



Accident Report

Rita

Foundering at Cape Jackson,
Marlborough Sounds on
15 February 2004



REPORT NO.: 04 1074

VESSEL NAME: *RITA*

Casualty Details:

Date of Casualty:	15 February 2004
Time of Casualty:	2245 hours New Zealand Daylight Time (NZDT)
Casualty Type:	Foundering
Casualty Location:	Cape Jackson, Marlborough Sounds
Investigator:	Domonic Venz



REPORT NO.: 04 1074

VESSEL NAME: *RITA*

Vessel Details:

Vessel Name:	<i>Rita</i>
Vessel Category:	Power
Length (m):	12



SUMMARY

On 15 February 2004, **Rita** issued a distress call advising they were drifting in heavy seas. Three crew members were picked up from the vessel's liferaft early the following morning. A fourth man, who was in a 3.5 metre dinghy, was missing and a search was launched. The upturned dinghy was located on 16 February with no sign of the missing man who is presumed drowned.



KEY EVENTS

- 1.1 At 0700 hours New Zealand Daylight Time (NZDT) on 15 February 2004, the recreational vessel **Rita** departed Havelock with 4 persons on board bound for Resolution Bay in the Marlborough Sounds. One of the four was the owner, and another was designated as Master for the voyage.
- 1.2 Passage was made out of Pelorus Sound through Allen Strait and into Guards Bay. The weather was deteriorating during the latter part of this passage and it was decided to seek shelter in Hikoekoea Bay (See Appendix I - Approximate course of vessel).
- 1.3 At 1100 hours, they attempted to anchor in Hikoekoea Bay but the southerly winds were too strong and the vessel dragged its anchor. Upon retrieval of the anchor they relocated to a nearby mooring in the same bay and made fast to it (See Appendix I - Position A).
- 1.4 They stayed on the mooring until 1600 hours, during which time they received the VHF 1333 hours forecast for sea area Cook. The three surviving crewmembers state that the weather conditions had abated during their time on the mooring.
- 1.5 At 1600 hours, they departed Guards Bay and made passage around Alligator Head towards Cape Jackson.
- 1.6 At 1800 hours, **Rita** rounded Cape Jackson, close in under the light, and proceeded south into the outer Queen Charlotte Sound.
- 1.7 After the **Rita** had travelled about 1.5 nautical miles (nm) and had Waihi Point abeam to starboard, they encountered 3 metre southerly swells with approximately 50 knots (kts) of southerly wind. During this time, the Master was unable to keep the vessel from being blown off-shore due to a combination of an intermittent failure of the hydraulic steering and strong winds. It was decided by all that they should turn around and double Cape Jackson and head into the relatively calmer waters of Port Gore (See Appendix I - Position B - Approximate turn back position).
- 1.8 Shortly after the vessel had turned around, the main engine revolutions started to fluctuate and the engine completely stopped a number of times. However, on each occasion, they were able to restart it successfully. During this time, one person went to use the head (toilet) down below and noticed an amount of water on the lower deck. The owner went to the engine room and found a moderate amount of water in the bilges. A 12-volt electric bilge pump was activated but was unable to stem the flow of water. Lifejackets were handed out at this point and donned by all onboard.
- 1.9 The main engine continued to run roughly and was still stopping completely for short periods of time. At 2025 hours, the Master put out a Mayday call on VHF channel 16 giving their approximate position as 40° 59'S 174° 19'E and requesting immediate assistance (See Appendix I - Position C - Mayday position).
- 1.10 At 2033 hours, the roll on-roll off vessel **Kent**, advised that they were 30 minutes away from this position and would make best speed to assist. During this time the Owner went below to the engine room and stemmed the inflow of water using the main engine 'Jabsco' mechanical pump via the gearbox cooling system.
- 1.11 At 2037 hours, **Rita** advised **Kent** of their position which was given as 41°59.66'S 174° 18.3'E and stated they were heading for Port Gore for better shelter.
- 1.12 At 2159 hours, the owner and crew were still attempting to pump out the water but thought things looked "fairly hopeless". Their EPIRB was activated as a result of advice from Maritime radio and asked **Kent** to keep coming towards their position.



