# National Transportation Safety Board

## Marine Accident Brief

### Sinking of Towing Vessel *Delta Captain*

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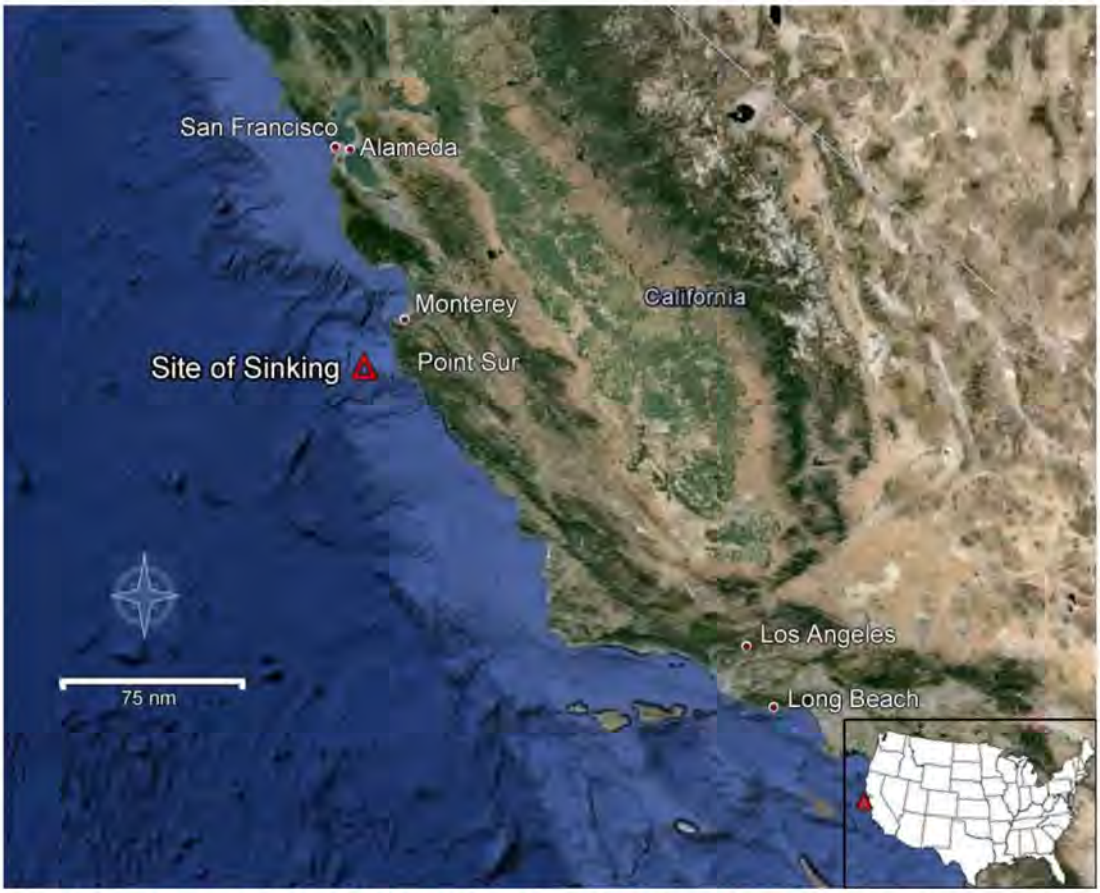
|---|---|
| **Accident no.** | DCA-13-NM-016 |
| **Vessel name** | *Delta Captain* |
| **Accident type** | Sinking |
| **Location** | Pacific Ocean, 13 nautical miles west of Point Sur, California<br>36°17.9′ N, 122°09.6′ W |
| **Date** | April 13, 2013 |
| **Time** | 1455 Pacific daylight time (coordinated universal time – 7 hours) |
| **Injuries** | None |
| **Damage** | Est. $2.5 million |
| **Environmental damage** | Potential 18,000 gallons of diesel oil (total fuel on board at time of sinking) |
| **Weather** | Winds 25–35 knots from the north-northwest; clear; visibility 10 nautical miles; air temperature 60°F |
| **Waterway information** | Pacific Ocean |

On April 13, 2013, about 1455, the uninspected towing vessel *Delta Captain*, towing the deck barge *DB 5*, experienced uncontrolled flooding in its engine room and sank 13 nautical miles west of Point Sur, California. The four crewmembers abandoned the vessel within about 10 minutes after the flooding began and were later rescued by the United States Coast Guard. No one was injured in the accident, but the vessel sank in deep water and was not recovered. Its estimated value was $2.5 million.


