

**MARINE OCCURRENCE REPORT**

**GROUNDING**

**OF THE FISHING TROLLER "NIGEI ISLE"  
AND SUBSEQUENT DEATH OF THE SKIPPER  
DURING ATTEMPTS TO REFLOAT  
ON THE WEST COAST OF THE  
QUEEN CHARLOTTE ISLANDS, BRITISH COLUMBIA  
13 JUNE 1996**

**REPORT NUMBER M96W0100**

The Transportation Safety Board of Canada (TSB) investigated this occurrence for the purpose of advancing transportation safety. It is not the function of the Board to assign fault or determine civil or criminal liability.

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### **Summary**

At about 0845 on 13 June 1996, the small fishing troller "NIGEI ISLE" grounded in Bottle Inlet on Moresby Island while the owner/operator was trying to free a crab trap line from the boat's propeller. The owner/operator tried to lay out a ground tackle to heave the troller off, and in the process, fell out from his skiff. His attempts to swim back to the troller were unsuccessful. His medically unfit condition and the exertion of swimming contributed to his death.

*Ce rapport est également disponible en français.*



**Other Factual Information**

**Particulars of the Vessel**

Name	"NIGEI ISLE"
Port of Registry	Vancouver, B.C.
Flag	Canadian
Official Number	193521
Type	Wooden fishing troller
Gross Tonnage	15
Crew	2
Length	12 m
Built	1951, North Vancouver, B.C.
Propulsion	Single-crew diesel engine, 100 BHP

The "NIGEI ISLE" is a small wooden troller of closed carvel construction. It is built with a straight stem and a square stern. A small wooden cabin is located amidships. A galley is located in a small separate cabin abaft the wheel-house. A single two-stroke diesel engine drives a single fixed-pitch propeller which is housed in a steerable Kort nozzle.

The vessel had an anchor which weighed approximately 36 kg, and the weight of the iron chain connecting it to the hydraulic winch is estimated to be an additional 45 kg. The vessel carried a three-metre long fibreglass-and-wood skiff which was abandoned in Bottle Inlet during the occurrence and was not retrieved.

No proof of the vessel having been inspected for business purposes was found, and housekeeping on the vessel was observed to be poor. The vessel had not been inspected by TC Marine Safety inspectors, nor was it required by regulations.

The "NIGEI ISLE" had sailed from Port Hardy, B.C., at the end of May 1996 with the owner/operator and a deck-hand on board. They fished for ling cod on the way to Massett in the Queen Charlotte Islands, B.C., where the owner sold his fish catch. On 09 June 1996, they sailed from Massett to Moresby Island to fish on the way back to Port Hardy. By 12 June, they were at the southern tip of Moresby Island and fished until the evening. They then ran into Bottle Inlet to shelter for the night. While the deck-hand cooked, the owner/operator manoeuvred the vessel to anchor in Bottle Inlet at about 2230. Shortly before anchoring, they set a crab trap of the collapsible sports-fishing type with a nylon line.

After breakfast on the morning of 13 June, at about 0845, the owner/operator commenced manoeuvring the "NIGEI ISLE" to retrieve the crab trap which was about 13 m from the vessel toward the north-east direction and in shallower water. During the retrieval process, the nylon line of the crab trap became fouled in the propeller of the troller, and some time was spent manoeuvring the vessel to

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1 All times are PDT (Coordinated Universal Time (UTC) minus seven hours) unless otherwise stated.

clear it. The deck-hand was looking overboard and advising the owner/operator, who was at the helm and engine controls. During this process, while on a westerly heading, the vessel grounded on a shoal which was believed to be mud and rocks on the eastern end of Bottle Inlet.

The owner/operator decided to refloat the "NIGEI ISLE" by rigging a ground tackle, which involved carrying the anchor out in a skiff toward deeper water and then heaving on it to pull the "NIGEI ISLE" off. He rowed out in a north-westerly direction with the anchor of the "NIGEI ISLE" placed between his legs in the skiff. When the owner/operator was about 45 m from the "NIGEI ISLE" and trying to heave the anchor over the port side of the skiff, the combined weight of the anchor and the cable over the gunwale of the skiff caused it to capsize.

The owner/operator was not wearing a personal flotation device, although flotation suits were found later on the boat. No lifejackets were found nor is it believed that there was any on board.

Finding himself in the water with the skiff rapidly drifting away from him, the owner/operator started swimming back toward the "NIGEI ISLE". The deck-hand, who had witnessed this from the "NIGEI ISLE", tried to assist by getting a rope to throw to the owner/operator, but in the meantime, the owner/operator disappeared from view. When last seen by the deck-hand, he was about 30 m away from the vessel.

