plenty of information that we need to pass manually today
- 10. Final questions or comments?**

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For more on the CG 44363 disaster: www.uscg44363.com



12 FEBRUARY 1997

A training remembering the CG 44363 disaster

SA WINGO



(scan for diagrams)

Introduction

- Sailing vessel GALE RUNNER is transiting from San Francisco, CA to Puget Sound, WA with a crew of two
- CG Station Quillayute River (**QR**) in La Push, WA is the next station north of Station Grays Harbor. It:
 - Has a BMCM Officer in Charge (**OIC**) and BM1 Executive Petty Officer (**XPO**)
 - Has two 44' motor lifeboats (**MLB**)
 - Reports to Group/Air Station Port Angeles (**PA**), WA, (the 1997 equivalent of a Sector)
 - Has a hazardous river bar crossing in order to get into the harbor at La Push, WA
 - Has a set of stadium-like "bar lights" fixed on James Island next to the bar for night transits
 - In February 1997, they are inoperative
 - The Officer of the Day (**OOD**) reports to a Surfman Duty Officer (**SDO**)
- On 11-12 February the duty section is comprised of 10 ready boat crew members, a watchstander, and several additional non-rated members
- On 11 February, Dr. Dennis Noble, a retired Coast Guard Senior Chief Petty Officer and notable history author reports to the station for a few days to stay on board while researching a book he is writing on lifeboat stations
- The following facts are taken verbatim from the USCG Administrative Investigation and Dr. Dennis Noble's book
- Reading takes about 40 minutes with 14 speakers and one facilitator
- Consider turning off the lights and having any members without speaking parts close their eyes.
- Each reader should say their **highlighted parts by speaking the time, name, and details, for example**, "At 0700 FA DaMello assumes the station's communications watch..."

Tuesday 11 FEB 1997

Time	Member	Details
Morning	GALE RUNNER Sailing Vessel	Is in Westport, WA and stops in at CG Station Grays Harbor. GALE RUNNER receives the weather forecast and decides to get underway to continue north.
0700	FA DaMello Comms watchstander	Assumes the Station's communications watch until 0700 on 12FEB97.
1640	FA DaMello Comms watchstander	Receives the updated NOAA weather forecast which calls for NW wind 35-40kt and seas building to 14'. For 12 February, the forecast predicts NW winds 30kt and combined seas 18'.
Approx. 1730	BM1 Placido SDO/ 1 st Boat Surfman	<p>Gets together with OOD BM2 Bosley and drives to the station's bar overlook to observe last light bar conditions. He observes that seas aren't bad and he feels comfortable going home on recall for the night, about 15 minutes away.</p> <p>He later said, "From the look of the bar and what Bosley had told me about the weather, there was no need for me to stay aboard."</p>
1740	BM2 Bosley OOD/ 1 st Boat Coxswain	Views the NOAA forecast on the computer and logs his initials, "D.A.B." to acknowledge it.

Evening	GALE RUNNER Sailing Vessel	Begins to encounter heavy weather and decides to head for the QR bar entrance to seek safe harbor.
After 2130	BM2 Bosley OOD/ 1 st Boat Coxswain	Does his evening round with MK3 Schlimme and FN Matthews and drives out to the bar overlook to check things out. FN Matthews recalls BM2 and MK3 saying that, “they [hope] they [don’t] get a case [tonight].”
Between 2130- 2200	BMCM LaForge OIC/ 2nd Boat Surfman	Returns from an appointment in Port Angeles and checks in with the OOD at the station. BM2 Bosley does not pass the 1640 weather forecast, but tells the OIC that the weather is supposed to pick up overnight. Without knowing of the forecast details, the OIC agrees with the OOD that the ready boat Surfman can remain on recall for the night. The OIC leaves for his home, 5 minutes away from the station.
2130	Dr. Noble CG History Author	Finishes his conversations with the crew and goes to bed.
Approx. 2200	BM2 Bosley OOD/ 1 st Boat Coxswain	Calls the SDO who remembers Bosley saying, “Nothing [is] going on. The winds [have] picked up a little bit... the weather [is] supposed to pick up later [tomorrow].”
2200	FA DaMello Comms watchstander	Passes the radio guard to Group PA for the night and sets up the cot to sleep in the comms room.