The *Delta Captain* at sea. (Photo source: TugboatInformation.com)

## Sinking of Towing Vessel *Delta Captain*

The 76.5-foot-long *Delta Captain* departed Alameda, near San Francisco, California, on the afternoon of April 12, 2013. The vessel was towing the 225-foot-long crane deck barge *DB 5* en route to Long Beach, California. About 1 day after departing Alameda, while traveling at a speed of about 4.7 knots, the engineer on duty in the *Delta Captain*'s engine room noticed water entering the space at the upper area of the aft bulkhead of the engine room, in the vicinity of a 6-inch-diameter pipe that passed through the bulkhead to the steering gear space. He reported the flooding to the mate on watch in the wheelhouse, and then started the bilge pump and the fire pump to dewater the engine room. In addition, the crewmembers attempted to reduce the ingress of water into the engine room by plugging the hole. However, the high rate of water ingress thwarted their efforts to stem the flow and remove the flooding water.




**Location of the sinking of the *Delta Captain*, about 90 nautical miles south of San Francisco, California. (Satellite image by Google Earth)**

As the vessel's stern began to settle into the sea, the crewmembers determined that the situation was dire and that they might be able to increase the chance of saving the boat by releasing the tow wire to the barge. However, the crew could not reach the winch drum to release the tow because the stern was partially submerged. About 1455, the captain called the crew to the wheelhouse and directed them to launch the liferaft. He also contacted the Coast Guard at that time, stating that the vessel was taking on water and that the crew was unable to keep up with the flooding. A few minutes later, about 1500, the captain placed a Mayday call and informed the Coast Guard that the crew was now abandoning ship. Shortly thereafter, the crew entered the liferaft. At 1502, the Coast Guard lost communications and automatic identification system (AIS) tracking of the *Delta Captain*, and the vessel's emergency position indicating radio beacon (EPIRB) was automatically activated as the vessel sank.


**The deck barge *DB 5* after the accident. (Photo by California Department of Fish and Wildlife)**

The Coast Guard launched search-and-rescue assets, including a rescue helicopter, a fixed-wing aircraft, and a 47-foot-long Coast Guard motor lifeboat. The rescue helicopter arrived on scene about 1623 and hoisted the crew from the liferaft. None of the four crewmembers was injured. The Coast Guard helicopter transported them to Monterey, California, where they were tested for drugs and alcohol about 7 hours after the vessel abandonment. All test results were negative.

The water depth at the location of the accident was about 3,000 feet, and the *Delta Captain* crew reported that the vessel appeared to still be attached to the towline of barge *DB 5* after sinking. However, about 1100 the next day, two towing vessels arrived at the location of the adrift *DB 5* and reported that the *Delta Captain* was not still connected to the barge's towline. About 1500, one of the two responding towing vessels began towing the barge to Los Angeles, arriving there the following day, April 15.

## Probable Cause

The National Transportation Safety Board determines that the probable cause of the sinking of the towing vessel *Delta Captain* was uncontrolled flooding of the steering gear space and engine room from an undetermined source in the steering gear space.

# Vessel Particulars

| Vessel | *Delta Captain* |
|---|---|
| **Owner/operator** | Double Eagle Marine, Inc./Marine Express, Inc. |
| **Port of registry** | San Francisco |
| **Flag** | United States |
| **Type** | Towing |
| **Year built** | 1980 |
| **Official number (US)** | 650726 |
| **IMO number** | n/a |
| **Construction** | Steel |
| **Length** | 76.5 ft (23.3 m) |
| **Draft** | 7.3 ft (2.2 m) |
| **Beam/width** | 22.2 ft (6.8 m) |
| **Gross tonnage** | 89 gross tons |
| **Engine power, type** | 2,000 hp (1,491 kW) diesel; twin fixed-pitch propellers |
| **Persons on board** | 4 crew |

**Adopted: April 28, 2014**

The NTSB has authority to investigate and establish the probable cause of any major marine casualty or any marine casualty involving both public and nonpublic vessels under 49 *United States Code* 1131. This report is based on factual information provided by the US Coast Guard from its informal investigation of the accident. The NTSB did not conduct its own on-scene investigation.