

**REPORT INTO THE
CASUALTY AND LOSS OF LIFE
AT BLACKROCK, CO. CORK
ON 18TH AUGUST, 2003.**

The Marine Casualty Investigation Board was established on the 23rd, May 2002 under The Merchant Shipping (Investigation of Marine Casualties) Act 2000

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1. SYNOPSIS.

- 1.1 This accident occurred on the 18th August 2003 at approximately 1330hrs at Blackrock in the Port of Cork and resulted in Mr. Jack Sweeney the owner of a GRP motor launch falling into the water from a small punt (also GRP) after he had moored the motor launch at his registered mooring which was some 30 yards off the shore at the time. It appears that Mr. Sweeney stumbled and fell backwards into the water.

2. FACTUAL INFORMATION

2.1	Name of Motor Boat:	"BARRACUDA"
	Length of Motor Boat:	17.5 FEET
	Engine:	70 HP EVINRUDE Outboard Motor
	Registered Mooring No.:	BKRK 1354
	Lifejacket worn by deceased:	A 150 Newton single chamber inflatable lifejacket made to standard EN396. Model 02111586701501 DK-0200-0.952 Inflation gas 33gram CO2 cylinder. No. printed on jacket 00200242226178 Numbers printed on inflation cylinder: 140.65 33 D91 ISI/35202 Austria 07/02
	Name & Address of Manufacturer:	Baltic Safety Products AB Sweden Tel + 46 506 40360 Fax + 46 506 40196
	E-mail address:	office@baltic-sweden.com
	Owner:	Mr. Jack Sweeney, (deceased) Blackrock, Co. Cork.

3. EVENTS PRIOR TO THE INCIDENT

- 3.1 Mr. Sweeney was the only person on board his boat and he had been out on a trip on the river. He was in the process of returning ashore in a small punt, having moored the larger motorboat. His wife was awaiting him ashore on the pier. The small punt which he was using to come ashore in was secured to the Starboard side of the motorboat. The tide was going out and a strong downstream current existed.

4. THE INCIDENT

- 4.1 At some time between 1315hrs and 1330hrs on 18th August 2003 on returning from a boat trip, Mr. Sweeney secured his motor boat at its mooring and was standing in the punt and fell backwards into the water.
- 4.2 Mr. Sweeney's wife was on the pier awaiting her husband's return from the trip and she became aware that something was wrong when she heard her husband calling her for help. She saw that he was in the water and she raised the alarm by calling the attention of Mr. Jack Keating, another boat owner who was in his car on the pier.
- 4.3 Mr. Keating shouted out to Mr. Sweeney to pull the release cord on his lifejacket and he and his son Tony went immediately to their own boat and rowed out to assist Mr. Sweeney. They estimate that it took 3 to 4 minutes to reach him and they found him facing down about a foot under water and some 30 yards downstream away from the boat. They also noticed that the lifejacket, which Mr. Sweeney was wearing, was not properly inflated and was not supporting him in the water. The tide was going out and the current would have tended to carry Mr. Sweeney downriver away from the boat. Mr. Keating got a hold of Mr. Sweeney but was unable to lift him into the boat and while keeping the casualty's head above the water his son then rowed the boat ashore to the nearest suitable place.

5. EVENTS FOLLOWING THE INCIDENT

- 5.1 When ashore, Mr Keating attempted to resuscitate Mr. Sweeney but was not successful. Tony Keating ran to the road and stopped a passing car to ask for assistance in telephoning the emergency services. This was done and within a few minutes the Fire Brigade, Ambulance and Gardai arrived on the scene.
- 5.2 Further efforts were made to revive Mr. Sweeney but were not successful. He was removed by ambulance to the South Infirmity Hospital Cork where he was pronounced dead. His body was subsequently removed to the Cork University Hospital where a Post Mortem was carried out.
- 5.3 The lifejacket, which Mr. Sweeney was wearing, is a single chamber inflatable type lifejacket fitted with a manual inflation release cord and also a mouthpiece for inflation/topping up. The jacket is worn around the neck and is secured by straps and a quick connect/release clip. To reduce the physical size of the jacket in the normal un-inflated condition, the jacket is folded and held in the folded condition with "Velcro" fasteners, which release as the inflation chamber increases in size when inflated.
- 5.4 On inspection of the lifejacket at the Garda station, Blackrock, Cork on the 19th August 2003 it was noted that the lifejacket had not fully inflated and that the left side inflation chamber was still contained within its outer enclosure. The lifejacket inflation gas cylinder is fitted to the right side of the inflation chamber and the cylinder showed evidence of having been activated. The right side of the inflation chamber to which the cylinder was attached had inflated to some degree. On further examination it was noted that the non-return valve fitted to the mouthpiece (on left side of jacket), was stuck in an open position. If the valve was in that condition when the inflation cord was pulled it would have the effect of releasing the inflation gas to atmosphere as fast as it was entering the chamber and hence the reason for one side of the inflation chamber not inflating. The non-return valve had not operated correctly and this is borne out by the fact that water was found to be inside the lifejacket. If the jacket had inflated to the extent that a positive pressure was contained within it, then water would not have entered the chamber.
- 5.5 The lifejacket was taken to Midleton Marine, which is a licensed lifejacket servicing station, where it was examined by Mr. Gordon Reeves in the presence of Garda Mark O'Mahony and this investigator. It was confirmed by Mr. Reeves that the spring operated non-return valve was not operating correctly insofar that it was stuck in an open position. During the inspection of the non-return valve it appeared to pop back into its correct working position and it was decided then to test the jacket by fitting a new 33gram gas inflation cylinder and to inflate the lifejacket. The jacket inflated fully in less than 10 seconds and the non-return valve held the pressure. The non-return valve was then depressed manually to time how long it would take for the jacket to deflate. That took approximately 8 seconds.