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Approx. 0015	GALE RUNNER Sailing Vessel	Hails Station QR on VHF 16 to obtain a bar report. Telecommunications Specialist Third Class (TC3) Marshall at Group PA answers for Station QR, consults the status board and reports, “no restrictions.”
	FA DaMello Comms watchstander	Wakes up to the radio traffic between Group and the GALE RUNNER and notices high winds outside. The Station’s anemometer is registering gusts of 50kt. On his own initiative, DaMello remembers the 1640 forecast for 18’ seas and intercoms TC3 Marshall at Group to tell her about the wind he’s seeing and the forecast for seas. He says he thinks that if the OOD knew about the 50kt gusts, then he would put a restriction on the bar.
	Group Port Angeles	Watchstander TC3 Marshall tells FA DaMello to hail the GAIL RUNNER and pass them the current weather conditions.
	FA DaMello Comms watchstander	Hails the sailing vessel and asks, “Are you crossing the bar?”
	GALE RUNNER Sailing Vessel	Crewmember Marcia Infante replies, “Affirmative. We are at the entrance now.” She doesn’t pass a GPS position.
	FA DaMello Comms watchstander	Passes the latest winds and advises the GALE RUNNER that the bar could be breaking. Next, FA DaMello calls BM2 Bosley in the OOD room to brief him of the weather and situation.
	BM2 Bosley OOD/ 1 st Boat Coxswain	Comes into comms and asks DaMello if he has GALE RUNNER’s position. DaMello says that the caller has not relayed their position. Bosley tells DaMello to call the GALE RUNNER and obtain their position. Bosley phones SDO BM1 Placido at his home and informs him of the radio call and that he thinks that it’s a bad idea for the sailboat to come across the bar. BM1 asks if he has a position for the sailboat. To keep listening for information, Bosely places the SDO on hold.

	FA DaMello Comms watchstander	Asks the GALE RUNNER for their position. He hears, "We're at 47, 51..." and then static silence.
	GALE RUNNER Sailing Vessel	Crewmember Ken Schlag is steering the sailing vessel and Marcia Infante is on the radio. Suddenly, the sailboat is struck by a rogue wave, knocked down, and dismantled. The radio antenna is damaged and Ken Schlag is thrown overboard. He is tethered with a safety harness and manages to pull himself back onboard. Portholes are blown out by the wave and the GALE RUNNER begins taking on water.
	FA DaMello Comms watchstander	Tries again to hail the boat, "Sailing vessel, this is Quillayute River on 22, over."
Approx. 00:26	GALE RUNNER Sailing Vessel	Crewmember Marcia Infante breaks the silence, "MAYDAY! MAYDAY! THIS IS SAILING VESSEL GALE RUNNER! U.S. COAST GUARD! WE'RE TAKING ON WATER!"
	GALE RUNNER Sailing Vessel	Crewmember Marcia Infante repeats her mayday calls every few minutes. She looks at the GPS plotter to reference the boat's position, but sees a black screen and figures that the GPS is broken. In fact, the GPS is in screensaver mode and she could have pushed any button to bring the chart and GPS position back up on the display.
	FA DaMello Comms watchstander	Only hears static after the mayday call. Group also hears static and suggests Station switch radio sites. DaMello says that he has already tried that.
Approx. 0026	BM2 Bosley OOD/ 1 st Boat Coxswain	Has gathered this key information in a very short period: there is a sailing vessel that says it is at the entrance to the bar, it has begun taking on water, and the CG has lost communications with it. BM2 Bosley hits the SAR alarm and pipes, "Ready boat crew lay to the ready boat! Sailboat on the bar taking on water."
	BM2 Bosley OOD/ 1 st Boat Coxswain	Takes the SDO phone call off hold and says, "I'm heading for the door."
	BM1 Placido SDO/ 1 st Boat Surfman	Replies, "Call Master Chief [the OIC]. I'm right behind you" and gets in his car to drive back to the station.
		Later, BM1 Placido said that, "If I had known how bad the bar was, I would have told Bosley to wait until I could get to the station."
	SA Wingo 1 st Boat Crewmember	Runs out of his barracks room with SN Miniken and down to the boat.
	Group Port Angeles	Watchstander TC3 Marshall passes that the Group has received more radio transmissions from a frantic woman who doesn't understand Station QR's instructions.
		Group's Duty Officer briefs the Group Commanding Officer, CAPT Volk, at the direction of the Group Senior Duty Officer. The Group is still trying to gather information and is not yet trying to launch a helicopter.
0030	FA DaMello Comms watchstander	Calls and notifies BMCM LaForge of the case and BMCM comes back to the station from his home.
0031	FA DaMello Comms watchstander	Recalls the second boat crew in accordance with the unit's standing orders.
	BM2 Bosley OOD/ 1 st Boat Coxswain	Is one of the first down to the ready boat, CG 44363, and urgently wants to get underway. He runs back up to the station and yells, "Where is my crew?!"