- 1.13 At 2212 hours, **Rita** informed **Kent** that they were having trouble with the hydraulic steering and were manoeuvring with difficulty. **Kent** had **Rita** on radar and was still making best speed towards them (See Appendix I - Position D).
- 1.14 At 2228 hours, **Kent** was in a position where **Rita** was 50 metres to starboard and ahead. **Kent** put both main engines full astern to stop in the water. **Kent** was unable to manoeuvre closer to **Rita** so asked if they could come over to her. **Rita** started to move towards **Kent** from the starboard side and as she went past the bow, she lost main engine revolutions again and made heavy contact with the bulbous bow of **Kent**. She then scrapped down the port side of **Kent** until she became entangled in part of the stern vehicle ramp on the port quarter. **Rita** was severely damaged by the heavy motion of **Kent** in the large swell that was running (See Appendix I - Position E).
- 1.15 At 2235 hours, Police ordered the crew of **Rita** to abandon ship and take to the life raft.
- 1.16 After about one minute, **Rita** broke free from **Kent** and started to drift out to sea with the wind. During this time, the Owner and the Master were co-ordinating getting the liferaft over the stern and inflated. The Master also told them to get the dinghy off the deck and into the water. The liferaft inflated astern of the sinking **Rita** and a rope off the raft (possibly the painter), became entangled in the stern rail of **Rita**.
- 1.17 Two members got into the life-raft and two got into the dinghy about 3 metres downwind. The dinghy capsized and one person from the dinghy swam to the life raft to join the others. The second person righted the dinghy and got back into it. One of the members in the liferaft managed to find the knife and cut the rope to **Rita**. The liferaft started to drift away as they yelled out to the Master who was in the dinghy to swim over to the liferaft. No response was heard due to the strong winds.
- 1.18 At 2240 hours, **Kent** closed with the liferaft, which had drifted clear of **Rita**, whose cabin top showed just above the water. They did not know how many people were in the liferaft, nor did they see the drifting dinghy.
- 1.19 Between 2246 hours and 0036 hours on 16 February, many attempts were made by the crew of **Kent** to get ropes to the liferaft but due to the very poor weather conditions all attempts were thwarted. It was decided that **Kent** would standby until the more manoeuvrable fishing vessel **Amaltal Columbia** arrived.
- 1.20 At 0045 hours on 16 February 2004, the survivors in the liferaft were taken onboard a rescue boat and transferred to **Amaltal Columbia** (See Appendix I - Position F).
- 1.21 **Kent**, **Amaltal Atlantis**, **Amaltal Columbia** and an Air Force Orion conducted a search for the Master but only the empty dinghy, some wreckage and the EPIRB was found.
- 1.22 At 0200 hours, the survivors were transferred to **Amaltal Atlantis** for the voyage back to Port Nelson.
- 1.23 At 1700 hours, on 16 February 2004, **Amaltal Atlantis** arrived in Port Nelson with the survivors.



