

The Public Affairs Office, located at the Cape May Coast Guard

Station, released the following news letter to the media:



# COAST GUARD NEWS

Public Affairs Officer  
USCG Group Cape May  
Cape May, NJ-08204-5082  
(609) 884-6985/3491

RELEASE NO.: 86-008

CONTACT: LTJG MICHAEL FARRELL

FIVE PEOPLE RESCUED FROM THE WATER OFF OCEAN CITY, NJ

ABOUT MIDNIGHT LAST NIGHT, GROUP CAPE MAY RECEIVED A RADIO FROM THE MELVIN H. BAKER, SAYING THAT THEY HAD PICKED UP THREE PEOPLE OUT OF THE WATER OFF OCEAN CITY, NEW JERSEY.

AT ABOUT 7:17 AM SUNDAY, GROUP CAPE MAY RECEIVED A MAYDAY CALL FROM AN UNIDENTIFIED VESSEL REPORTING ITSELF SINKING AT A BEARING OF 135, 20 NAUTICAL MILES OFF OCEAN CITY, NEW JERSEY.

AT ABOUT 7:30 AM SUNDAY, A 41 FOOT UTILITY BOAT FROM COAST GUARD STATION GREAT EGG AND A HELICOPTER FROM AIR STATION CAPE MAY RESPONDED AND SEARCHED ALL DAY.

AT ABOUT 40 MINUTES PAST MIDNIGHT, GROUP CAPE MAY RECEIVED A RADIO CALL FROM THE MOTOR VESSEL MELVIN H. BAKER REPORTING THAT THEY FOUND THREE OF FIVE PEOPLE IN THE WATER.

THE PEOPLE WERE FROM THE VESSEL, SUPER HEAT, WHICH HAD SWAMPED AND SANK QUICKLY AT APPROXIMATELY 7:20 AM SUNDAY JUST AFTER GETTING OUT A MAYDAY CALL.

THE BAKER, A 555-FOOT BULK CARRIER REGISTERED IN PANAMA, SAID THAT THEY HEARD A PERSON IN THE WATER CALLING FOR HELP.

THE BAKER TURNED AROUND, LOWERED A SMALL BOAT, AND RESCUED THREE PEOPLE FROM THE WATER.

AT 1:30 AM MONDAY, AFTER RECEIVING THE CALL FROM THE BAKER, A HELICOPTER FROM AIR STATION CAPE MAY WAS LAUNCHED AND WITH VALUABLE ASSISTANCE FROM THE BAKER, LOCATED THE REMAINING TWO PEOPLE IN THE WATER.

AT 1:35 AM MONDAY, THE HELICOPTER HOISTED THE TWO PEOPLE FROM THE WATER AND FLEW THEM TO THE HOSPITAL.

THE FIVE PEOPLE WERE ABOARD THE SUPER HEAT, A 1986, 32-FOOT CHRIS-CRAFT SCORPION OCEAN RACER (CIGARETTE TYPE) WITH TWIN 200 HP OUTBOARDS. DOCUMENTS DOCUMENTED IN PHILADELPHIA, PA.

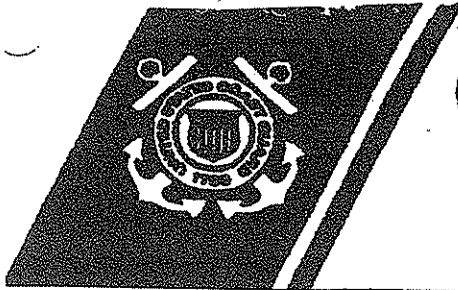
ALL PEOPLE WERE TAKEN TO BURDETTE TOMLIN MEMORIAL HOSPITAL, CAPE MAY COURT HOUSE, NEW JERSEY, WHERE THEY WERE TREATED FOR EXPOSURE AND RELEASED.

THE FIVE NEW JERSEY MEN RESCUED AFTER OVER 18 HOURS IN THE 70 DEGREE WATER WERE: THE OWNER/OPERATOR, GEORGE BENDER, FROM OCEAN CITY; DAVID JONES, NORTHFIELD; JOSEPH WALLS, GLENWOOD; THOMAS O'ROUKE, MAYS LANDING; AND ART HIGBEE, NORTHFIELD.