	BMCM LaForge OIC/ 2nd Boat Surfman	Stops at the bar overlook to scan for signs of a sailboat before arriving back at the Station. He notes that there is reduced visibility, but that he can still see the "Q" buoy a mile from the bar. Winds are 30kt with stronger gusts.
0034	BM2 Bosley OOD/ 1 st Boat Coxswain	Gets CG 44363 underway for the SAR case. BM2 Bosley doesn't brief his crew on the mission and the four are all wearing Mustang anti-exposure suits. If he believed the sailboat taking on water was on the bar, he would have thought the situation was very urgent.
	SA Wingo 1 st Boat Crewmember	Hands out pyro vests and SN Miniken hands out surf belts as the boat gets underway. Wingo and Miniken clip into D-rings and later, SA Wingo said that he had presumed MK3 Schlimme clipped in, but he wasn't certain if BM2 Bosley wore his belt or clipped it in. No one on 44363 puts on a helmet, even though policy requires them to and no one speaks up about it. Bosley's helmet was clipped behind his coxswain chair and everyone else's helmets were stowed below in their SAR bags.
	BMCM LaForge OIC/ 2nd Boat Surfman	Is still at the overlook and observes the 44363 leaving the boat basin. He does not see its navigation lights energized. The OIC radios the 44363 and informs them that he does not see a sailboat in the immediate area and orders BM2 Bosley, "To check out the bar to see if they could cross." The OIC heads back to the station.
0043	Group Port Angeles	Watchstander TC3 Marshall intercoms Station QR to have the ready boat standby because they think the case might be a hoax. There has been a rash of hoax calls with a young voice in northwestern Washington over the past two weeks.
	MK3 Schlimme 1 st Boat Engineer	Comes over to the starboard side of the 44363 as it gets underway, adjusts the radar, and then returns the engineer's spot on the port side of the coxswain. While outbound, he reminds BM2 Bosley to not let the lube oil pressures get too high.
	BM2 Bosley OOD/ 1 st Boat Coxswain	Replies, "Yeah, I got it."
	SN Miniken 1 st Boat Crewmember	Operates the port spotlight.
	SA Wingo 1 st Boat Crewmember	Is ordered by BM2 Bosley to man the starboard spotlight and illuminate Wash Rock.
	MK3 Schlimme 1 st Boat Engineer	Yells at Bosley, "Let's get the fuck out of here," just before passing Wash Rock.
	BM2 Bosley OOD/ 1 st Boat Coxswain	Replies, "Fuck that!" Schlimme may have been indicating a desire to go back to the station or instead, to go out to deeper water past the bar.
	FA Ballard Non-rate	Assists FA DaMello in comms and calls the 44363 to pass the Group's instructions to have the ready boat standby.
	BM2 Bosley OOD/ 1 st Boat Coxswain	Responds, "Standby, we're a little busy," likely because BM2 Bosley is focused on negotiating the rough seas on the bar while heading outbound. Regarding the possibility of a hoax, Bosley tells the crew, "I hope not!"
Approx. 0044	SA Wingo 1 st Boat Crewmember	Is told by BM2 Bosley to aim the spotlight starboard towards James Island around the time the 44363 is at Wash Rock. Bosley wants to keep the island off the starboard beam. The 44363 is 100-150 yards off of the island.
0045	BM2 Bosley OOD/ 1 st Boat Coxswain	Radios the station that the 44363 has safely crossed the bar and that it is 16-18' past the bar and evening out. Winds are from the WSW.