KEY CONDITIONS

- 2.1 **Rita** was designed and built by Miller and Tonnage and was of kauri carvel planked construction, launched in 1902. Her dimensions were 12.1 metres in length, a beam of 3.5 metres and a draft of 1 metre. She was powered by a 65 kW 371 GM diesel main engine that had run about 500 hours since being rebuilt. The vessel had two galvanised mild steel fuel tanks with a combined capacity of 360 litres, (See Appendix II - File photo of vessel).
- 2.2 The owner had a pre-purchase inspection carried out when the vessel was on the slipway in November 2003. The following is an excerpt from that report "... The vessel has had extensive woodwork repairs carried out over recent years. These include re-fastening new ribs and deck beams etc. As a result of the above work the "**Rita**" is a well-found vessel in excellent order for her age. No timber defects or leaks were evident..."
- 2.3 The previous owners had drawn fuel from predominantly one tank; the fuel in the other tank was partly contaminated with water. The new owner drained this tank over a period of two days until the fuel ran clear. The previous owner set up the fuel delivery line between the primary and secondary tanks with a glass water trap in the line to make decanting of the tanks more convenient.
- 2.4 The owner arrived in Havelock on 12 February and proceeded to "go over the motor" with the previous owners. He changed the primary and secondary fuel filters but did not change the lubrication oil or filters.
- 2.5 The Owner of **Rita** had about 25 years boating experience and had been a commercial diver for 18 years. The designated Master was an experienced ex-commercial mariner. One of the other men had a moderate amount of recreational boating experience, and the final person having very minimal boating time.
- 2.6 The vessel received the 1333 hours VHF Metservice weather forecast for area Cook while on the mooring in Guards Bay. The following is an excerpt from that forecast. "*Storm warning in force. Southerly 50 knots, rising to 60 knots this evening and easing to 45 in the western Strait late morning. Sea becoming very high for a time. Southerly swell rising to 4 metres. Poor visibility in periods of rain. Outlook following 12 hours: Southerly easing to 15 knots throughout.*"
- 2.7 The actual weather experienced at Brothers Island in western Cook Strait was as follows:
- 1600 hours, 180° @ 68 kts gusting 75
1700 hours, 180° @ 70 kts gusting 82
1800 hours, 180° @ 65 kts gusting 86
1900 hours, 180° @ 67 kts gusting 82
2000 hours, 180° @ 66 kts gusting 78
2100 hours, 190° @ 64 kts gusting 77.
- 2.8 Due to the strong winds and driving rain experienced at the time the crew of **Kent** were unable to observe **Rita** while conning from the bridge wing.
- 2.9 While the vessel was in the relative shelter of Port Gore, one of the crewmembers felt that he was having a heart attack. He had a medical history of heart related problems. With the approaching **Kent** it was decided that it would be best to go out to her particularly with a perceived serious medical condition on board. A better course of action at this early stage would have been to contact Maritime Radio and seek medical assistance before leaving the shelter.



CONTRIBUTING FACTORS

N.B. These are not listed in order of importance.

- 3.1 **Rita** had predominantly been operated within the confines of the Marlborough Sounds for a number of years.
- 3.2 The Master chose to get into the dinghy after abandoning **Rita**. He is presumed to have drowned.
- 3.3 There was a storm warning in force for the sea area Cook for the evening in question.
- 3.4 The Master and Owner did not have sufficient knowledge of the area with regard to the expected increase in wind speed and swell due to the fetch from Cape Jackson through to Long Island.
- 3.5 The weather forecast would suggest that it would have been more prudent to seek shelter, rather than continue with a passage as occurred.



CAUSE

Human Factor

<input type="checkbox"/> Failure to comply with regulations	<input type="checkbox"/> Drugs & Alcohol	<input type="checkbox"/> Overloading
<input type="checkbox"/> Failure to obtain ships position or course	<input type="checkbox"/> Fatigue	<input type="checkbox"/> Physiological
<input type="checkbox"/> Improper watchkeeping or lookout	<input type="checkbox"/> Lack of knowledge	<input type="checkbox"/> Ship Handling
<input type="checkbox"/> Misconduct/Negligence	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Error of judgement	<input type="checkbox"/> Other . . .

Environmental Factor

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Adverse weather	<input type="checkbox"/> Debris	<input type="checkbox"/> Ice	<input type="checkbox"/> Navigation hazard
<input type="checkbox"/> Adverse current	<input type="checkbox"/> Submerged object	<input type="checkbox"/> Lightning	<input type="checkbox"/> Other . . .

Technical Factor

<input type="checkbox"/> Structural failure	<input type="checkbox"/> Wear & tear	<input type="checkbox"/> Steering failure
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Mechanical failure	<input type="checkbox"/> Improper welding	<input type="checkbox"/> Inadequate firefighting/lifesaving
<input type="checkbox"/> Electrical failure	<input type="checkbox"/> Inadequate maintenance	<input type="checkbox"/> Insufficient fuel
<input type="checkbox"/> Corrosion	<input type="checkbox"/> Inadequate stability	<input type="checkbox"/> Other . . .

- 4.1 The fuel tanks were not completely cleaned of all impurities before the voyage. When the vessel encountered rough weather, the fuel filters became blocked, with the result that the main engine was starved of fuel.
- 4.2 The decision to continue from their position of shelter into Queen Charlotte Sound.