6. CONCLUSIONS AND FINDINGS

- 6.1 Mr. Sweeney unfortunately slipped whilst standing in the punt and fell into the water. The fact that the lifejacket did not inflate correctly had a very serious effect on the outcome of this accident. Mr. Sweeney was found under the water and even if the lifejacket was only half inflated it possibly would have offered sufficient support to prevent him going beneath the surface of the water.

RECOMMENDATIONS

7. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 7.1 That the manufacturer be informed immediately of this incident in order that further investigation be carried out as to the effectiveness or otherwise of the non-return valves fitted to this type of lifejacket.

8. APPENDICES

8.1: Photographs of Lifejacket

APPENDICES

8.1: Photographs of Lifejacket BALTIC 150 WINNER SERVICE HISTORY (NO ENTRIES)





APPENDIX 8.1

FRONT VIEW SHOWING INFLATION/TOP UP MOUTHPIECE
BACK OF JACKET SHOWING STRAPS AND CLIP



CLOSE UP OF INFLATION/TOP UP MOUTHPIECE.
TYPE OF LIFEJACKET



APPENDIX 8.1

SPECIFICATION LABEL
CO2 INFLATION CYLINDER AND RELEASE CORD. ALSO WHISTLE



PRINTING ON JACKET SHOWING SIZE OF CO2 CYLINDER USED
NUMBERS PRINTED ON FRONT LEFT SIDE OF JACKET



APPENDIX 8.2

MOTOR BOAT
MOTOR BOAT AND PUNT



MOTOR BOAT AND PUNT
PUNT AND GUNWALE OF MOTOR BOAT



APPENDIX 8.2

MOTOR BOAT LOOKING AFT
MOTOR BOAT LOOKING FORWARD



9. INDEX OF CORRESPONDENCE RECEIVED

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Mr. Per Frode
(Baltic Safety Products)



Mr Dick Heron
Secretary
Marine Casualty Investigation Board
Leeson Lane
Dublin 2
Ireland



Älgårås 2003-11-09

Ref: MCIB 76

Dear Sir,

I, the undersigned have read the draft report with ref: MCIB 76 and would like to comment as follows.

The oral tube with it's non-return valve has two functions. One is to use it for oral inflation of the life jacket.

The other is to deflate the life jackets by depressing the non-return valve with the reversed cap. In accordance with the instruction from the oral tube and non-return valve manufacturer Halkey Roberts, USA. This information is also attached to the lifejacket as outlined in EN 396, the European standard for 150 N lifejackets

In paragraph 5.4 and 5.5 the wordings " was stuck in the open position" can be read.

We must strongly emphasize that there is no "the open position" on this valve which, in our opinion should be known by the service station.

The non-return valve has only one permanent position springloaded in the closed position. This position is the normal air proof position. However it is designed to open up under an airflow pressure into the bladder or when depressing the non-return valve open by using the reversed cap to deflate the lifejacket.

"The open position" described in the draft report is an abnormal position and could be evidence that the valve has been abused to an extent that it did not function correctly. E.G. something else than the reversed cap may have been used to depress the non return valve.



We would like to describe our quality routines with regard to the oral tube and bladder.

We are a ISO 9001/2000 certified company as well as M.E.D./SOLAS certified.