	Dr. Noble CG History Author	Joins BMCM LaForge on another trip out to the bar overlook. While driving there, the two hear the 44363 say they made it safely across the bar. BMCM LaForge thinks that the 44363 is likely turning away from James Island and toward the sea buoy into deeper (safer) water.
	SA Wingo 1 st Boat Crewmember	Hears Bosley radio the station that it is 15-16' out (a factual inconsistency) and later said, "I was about to call BS. Those waves were a lot higher than 15-16' and it wasn't getting better, but I was like, 'oh well.'"
		The 44363 is not transiting south on the safe route outbound to the "Q" buoy, but is actually being set north towards the edge of James Island.
		SA Wingo spots a rock and yells, "Rock starboard side! Ten feet!" The boat hits something.
Approx. 0048	BM2 Bosley OOD/ 1 st Boat Coxswain	Yells, "What was that!?" Someone else shouts, "Wave port side!"
	SA Wingo 1 st Boat Crewmember	Sees an enormous wave off the port bow and the boat is rolled over to starboard. SA Wingo hits his head on something and tastes blood. The boat rights itself with its bow pointing towards James Island. When the boat comes up, SA Wingo is twisted in his belt and wrapped up in the canvas dodger. The mast is bent flat to the port side. Wingo reaches for the spotlight and realizes it has broken off the top of the cabin and is gone. The motor lifeboat turns towards the island with way on. The 44363 has been underway for approximately 14 minutes.
Approx. 0048	BM2 Bosley OOD/ 1 st Boat Coxswain	Radios, "Capsized and disoriented."
	FA DaMello Comms watchstander	Hears the call about the boat being capsized, but he and Group PA are confused if the caller is the GALE RUNNER or the 44363. Group and Station hail both boats.
	CG 44393 2 nd Boat	Is the second boat and the recalled crew for it begins arriving at the Station. They begin to dress out in anti-exposure suits and then change their minds, opting for dry suits. The crew heads down to the boat and passes the communications room. They overhear, "Capsized..." but think it is in reference to the sail boat.
	MK3 Schlimme 1 st Boat Engineer	Yells, "We're still on the bar!"
	BM2 Bosley OOD/ 1 st Boat Coxswain	Replies, "Find me buoy 3!"
	SA Wingo 1 st Boat Crewmember	Can see the lights of the town of La Push, but doesn't see Buoy 3 which is too far back around the eastern side of James Island to be visible.
	BMCM LaForge OIC/ 2nd Boat Surfman	And Dr. Noble hear the 44363 say they rolled. The OIC can't see the MLB's navigation lights, but for a moment sees its spotlight sweeping rapidly towards the south from what he thinks is the seaward side of James Island. The OIC now knows the 44363 is in trouble (too close to rocky James Island) and calls the station to get the second boat underway. He also tells the station to call Group PA and get a helicopter dispatched.
	FA DaMello Comms watchstander	Calls the OIC back and passes that Group's duty officer wants to talk with him because Group is still concerned the call is a hoax.

