

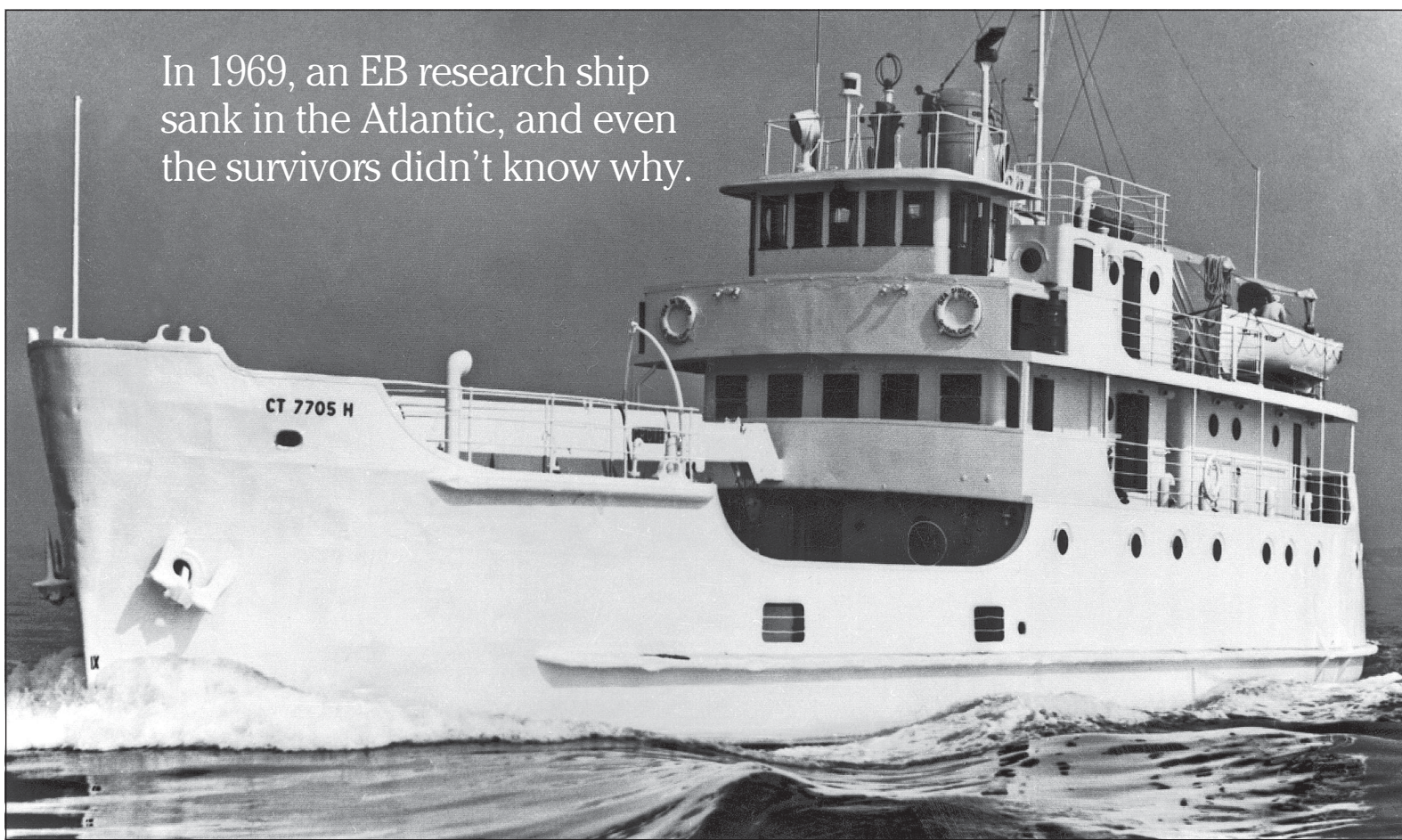
# The Day

More Than a Month: Celebrating Hispanic Heritage **Inside**

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In 1969, an EB research ship sank in the Atlantic, and even the survivors didn't know why.

ED BAILEY/AP PHOTO

## What happened to SEA SURVEYOR?

Story by **JOHN RUDDY**  
Graphics by **SCOTT RITTER**  
The Day

The mission was routine: Sail from Electric Boat, rendezvous with a submarine, conduct tests, return home. ¶ Twelve men from an EB research vessel did return, eventually. But they left their ship at the bottom of the Atlantic and brought back only a question: What went wrong?