ALL FIVE MEN HAD ON PERSONAL FLOTATION DEVICES (LIFE JACKET).

Within hours, the local radio station began broadcasting the news. By early evening, the news of the rescue was being broadcast on the television. The next morning, the paper had the story on the front page.

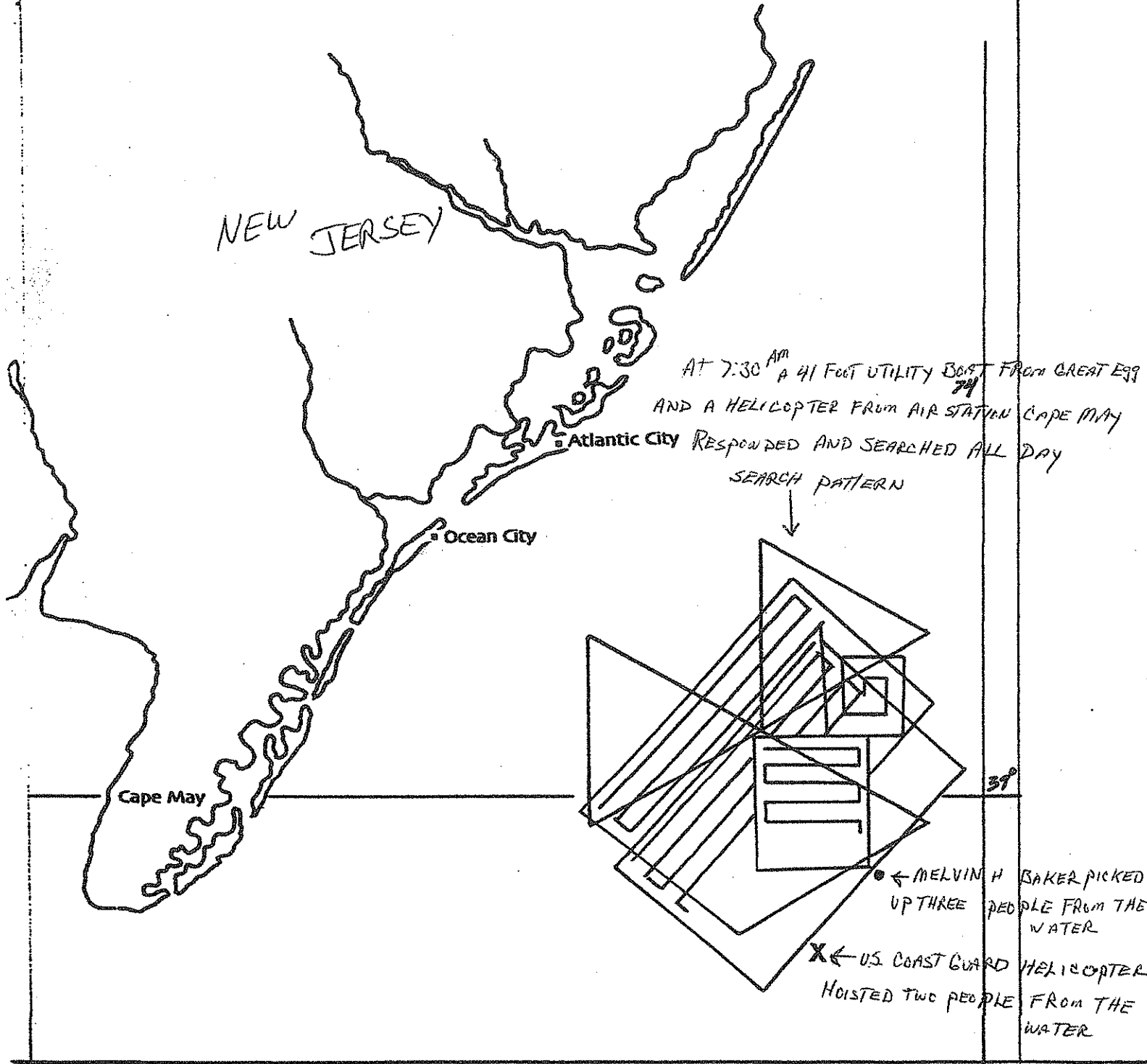
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# COAST GUARD NEWS