	BMCM LaForge OIC/ 2nd Boat Surfman	And Dr. Noble return to the Station and the OIC tells the SDO that the 44363 is in trouble. BMCM LaForge phones Group PA and says he has, "A serious situation and still [needs] the HH-65A helicopter launched" and also requests an HH-60 helicopter from Astoria, OR.
0049	GALE RUNNER Sailing Vessel	Passes their full position to Group PA.
Approx. 0049	SA Wingo 1 st Boat Crewmember	Hears someone shout something. The boat is hit by a wave on the port quarter and pitch-poles, end over end. Upon re-righting itself, the 44363 rests on the rocks and he knows it is out of the water because the engine noise is different. The mast and entire top of the cabin have sheared off. BM2 Bosley and SN Miniken are gone. The ship's clock recovered from the wreckage of the 44363 was stopped at exactly 00h:49m:03s. CG 44363 has been underway for about 15 minutes.
	MK3 Schlimme 1 st Boat Engineer	Takes control of the 44363.
	SA Wingo 1 st Boat Crewmember	Panics and says, "We have to get out of here" and begins to unclip his surf belt.
	MK3 Schlimme 1 st Boat Engineer	Convinces Wingo that it's safest to stay with the boat and to clip back in. He asks Wingo for the boat's radio and tries to call the station with their position.
	SA Wingo 1 st Boat Crewmember	Looks down at the radio while Schlimme makes the call and sees that it's broken. Wingo realizes that MK3 Schlimme "Was just doing it to calm me down, and it worked because suddenly I was super calm. He saved my life by keeping me on the boat."
	MK3 Schlimme 1 st Boat Engineer	Tries to get himself and SA Wingo down into the forward compartment of the 44363, but can't because the handle of the watertight door is jammed from the boat's impact with rocks. Seeing another wave approaching, Schlimme yells, "Hold on!"
	SA Wingo 1 st Boat Crewmember	Feels the boat roll for a third time after the 44363 is knocked off the rock it was resting on and pushed against the rock cliffs. Underwater, he notes a "tremendous quiet." When the 44363 rights again, MK3 Schlimme is gone and Wingo sees a body float by the boat. He can't throw a life ring to it because both life rings are missing.
		CG 44363 has been underway for about 20 minutes.
		Wingo feels the boat drifting backwards and banging along the rocks into the cove on James Island. He sees a strobe light flashing in the cove, grabs the strobe light from his pyro vest, and turns it on. SA Wingo remembers that he thinks he placed the boat's engines in neutral, but doesn't secure them. Wingo grabs his MK-79 flare kit, fires five flares into the sky and two horizontally towards the beach to illuminate it. Like Schlimme, he tries to get into the forward compartment where there is a portable VHF radio and more flares, but also finds the door jammed.
Approx. 0055	BMCM LaForge OIC/ 2nd Boat Surfman	Is off the phone with Group PA after asking for helicopters and someone at the station tells him they've spotted red flares. The OIC finds Dr. Noble and says, "Let's go back to the bar."
	BM1 Placido SDO/ 1 st Boat Surfman	Shouts, "I'm going" and runs down to the 44393.
	Dr. Noble CG History Author	Parks at the bar overlook with BMCM LaForge and sees a red flare in the sky.

	BM1 Placido SDO/ 1 st Boat Surfman	Gets down to the 44393 and gives a quick brief on the mission. At this point, the second boat crew doesn't know the 44363 is in trouble. He later said that, "I wanted to stick my nose close to the bar and look around before trying to get across. I had no Goddam clue what the bar was doing."
0058	CG 44393 2 nd Boat	Gets underway with BM1 Placido as Surfman and three other crewmen. By chance, BM3 Martin is on second boat, but should have been on the ready boat. Because of his pregnant wife, the surfmen had given him as much time on second boat as possible. CG 44363 got underway approximately 24 minutes earlier.
	BM1 Placido SDO/ 1 st Boat Surfman	Sees a red flare in the sky shortly after leaving the boat basin. He thinks it could be from the 44363. He decides that they must cross the bar.
	Dr. Noble CG History Author	And BMCM LaForge have been at the overlook for a few minutes and see the 44393 leaving the protection of the river. The OIC thinks he can help keep track of the 44393 and advise them if they begin to get set towards James Island. In his own words, Dr. Noble remembers seeing the, "Small white boat rising. Rising. Rising. Rising until it seemed to stand on its stern. White water almost enveloping the small boat. Then the plunge downward."
	BMCM LaForge OIC/ 2nd Boat Surfman	Uses the VHF radio in his truck to communicate back and forth with the 44393 on the bar. As the 44393 heads farther out to sea, he can tell that the length of the swells underneath the boat are lengthening out. He is able to see the 44393 getting set north towards James Island and advises the boat. Dr. Noble and the OIC see more red flares from the western part of James Island.
Approx. 0100	Group Port Angeles	<p>Duty Officer first called the Group's Operations Officer around 0030. He now calls the Group's Senior Duty Officer (SDO) in his duty room and informs him of the case. The SDO tells him to hit the SAR alarm at the Air Station.</p> <p>Next, the Group Duty Officer calls the Group Commanding Officer again and tells him that the helicopter is launching because they have lost communications with the 44363 and have spotted red flares. Until that time, the CO did not know that 44363 had gotten underway from Station Quillayute River. Group CO CAPT Volk drives into the Air Station and assigns a non-rate in the command center to scribe everything he sees and hears as the case goes on.</p>
0107	SA Wingo 1 st Boat Crewmember	<p>Floats with the 44363, gauging his progress into the cove by the illumination from the boat's aft deck light light. He notices the time on his watch: 0107.</p> <p>Starts praying, "Not a prayer of all the things I would or wouldn't do if I was saved, it was just an all-out cry for help: 'Please get my boat to shore.'" The boat's stern swings around and points towards the beach at the far back of the cove.</p> <p>SA Wingo thinks he sees a tree towards shore, unclips his surf belt, hops down into knee-deep water, and wades into the beach. CG 44363 comes to its final resting place at the back of the northern cove in James Island.</p>
0110	CG 44393 2 nd Boat	Crosses the bar.
0110	Group Port Angeles	Watchstander TC3 Marshall transmits an Urgent Marine Information Broadcast.

