

Crew plucked from sea after clam boat takes on water

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LEB ELLIE-B, a clamming vessel, lay at a 45-degree angle against the north jetty in the Manasquan Inlet, each swell threatening to capsize it.

All was silent except for the waves crashing against the partially submerged boat, still loaded with a haul of clams.

The 68-foot vessel began taking on water sometime about 6:30 a.m. yesterday, forcing its crew of three commercial fishermen to jump overboard after they notified the Coast

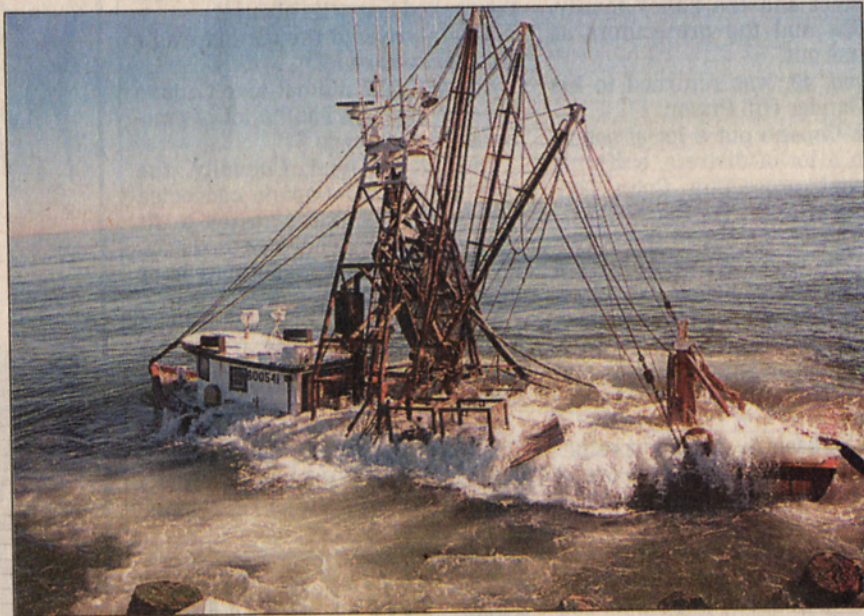
Guard station in Manasquan that the vessel was in distress.

They put on their survival suits and jumped into the water, which had 2-foot swells yesterday, Coast Guard officials said. Within about 10 minutes the Coast Guard and the Crystal Ann, a nearby fishing vessel, rescued the men.

No one on board was injured, officials said.

The crew was identified as Capt. John Babbi, Jason Wilson and Gary Silva, all of Rhode Island, a Coast Guard official said. The men were heading to port with the load of clams when the incident happened.

Coast Guard officials do not know how far out at sea the Leb Ellie-B had been, nor how long the vessel had been out



JOE DELCONZO/Special to the Press

● The clamming vessel Leb Ellie-B remains near Manasquan Inlet's north jetty. The vessel's crew abandoned it after it took on water.



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clamming before taking on water.

The cause of the incident is still under investigation, said Petty Officer Colin Redy of the Manasquan station. A salvage crew was expected to be at the scene last night, a Coast Guard member said.

Redy said the incident could have been the result of human error.

All three fishermen declined to comment.

Babbi, the captain, was charged with failure to maintain a proper lookout, said Trooper Ken Minnes, with the state police's marine bureau in Point Pleasant.

The owner of the vessel, whom Redy only identified as being from Rhode Island, hopes to be able to salvage the vessel and its cargo, Redy said.

Redy said he is not certain what will happen to the clams, but said they could be sold if they have not been fouled by any fuel or similar pollutants from the boat.

This is the third fishing vessel to go down this month. On Jan. 6, the 84-foot Beth Dee Bob sank about 14 miles off the coast of Manasquan with four men aboard. One was rescued and died in the hospital. The body of another was found last Thursday. The two other men are still missing.

Just two days later, the 105-foot Cape Fear, based in New Bedford, Mass., went down in waters just south of Boston. The fishing vessel was carrying a crew of five, officials said.

A nearby boat rescued three men within about 15 minutes. Another crew member's body washed ashore the following day. The Coast Guard is continuing to search for a missing fisherman.