The deck-hand called for help on channel 16 of the very high frequency (VHF) radiotelephone, and waited on the "NIGEI ISLE". The call was intercepted by the Marine Communications and Traffic Centre (MCTC) at Prince Rupert and relayed. A private helicopter from Vancouver Island tasked by the Rescue Coordination Centre (RCC) Victoria arrived on the scene in 20 minutes. The surviving crew member was lifted off the vessel. However, in the meantime, he had manoeuvred the "NIGEI ISLE" off the shoal and toward the anchor in deeper water by using the engines. Eventually, the owner/operator's body was recovered. The "NIGEI ISLE" was refloated and brought to Queen Charlotte City, B.C.

The owner/operator of the "NIGEI ISLE" was a stocky man of medium height who weighed 94 kg. He was dressed in fisherman's wet weather gear and wore a hat and glasses. It is not known if he was a good swimmer.

The owner/operator had not known the deck-hand prior to hiring him. On previous voyages, he had used his sons as help on deck, but his sons were unavailable for this trip. The deck-hand had no recent fishing experience or marine qualifications. The

owner/operator had considerable fishing experience but apparently did not have any marine qualifications.

The owner/operator of the "NIGEI ISLE" had a lung condition known as sarcoidosis which is a debilitating respiratory ailment caused

by scar tissue build-up on the lungs. The owner had visited a clinic in Vancouver in 1995, at which time his lung function was found significantly reduced and deteriorating. The owner/operator was taking prescription medication for this condition and medication was found on board the vessel.

The weather at the time of the occurrence was reportedly sunny, with the wind 270° at 15 kn and gusting, and the sea height about 15 cm.

The post-mortem examination established that the owner/operator's death was attributable to acute coronary insufficiency due to cardiovascular disease and could have been brought about by hypothermia. The autopsy report also states that the owner/operator was not healthy and had an enlarged heart, scarred lungs, and degenerative narrowing of the coronary arteries.

### **Analysis**

In Canada, there is at present no requirement for periodic medical examination for personnel serving aboard vessels of this size and type. The owner/operator had been advised of his medical condition, but in the absence of any medical requirements, he continued to operate his troller. It was therefore in keeping with his condition and the exertion of swimming that he had a heart attack leading to heart failure as he tried to swim toward his vessel.

The Canadian Hydrographic Tide Tables do not tabulate tides for Bottle Inlet as a reference or secondary station as it is not used by marine traffic. However, it has been confirmed that the tidal stream both to the north (Skidegate Channel) and to the south (Tasu Sound) was flooding, with the high water expected at about noon on 13 June 1996. At about 0900, the tidal stream rate would have been peaking. It is quite likely that eddies and counter-currents were caused because of the narrow and confined nature of the cylindrically shaped Bottle Inlet. This would have made the "NIGEI ISLE" difficult to manoeuvre. The area has not been surveyed in detail and warnings to that effect are inserted in the Sailing Directions.

The "NIGEI ISLE" was refloated by the high tide and use of engines before the deck-hand was lifted off the vessel. It is not known why the owner/operator wanted so urgently to heave his vessel off at a time when the tidal stream was at its strongest and high water was yet to come. The vessel was not in any perceived danger when he tried to lay out a ground tackle; he could have waited until high water to attempt to refloat the vessel. The deck-hand recalled that it was the owner/operator's unilateral decision to heave the vessel off with a ground tackle and that he, the deck-hand, was not knowledgeable enough to comment on it.

The "NIGEI ISLE" ran aground partly because of the deck-hand's lack of experience and because of the owner/operator's and the deck-hand's lack of knowledge. Because the safety of the vessel and crew can be compromised by pre-existing medical conditions, it is considered that periodic medical examination could go a long way in eradicating

the problem.

### **Findings**

1. The vessel ran aground while the owner/operator was retrieving a crab trap.
2. To assist in refloating the vessel, the owner/operator decided to lay out a ground tackle with the vessel's skiff.
3. While the owner/operator was trying to throw the fishing vessel's anchor clear of the skiff, the skiff capsized.
4. The owner/operator, who was not wearing a personal flotation device, was thrown into the water.
5. The owner/operator had pre-existing heart disease and had been warned against exertion on account of a history of lung disease.
6. The owner/operator apparently suffered cardiorespiratory failure due to a pre-existing heart and lung condition which was aggravated by the exertion of swimming.

### **Causes and Contributing Factors**

The owner/operator of the "NIGEI ISLE" died of acute coronary insufficiency brought about by exertion and hypothermia when his skiff capsized due to lateral instability. His medically unfit condition and the lack of training of both the owner/operator and the deck-hand contributed to this occurrence.

*This report concludes the Transportation Safety Board's investigation into this occurrence. Consequently, the Board, consisting of Chairperson Benoît Bouchard, and members Maurice Harquail, Charles Simpson and W.A. Tadros, authorized the release of this report on 16 June 1997.*