	BM1 Placido SDO/ 1 st Boat Surfman	Remembers that his, "Crew performed like they were supposed to... They constantly fed me information. I felt like a machine. I absorbed the information and my body performed the necessary motions." Eventually he sees flares both to the north (from the 44363) and from the south (from the GALE RUNNER).
		He remembers, "I knew which ones were ours. I started to push back in and had to decide: Should I go for the sailboat, or our boat? It was one of the hardest decisions I ever had to make. I [later] saw the helicopter starting to search for our boat. I knew the helo could probably help out our boat better than I could, so I headed for the sailboat."
0121	BM1 Placido SDO/ 1 st Boat Surfman	Radios, "We are on handheld. Our antenna was damaged by a breaker."
	BMCM LaForge OIC/ 2nd Boat Surfman	Advises the 44393 to head to the "Q" sea buoy and stay in deep water.
	CG 44393 2 nd Boat	Eventually depletes the battery on their portable VHF radio and loses all communications with the station and BMCM LaForge at the overlook. They proceed to the "Q" buoy.
	BMCM LaForge OIC/ 2nd Boat Surfman	Calls Group again for helicopter assistance because he has a sailboat in distress, a missing MLB, and another MLB he's lost communications with.
0123	CG 6589 Air Station Port Angeles	Takes off from Air Station PA. BM2 Bosley, MK3 Schlimme, and SN Miniken are already dead.
	BMCM LaForge OIC/ 2nd Boat Surfman	And Dr. Noble return to the station.
After 0130	Group Port Angeles	Commanding Officer (CO) CAPT Volk calls nearby units to request additional surface assets. The 110' cutter CUTTYHUNK is in Neah Bay and is dispatched towards La Push. CAPT Volk calls CWO2 Robert Coster, the CO of the Station Neah Bay, and asks if he can send one of his lifeboats south to help. CWO2 Coster drives in to his station and reviews the conditions. He makes the difficult decision that he cannot safely send his crews. CAPT Volk conferences with the CO of Group Astoria and CWO2 Randy Lewis, the CO of Station Grays Harbor. CWO2 Lewis also declines sending his station's 52' MLB due to the conditions. Later, CAPT Volk says that both stations' CO's, "Made the right decision."
0157	CG 6589 Air Station Port Angeles	Arrives on scene, is briefed about the situation by BMCM LaForge, and commences a search near James Island.
0159	GALE RUNNER Sailing Vessel	Passes their accurate position to the Coast Guard after reestablishing communications. They are not on the bar, but farther south near "The Needles," a group of jagged rock features sticking out from the ocean, about three miles from the bar.
0201	BMCM LaForge OIC/ 2nd Boat Surfman	Orders a beach search for survivors and several crewmembers, local police, and National Park Rangers set out for First Beach in anti-exposure coveralls and helmets.

