

Beat: Miscellaneous

U.S. Coast Guard orders probe into HMS Bounty sinking

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USPA News - The U.S. Coast Guard on Friday ordered a formal investigation into the loss of the replica tall ship HMS Bounty, which sank off the coast of North Carolina earlier this week, and resulted in the death of one crew member and left the ship's captain missing. Rear Admiral Steven Ratti, the Coast Guard 5th District commander, ordered a district formal investigation to determine the exact causes of the accident, whether a material or equipment failure contributed to the casualties, and whether there is any evidence of misconduct, negligence or crimes.

"A district formal investigation consists of a Coast Guard investigating officer who will receive evidence and testimony using formal rules and procedures and is convened when the information to be derived has considerable regional significance, or may indicate vessel class problems or areas of technical importance," the Coast Guard said in a statement. Commander Kevin M. Carroll, the chief of the Coast Guard 5th District Marine Inspections and Investigations Branch, will lead the investigation which is expected to take several months. The agency said the investigation is intended to prevent similar accidents in the future and not to fix civil or criminal responsibility. The incident began at around 8:45 p.m. local time on Sunday when the U.S. Coast Guard was notified that the 180-foot, three mast tall ship was taking on water and without propulsion while about 90 miles (144 kilometers) southeast of Hatteras in North Carolina. A C-130 Hercules aircraft arrived at the scene at around midnight but could not have carried out an evacuation. Several hours later, at 4:30 a.m. local time, the sixteen crew members on board the vessel began to abandon ship wearing survival suits and entered life rafts. It took two more hours before two Coast Guard MH-60 Jayhawk helicopters arrived at the scene and rescued fourteen of the crew members. The body of 42-year-old crew member Claudene Christian was recovered several hours later while the ship's captain, 63-year-old Robin Walbridge, has remained missing. After 90 hours of searching, covering approximately 12,000 overlapping square nautical miles, the search for Walbridge was suspended on Thursday. The HMS Bounty, which is a replica of the original vessel and was built in 1960 for the MGM movie "Mutiny on the Bounty," was located approximately 160 miles (257 kilometers) west of the eye of Hurricane Sandy when it sank. This would have been within the area affected by hurricane-force winds at the time.

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