Fifty-three years later the mystery remains, and one of the survivors is seeking answers. He hasn't found them despite searching for documents that have to be out there somewhere.

What he has done is resurrect a tale of peril and survival on the high seas in which he played a part. He's lucky he lived to tell it.

And southeastern Connecticut is lucky to reclaim a chapter of maritime lore after decades in which the story was all but forgotten.



A thin crust of ice coated the Thames River on Sunday, Jan. 5, 1969, as the 118-foot ship Sea Surveyor prepared to depart from EB. There were seven in the crew, and one by one, five passengers, or "observers," arrived and boarded.

Three were company employees, and two worked across the river at the Navy Underwater Sound Laboratory, a sonar research site at Fort Trumbull. Their job was to send radio signals to an antenna on a nearby submarine.

At 10 p.m. Sea Surveyor sailed, crunching through the ice as it moved south into Long Island Sound and beyond.

SEE AN EMERGENCY PAGE A4



The 12 Sea Surveyor survivors, left, arrive at John F. Kennedy International Airport in New York on Jan. 19, 1969, after their rescue. This photo was taken by United Press International. Sea Surveyor, top, was a converted coastwise passenger and freight vessel built in 1939. Before Electric Boat bought the ship in 1965, it plied the St. Lawrence River and Gulf for years and also operated between the West Indies, South America, and ports in Georgia, Texas and Florida.

**Editor's note:** This story is based on recollections of Walter Banzhaf and research by Scott Ritter and John Ruddy. Ritter, The Day's production manager, is the son-in-law of Richard Carlson, Sea Surveyor's first mate.

Go to **theday.com** to listen to a podcast about the sinking of the Sea Surveyor.

PHOTO COURTESY OF JOHN RUDDY

## Activists swamp election officials

Thousands of voter challenges driven by conspiracy theories

By **NICHOLAS RICCARDI**  
Associated Press

Spurred by conspiracy theories about the 2020 presidential election, activists around the country are using laws that allow people to challenge a voter's right to cast a ballot to contest the registrations of thousands of voters at a time.

In Iowa, Linn County Auditor Joel Miller had handled three voter challenges over the previous 15 years. He received 119 over just two days after Doug Frank, an Ohio educator who is touring the country spreading doubts about the 2020 election, swung through the state.

In Nassau County in northern Florida, two residents challenged the registrations of nearly 2,000 voters just six days before last month's primary. In Georgia, activists are dropping off boxloads of challenges in the diverse and Democratic-leaning counties comprising the Atlanta metro area, including more than 35,000 in one county late last month.

SEE VOTER PAGE A6

## Business owners say roundabouts would wreck livelihoods

Several buildings would be demolished in plan for Route 82 in Norwich

By **CLAIRE BESSETTE**  
Day Staff Writer

**Norwich** — David McDowell makes his living designing and printing signs, and now he is printing one designed to save his living.

The state Department of Transportation's controversial proposed roundabouts on Route 82-West Main Street would demolish his and four other buildings.

So, when opponents asked him to make "No Roundabouts" signs to protest the \$20 million project, McDowell was skeptical that it would be effective, but went to work as he would with any business order.

On Thursday, McDowell sent a design to Mayor Peter Nystrom, also a strong opponent of the project. Residents and business owners also asked for signs.

SEE NORWICH PAGE A7

### WEATHER

Today, mostly sunny, afternoon clouds, more humid. High 77. Monday, chance of showers. High 78. **E6**

### INDEX

Books/**F2** Public notices/**C3**  
Business/**B1** Puzzles/**C5**  
Classified/**C3** Region/**D1**  
Comics/**G2** Sports/**E1**  
Daybreak/**F1** Stocks/**B5**  
Editorials/**B4** Television/**F3**  
Nation/**A3** World/**A3**  
Obits/**D3,6,7**

### QUEEN'S 8 GRANDCHILDREN HOLD SILENT VIGIL AT COFFIN

**London** — All eight of Queen Elizabeth II's grandchildren stood in silent vigil beside her coffin Saturday, capping another huge day in which thousands came to pay their respects. Mourners huddled in a line that snaked across London, enduring the city's coldest night in months and waits that stretched up to 16 hours.