0204	CG 6003 Air Station Astoria	Launches from Air Station Astoria.
	BMCM LaForge OIC/ 2nd Boat Surfman	Has to decide where to send resources: to the GALE RUNNER or to James Island for his lifeboat crew? He radios the CG 6589 back and recommends they leave James Island and proceed to the GALE RUNNER's position because it is only minutes away from the rocks. The OIC advises the watchstander to keep off the radio as much as possible because the helicopter may only have a brief window to transmit that they're in trouble too. BMCM LaForge has 14 lives and three Coast Guard assets in his hands.
0205	CG 6589 Air Station Port Angeles	Diverts from the vicinity of James Island and flies south towards The Needles. To make an approach on the GALE RUNNER, they must fly over, around, and through the 190' tall rock islands. The helicopter is being buffeted by winds and keeps fighting to make new approaches as the sailboat is washed over by breaking waves and drifts between the rock pinnacles.
	FA DaMello Comms watchstander	Is relieved of the communications watch to help the beach party. At First Beach, he and two other members run down the beach, dodging waves.
	SA Wingo 1 st Boat Crewmember	Sees a helicopter searchlight in the distance and CG 44393, and activates the night end of his MK-124 signal flare.
0219	CG 6589 Air Station Port Angeles	Arrives on scene with the GALE RUNNER to commence the hoist.
0227	CG 6585 Air Station Port Angeles	Launches from Air Station PA.
0234	CG 44393 2 nd Boat	Arrives at the "Q" buoy and is tasked by the Station to stay there. They remain there for about six hours until daylight and the chance to return across the bar.
0242	CG 6589 Air Station Port Angeles	Overstresses its hoist, but manages to hoist both crewmembers off the GALE RUNNER.
0251	CG 6589 Air Station Port Angeles	Lands at Station QR's ball field to pass the survivors to an ambulance and depart for Station Neah Bay to refuel.
0253	CG 6003 Air Station Astoria	Arrives on scene and spots a strobe light flashing from the cliff at the back of the cove on James Island.
0320	FA DaMello Comms watchstander	On First Beach sees a flashing light down the beach and starts running towards it. While running, DaMello and another member of the beach party are hit by a log that surges towards them on a wave. The wave knocks DaMello down and the log pins him underwater. FN DaMello sees his life and family flashing before his eyes and takes a breath of seawater. DaMello's arm is dislocated by the log, but it releases him and he gets to his feet. The light seen up the beach belongs to a National Park Ranger helping with the search.
	BMCM LaForge OIC/ 2nd Boat Surfman	Heads out to First Beach with another beach party. He is overheard saying to himself, "I should have trained them more, I should have trained them more."
0334	SN Miniken 1 st Boat Crewmember	Is found unconscious without socks or boots on by the other beach party on First Beach. The beach crew performs CPR at the scene and an ambulance takes him to the hospital in Forks, WA. Taking shifts with compressions, the team of responders gives him CPR for a total of four hours.

0432	CG 6003 Air Station Astoria	Observes BM2 Bosley and MK3 Schlimme floating in the cove on James Island. They request the county's high angle rescue team be contacted to rescue SA Wingo on the cliff.
0505	CG 44393 2 nd Boat	Loses communications with the Station after its portable VHF radio dies.
0508	CG 6013 Air Station Astoria	Leaves Air Station Astoria, OR to assist in the search.
0630	CG 6013 Air Station Astoria	Deploys a rescue swimmer to the cliff SA Wingo is hanging onto. SA Wingo is in good condition.
0633	CG 6585 Air Station Port Angeles	Transfers two additional portable VHF radios to 44393.
0734	CG 44393 2 nd Boat	Safely crosses the bar back into the Quillayute River and moors at Station Quillayute River. They have been underway for six hours and 36 minutes. Until they moor and see the other slip empty, they are unaware that CG 44363 has been lost.
Approx. 0815	CG 6013 Air Station Astoria	Deploys the high-angle rescue team to retrieve SA Wingo from the cliff and hoists him to safety.
0932	BM2 Bosley OOD/ 1 st Boat Coxswain	And MK3 Schlimme are recovered from the cove on James Island by 6013's rescue swimmer. The rescue swimmer states that the wreck of 44363 is in "bad shape" and is leaking fuel.
1030	FA Ballard Non-rate	And the rest of the station are notified that SN Miniken has been pronounced dead at Forks Community Hospital.
1050	CG 6013 Air Station Astoria	Hoists the remaining five rescue team members and its rescue swimmer from the beach. The helicopter drops off the remaining Clallam County rescue team and departs for Air Station Astoria.

Aftermath

Findings from the official report, signed by CG Commandant ADM Kramek

BM2 Bosley OOD/ 1 st Boat Coxswain	Is found by the investigators to, "...not have enough rough weather bar crossings at night in a 44' MLB to prepare him for the conditions that MLB 44363 encountered on 12 February 1997 and should not have attempted to cross the bar."
	The investigators are of the opinion that BM2 Bosley viewed the updated weather forecast and had ample time to pass it to the SDO or OIC. Had either of them received this information, a Surfman would have been on board when the call came in.
MK3 Schlimme 1 st Boat Engineer	And SN Miniken, and BM2 Bosley's autopsies list their cause of death as blunt force trauma to the head.
BMCM LaForge OIC/ 2nd Boat Surfman	Was found by the investigators to have "made several key decisions... which increased the chances of survival for both the sailboat and the MLB 4363 crews."