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NEW JERSEY



AT 7:30 AM A 41 FOOT UTILITY BOAT FROM GREAT EGGS AND A HELICOPTER FROM AIR STATION CAPE MAY RESPONDED AND SEARCHED ALL DAY

SEARCH PATTERN

39°

● ← MELVIN H BAKER PICKED UP THREE PEOPLE FROM THE WATER

X ← U.S. COAST GUARD HELICOPTER HOISTED TWO PEOPLE FROM THE WATER

# Boat Sinks; 5 Saved After Night at Sea

By THOMAS BARLAS  
And DONALD WITKOWSKI  
Press Staff Writers

Five men struggling to survive in the Atlantic Ocean after their boat sank Sunday morning were rescued about 18 hours later when a crewman on a passing tanker heard their screams for help echoing through the darkness.

The lucky encounter ended an ordeal that began when their 32-foot offshore racer, out of Ocean City, went down around 7:45 a.m. Sunday after waves broke over the stern of the boat.

The men — four from Atlantic County and one from Cape May County — had earlier failed to flag down boats passing within a quarter of a mile. Their flares went unnoticed by the crew of a U.S. Coast Guard helicopter that flew so close the bobbing men could read the insignia painted on the side.

And finally, after breaking into two groups when they found it difficult to swim together, the men strapped themselves to lobster pots and decided to wait out the night.

"I think the big thing was we  
(See RESCUE on Page 3)



Staff photo by Dan Drake

Bender sits at the Ocean City slip where his boat was docked

# Boat Sinks; 5 Men Rescued After Fight for Life at Sea

RESCUE, from Page 1

"I didn't want to die," said Egg Harbor Township resident Thomas O'Rourke. "You just don't think about death. You concentrate on other things. I concentrated on getting home."

"At times, it was scary and impossible," said George Bender of Ocean City. "When something like that entered my mind, I was determined to put it out."

O'Rourke, 31, Bender, 42, Joseph Walls, 51, of Linwood, and Northfield residents David Jones, 32, and Arthur Higbee, 34, got home early Monday morning.

After being rescued by the tanker, they were flown to Burdette Tomlin Memorial Hospital in the Cape May Court House section of Middle Township. They were treated for exposure and released.

"We have incredible sores," a tired O'Rourke said from his home Monday afternoon. "Our legs are totally exhausted."

The trip began at 5:30 a.m. Sunday, when the men left Ocean City in the Super Heat to go tuna fishing. The boat was owned by Bender, who owns a refrigeration firm.

The sea was relatively calm, the sun had just come up and the boat was traveling at about 15 miles per hour, said O'Rourke, a radio executive. The wind was blowing from the northeast, he said, and waves were at the boat's stern.

One of those waves suddenly picked up the boat, which "nose dived" into the sea like a surfboard, he said. The engines shut down and waves started breaking over the stern, he said.

"We immediately knew we were in trouble," O'Rourke said.

The men began donning life jackets, he said. He said he started sending out a mayday signal, but couldn't be sure if it was heard.

O'Rourke said a wave finally broke over the stern and flooded the boat's console. Some of the men were bailing out water while others threw things overboard to create a trail of debris rescuers might follow, he said.

"We were going down," he said. "We all knew it."

Despite what was happening, O'Rourke, a former member of the Coast Guard, said everyone stayed calm.

"There was not one bit of panic," he said.

The boat sank at 7:42 a.m., O'Rourke said, noting that he looked at his watch as the boat went under.



ARTHUR HIGBEE  
Swam out of ship's way



JOSEPH WALLS  
Spirits fell as day went on



THOMAS O'ROURKE  
Speaks from his bed

O'Rourke's distress signal was picked up by Coast Guard officials at the Cape May base, according to Lt. J.g. Michael Farrell.

The signal came in at 7:17 a.m., he said, and it was determined that the boat was 20 nautical miles southeast off Ocean City when it went down. A 41-foot utility boat from the Coast Guard's Great Egg station and a helicopter from the Cape May base began a search that was to last all day, he said.

Meanwhile, O'Rourke said, he and the others "collected our thoughts and stayed together."

"We came to the realization that we were in a life-threatening situation," said Jones, a carpenter. "So we got together in a group and agreed we would have to put it out."