Halkey Roberts leak test 100% of their oral tubes and would have rejected a non-return valve that stuck open. The oral tubes are delivered with the cap fitted to the tube in the closed position. We batch test all incoming shipments from Halkey Roberts. One of the checks is that the non-return valve moves correctly. We use no tools, only oral inflation.

During the entire manufacturing process of the bladder the oral tube cap is left fitted to the oral tube covering the non return valve. When packing the bladders a last control is made that each cap is still fitted to the tube in the same position.

At the point of assembling the bladder to the cover each cap is opened and a visual check is made to ensure that the non-return valve is in it's normal air-proof position. After this inspection the cap is put back in it's closed position i.e. covering and protecting the valve.

When the lifejacket is packed into the poly bag a last check is made that the cap is in it's closed position.

As proof that our manufacturing process as well as test procedures have been conducted, according to our QM the lifejacket poly bag is permanently sealed by welding. This welding is also to prevent any tampering on the lifejacket before point of sale.

It should be noted that we are not trying to place any blame or fault, but given our production quality checks we fail to understand why this oral tube had a non-return valve in an abnormal position.

To try to find out what has made the non-return valve stick in an abnormal position we would very much like to be able to examine the lifejacket in question or perhaps have it examined by a CE recognised test house

If I can be of any further assistance please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours faithfully,


Per Frode
Managing Director

MCIB Response

**MCIB RESPONSE TO THE LETTER FROM MR. PER FRODE
(BALTIC SAFETY) OF 09TH NOVEMBER 2003**

The MCIB notes the contents of this letter and understands the issue is being pursued by the appropriate authorities.

O'Flynn Exhams & Partners
(On behalf of Mrs. Ella Sweeney)




O'Flynn Exhams & Partners

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Our Ref: DC/ZOB/SWE27/1

Your Ref: MICB 76

Date: 28 November 2003



Mr. Dick Heron,
Secretary,
Marine Casualty Investigation Board,
29-31 Adelaide Road,
Dublin 2

By post and fax: (01) 6783129

**RE: JACK SWEENEY (DECEASED)
ACCIDENT 18TH AUGUST, 2003**

Dear Mr. Heron,


We act on behalf of Mrs Ella Sweeney, widow of the above named who has instructed us to respond on her behalf to the draft report enclosed with your letter to her of 4th November, last. It is our client's wish that her observations be included in the final report.

Our client was the only known witness to the accident. She is adamant that her late husband was in the small punt when he stumbled and fell into the water and not in the process of getting into the small punt.

In relation to the draft report comments are as follows: -

- 1.1 Our client states that her late husband was already in the small punt when he stumbled and fell backwards into the water.
- 2.1 Our client states that she was the only witness to the accident. Mr Jack Keating and Mr. Tony Keating were sitting in a car on the pier and in our client's view did not witness the accident.
- 3.1 Our client disputes that a strong downstream current existed. Our client and her family have lived in the area for many years and as children swam in the area. This would not have been possible if a strong downstream current existed.
- 4.1 The late Mr. Sweeney was standing in the punt and fell out backwards and into the water.
- 4.2 Mr. Jack Keating was in his car on the pier.

Frank O'Flynn	Fachtna O'Driscoll	Denis P. Cahalan	Michael A. Bolger	Irene O'Donovan	Eamonn P. Muldoon	Richard Neville	Susan E. Lee	John Gaffney
Peter Kirwan	Michael P. O Mullain	Eddie Burke	Nicholas Tangney	Rose Hudson	Annmarie Laffey	Steven Walsh	Peter Gleeson	Fiona O'Connell
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4.3 Mrs. Sweeney appreciates the assistance given by Messrs. Keating but has not any recollection of Mr. Keating shouting to her husband to pull the release cord on his life jacket.

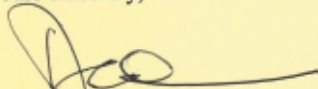
6.1 As previously mentioned our client disputes her late husband slipped while transiting from the motorboat to the punt. He was already standing in the punt when for some reason he became unbalanced and fell backwards into the water.

Can you confirm to whom the draft report has been submitted and give an indication as to when the final report is likely to be available.

Our client requests that the draft report be altered before publication to include her comments.

Please acknowledge receipt of the enclosed and we await hearing from you.

Yours sincerely,



DENIS CAHALAN
O'FLYNN EXHAMS & PARTNERS.

MCIB Response

MCIB RESPONSE TO LETTER FROM O'FLYNN EXHAM & PARTNERS OF 28TH NOVEMBER 2003

The MCIB notes the contents of this letter and have amended the report where appropriate.