Investigation	<p>Finds that there were no mechanical issues with 44363 to cause the accident. The boat is so badly damaged it is cut into three pieces and hoisted off the island by a helicopter for disposal.</p> <p>According to investigators, “The proximate cause of this casualty was the coxswain’s failure to safely navigate MLB 44363, causing the boat to capsize and founder in the surf conditions near James Island.”</p> <p>But the report also highlighted excessive personnel turnover at the unit. In February 1997, “only two non-rates had been at the station longer than one year, and because of ...high turnover of personnel, a majority of the Station training is focused on providing basic, introductory skills to help new personnel get their boat crew qualifications... Due to the high turnover of personnel, the Station’s operational readiness was diminished in the area of advanced skills/techniques.”</p> <p>At this time, of the 17 crewmembers filling boat crew positions at the station, 12 had been there less than one year (~70%). Also, despite four Surfman billets, only three surfmen were assigned at the unit, including the OIC and XPO.</p> <p>A 1961 editorial about the TRIUMPH-MERMAID disaster at Stations Point Adams/ Cape Disappointment noted similar concerns about crew inexperience at those units.</p>
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Discussion

- 127. What was it like “playing” your specific part?**
- 128. What do you feel when the SAR alarm goes off?**
 - Do our risk management tools help here?
 - How do you handle this?
- 129. What was the culture of response and operations like in 1997? How is it today?**
 - Coast Guard attitudes about risk
 - “You have to go out, but you don’t have to come back” (then)
 - “Us, ours, them, theirs” (now: balancing risk-taking with being risk-averse)
 - Crew selection, support and oversight from experienced SDOs, etc.
 - The Coast Guard has supported and related to its small boat stations
- 130. What parts of the Coast Guard system were related to this mishap? Are they the same or different today?**
 - Surfman assignment process
 - Risk management culture/tools
 - Station experience level/qualification process
 - Station staffing
 - Group nighttime radio guard
- 131. What were the effects of high turnover?**
 - Training focused on basic qualifications instead of advanced skills
 - Today’s D13 surf stations have ~40% annual turnover, exacerbated with non-rate transfers for A-School

- 132. Are you prepared to operate without the normal aids and references you rely on?**
-In 1997, crews never practiced nighttime rough bar crossings without bar lights
-What aids and references do we rely on today?
-Can we practice taking those away and adapting?
-Do we have “backup plans” for operating in nighttime, low viz, ATON discreps, etc.?
- 133. Compare communications issues in 1997 and today.**
-How much time passed between the initial call and when the CG asked for a position?
-Station watchstanders used to sleep in the comms room to overhear any traffic from the Group
 -Today, Sector could be conversing with a vessel in the middle of the night for 30 minutes without anyone at the station being aware of it
-There was no Rescue 21 in 1997, so targeting a vessel’s location using radio lines of bearing was imprecise
 -This highlights the importance of R21 Geo Display and promptly asking for lat/long positions
-Simple advice to have a vessel standby and wait in deep water can buy time to gather all the information and prevent a worsening situation
- 134. Why should we get an accurate position and observe the bar before launching?**
-The GALE RUNNER’s true position might have been ascertained before the 44363 crossed the bar near James Island
-Even today, vessels often pass geographic references that don’t match their precise location
-This information can impact asset and crew selection, and overall sense of urgency
- 135. Compare weather forecasting and reporting in 1997 and today.**
-None of the 1997 crew or command could have gotten on their phone and seen the forecast or buoy readings
-Despite modern technology, there is still plenty of information that we need to pass manually today
- 10. Final questions or comments?**

References

CDR Hasselbalch, James M. *Investigation into the Capsizing and Subsequent Loss of MLB 44363 and the Death of Three Coast Guard Members That Occurred at Coast Guard Station Quillayute River on 12 FEB 1997*. March, 1997 (including reviews by RADM J. David Spade and ADM Robert E. Kramek).

Noble, Dennis L. *The Rescue of the Gale Runner*. University Press of Florida, 2002.



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