As U.S. President Joe Biden and other world leaders and dignitaries flew into London ahead of the queen's state funeral on Monday, a tide of people wanting to say goodbye streamed into Parliament's Westminster Hall for another day Saturday. That's where the queen's coffin is lying in state, draped in her Royal Standard and capped with a diamond-studded crown.

Related story, **A3**.

### BIDEN WARNS PUTIN: DON'T USE NUKES OR CHEMICAL WEAPONS

**Washington** — President Joe Biden said Vladimir Putin would face a "consequential" U.S. response if the Russian president used nuclear or chemical weapons in the war in Ukraine.

"Don't. Don't. Don't," Biden said in an excerpt from an interview with CBS's "60 Minutes" when asked what he would say if Putin were considering using tactical nuclear weapons or chemical weapons in the almost 7-month-old conflict. "You will change the face of war unlike anything since World War II."

Biden declined to specify the possible consequences, saying that "the extent of what they do" would determine the response.

"Of course, I'm not going to tell you. It'll be consequential," Biden said. "They'll become more of a pariah in the world than they ever have been. And depending on the extent of what they do will determine what response would occur."

— Bloomberg

### Thirst quenchers



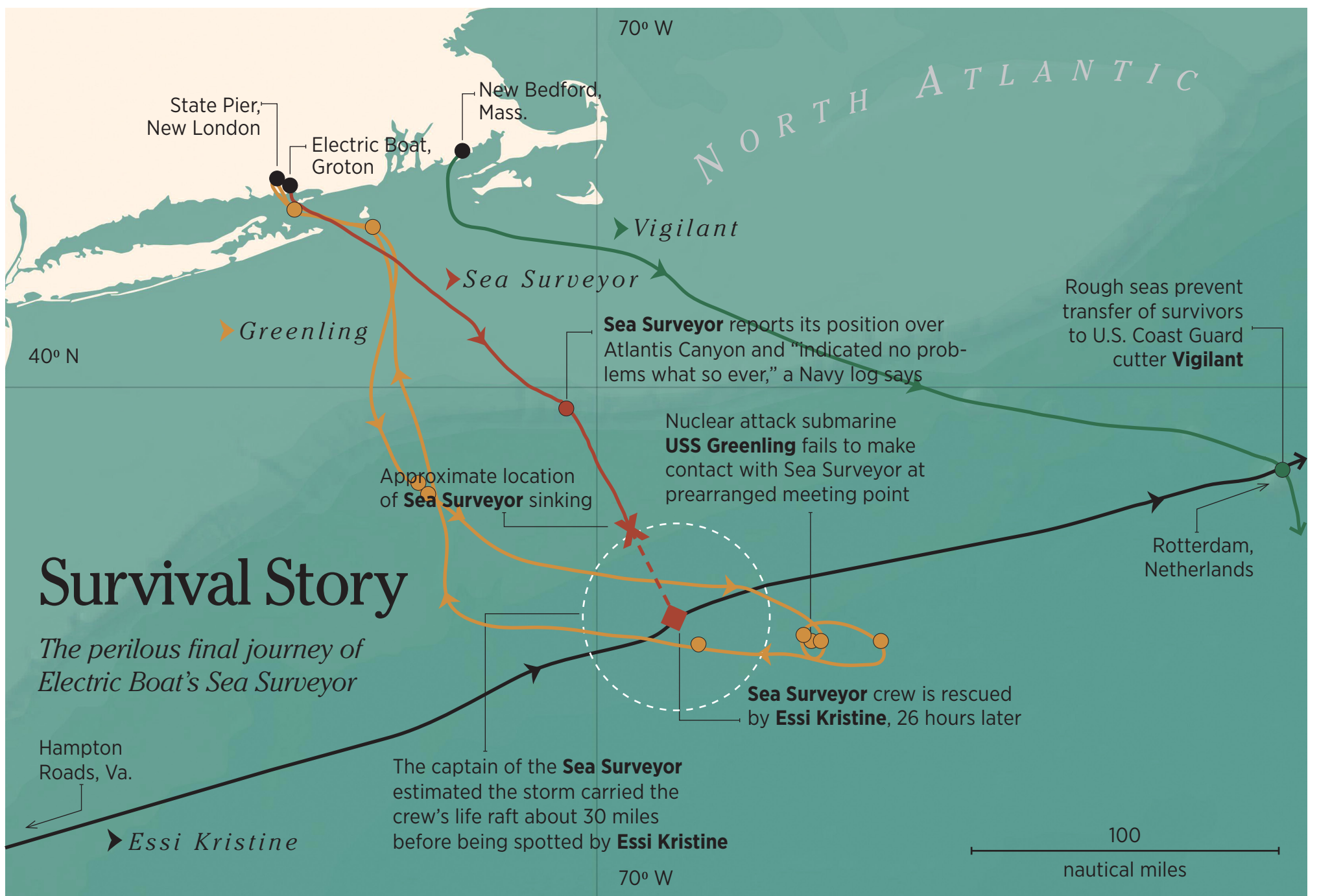
MICHAEL PROBST/AP PHOTO

A woman carries beer in one of the tents Saturday on the opening day of the 187th Oktoberfest beer festival in Munich, Germany.





Final Journey



Survival Story

The perilous final journey of Electric Boat's Sea Surveyor

MAP BY SCOTT RITTER AND JOHN RUDDY/THE DAY | DATA: NATURAL EARTH; LOGS OF USS GREENLING, COAST GUARD CUTTER VIGILANT AND U.S. NAVY; ELECTRIC BOAT; NEWS REPORTS  
The red X shows where the Sea Surveyor may have gone down while en route to rendezvous with the nuclear attack submarine USS Greenling in January 1969. All 12 aboard the 118-foot Electric Boat research vessel were rescued by a passing Norwegian freighter, the Essi Kristine, after 26 storm-tossed hours in an inflatable life raft. The vessels' routes are approximate and are based on coordinates noted in ship logs during the incident.

An emergency unfolding in just 20 minutes

**FROM A1**  
Twelve hours later, the USS Greenling (SSN-614) left State Pier and followed a similar course. If all went as planned, Greenling and Sea Surveyor would meet at sea and test the antenna.