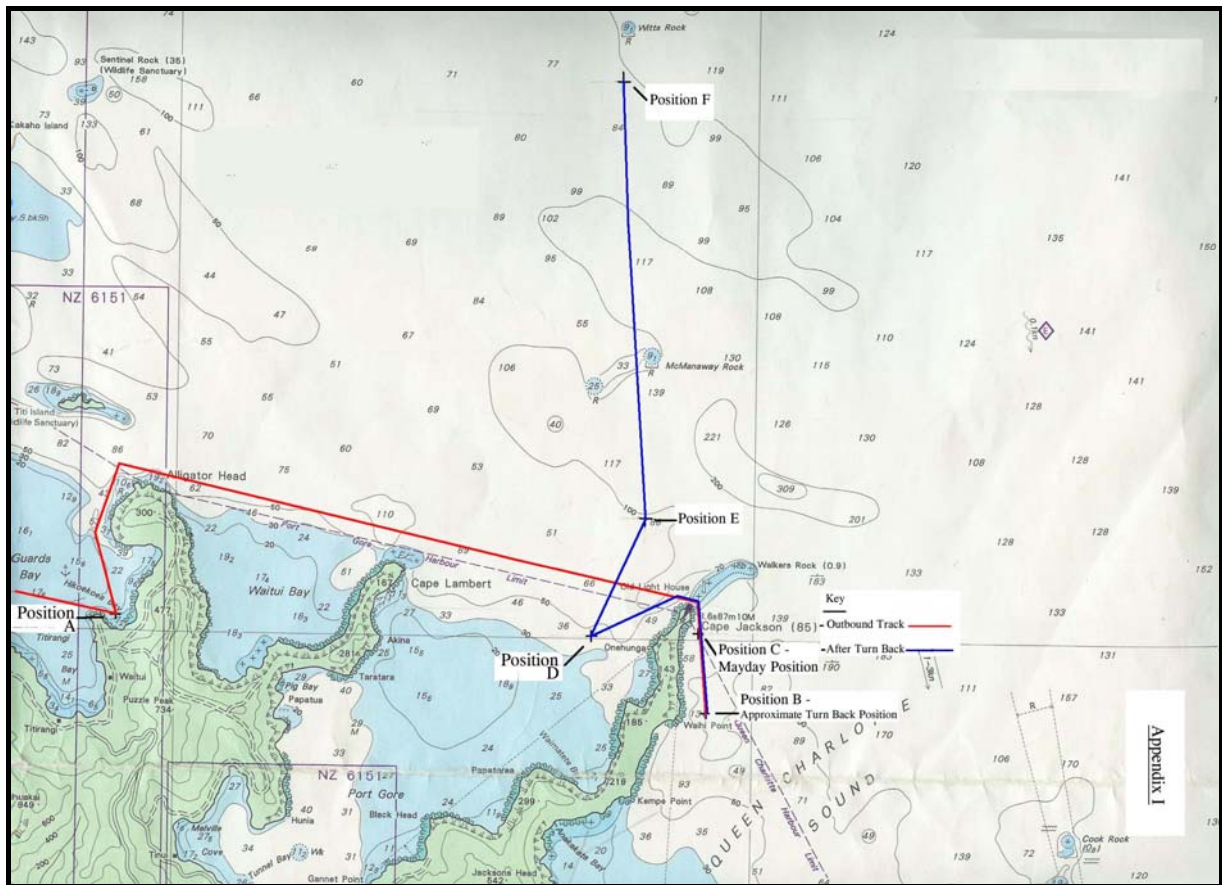


OPINIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS

- 5.1 It is recommended that the Education and Communication Division of the Maritime Safety Authority give active consideration to disseminating the following information to recreational boaties:
- That when vessels are about to undergo an extended voyage, that the fuel tanks be serviced fully so as to reduce the risk of contaminated fuel reaching the main engine.
 - That local knowledge is used when planning a voyage through areas that are not familiar.
 - To include this report in the recreational accident report publication.
- 5.2 The Maritime Safety Authority hereby commends the Master and crew of ***Kent***, ***Amaltal Atlantis*** and ***Amaltal Columbia*** for their conduct and action in the rescue of the crew of ***Rita***.



Appendix I – Chart



Appendix I

Appendix II – Photo