The men stayed together in the water by locking arms and grasping a beverage cooler and life ring.

The Coast Guard helicopter eventually flew by. The men fired two flares before realizing the

*'I think the big thing was we didn't want to die. You just don't think about death. You concentrate on other things. I concentrated on getting home,' says Thomas O'Rourke*

aircraft was flying into the sun and didn't see the distress signals.

"Just seeing the helicopter lift our spirits dramatically," O'Rourke said.

He said the men watched the helicopter search "back and forth" all day. He said they also shouted and waved, but couldn't get the attention of passing boats.

"After midday, we decided that, heck, we better start swimming to shore," O'Rourke said.

Although they tried staying together, O'Rourke, Bender and Higbee became separated from Jones and Walls.

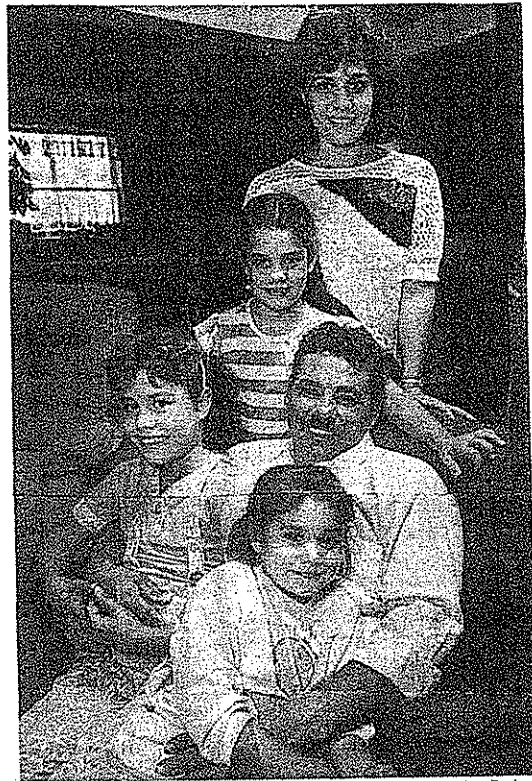
O'Rourke said his group eventually found and tied themselves to a lobster pot.

"We mentally prepared ourselves to wait the night out," he said.

Jones and Walls, struggling against strong currents, swam to another lobster pot.

"We barely made it because of the currents," Jones said. "We agreed to wait it out."

As daylight began to fade, Jones and Walls watched the me-



Staff photo by Dan Drake

HAPPY HOMECOMING — David Jones returns to his Northfield home and his family: wife Barbara and daughters Lynn, 4, front; Liso, 9, left; and Laura, 7.

thical Coast Guard search with excitement.

"We saw them sweeping the area and coming closer to us," Jones said. "We were so relieved that we began to talk about what we would have for dinner."

However, their hopes were dashed when darkness approached and the search did not continue in their area.

"We were in pretty good spirits early, but as the day went on, we got down," said Walls, a bank executive.

Sometime later, the tanker Melvin H. Baker came along.

Higbee, a chiropractor, said the ship ran over the lobster pot and forced him, O'Rourke and Bender to swim out of the way. The men started swimming in the "pitch dark" to the ship, O'Rourke said.

"We started screaming like crazy," he said. "One guy on the bridge heard us. Suddenly, the tanker just stopped dead in the water."

O'Rourke said the tanker turned around and sent out a boat that picked up his group. The

tanker's crewmen, who were from Taiwan, "carried us in" and brought out coffee, cake and bread, he said.

"They took our clothes off and literally gave us the clothes off their back," O'Rourke said.

Some of the crew understood English, he said, and Bender told them there were two more people in the water.

Farrell said the Coast Guard got word from the tanker around 12:40 a.m. Monday that three men were found.

The helicopter got airborne at 1:03 a.m. and got to the scene 19 minutes later, he said. With the "valuable assistance" of the Melvin H. Baker's crew, the helicopter picked Jones and Walls out of the water at 1:35 a.m., he said.

Jones and Walls were flown to Burdette Tomlin. The helicopter then returned for O'Rourke, Bender and Higbee.

"I put a lot of faith in the Lord," Jones, a born-again Christian, recounted in his hoarse voice. "He answered our prayers. I know I share the same feelings with everyone. We were blessed."