The Sound Lab employees were John GropPELLI, 33, of Pawcatuck, an electronics technician; and a 22-year-old electrical engineer named Walter Banzhaf.

Two years ago, Banzhaf, now 76, discovered an old pad of paper in his Simsbury home. On it was his handwritten account of Sea Surveyor's end, set down just after the fact. The story broke off mid-sentence:

"Two people were on watch, and ..."  
Summoning recollections from a half-century earlier, he finished the thought: "... nothing was seen except waves and spray for several hours."

Between the halves of that sentence lay most of Banzhaf's four years at the lab; a stint as a high school teacher; 29 years as a professor at the University of Hartford; and a lengthy retirement. He added a few paragraphs

and set the pad aside. Then, last December, he found something else: an album of photos and news stories about Sea Surveyor.

"All of that stuff brought back memories," he recalled, "... and I said, 'This is a good story.'"

Banzhaf decided to write something for family and friends who hadn't heard the details. He produced a 28-page booklet and made 80 copies.

The enthusiastic response led to a PowerPoint presentation called "We Are Very Likely to Die," which he has given several times. His next presentation will be Wednesday for the Noank Historical Society.

He also tried to learn how many of his fellow survivors were still alive. He found two: Ernest Maxwell, who lives in the Philippines; and GropPELLI, now 87, who spent 37 years at the lab and is still in Pawcatuck.

The first day at sea was no fun for Banzhaf and GropPELLI. Both were seasick and mostly stayed in their cabins. As the ship headed south, the wind picked up and the swells increased. Eventually, Banzhaf was well enough to have



dinner, but GropPELLI doesn't recall eating on the ship.

At 11:40 p.m., Banzhaf was awakened by a loud, metallic sound.

"It was a big noise, a large piece of something hitting a large piece of something," he said. "I don't know what it was."

GropPELLI didn't hear it, but he noticed vibrations as the ship's propeller rose from the water.

The captain, Adrian Lane, heard the engines speed up from his cabin and went to the bridge, where he learned the ship wasn't responding to the helm. With Sea Surveyor listing to port by 40-45 degrees, Lane ordered a life raft launched. The wind was howling.

Banzhaf heard the ship's bell ring 12 times, and a chart told him that meant "abandon ship." Someone was yell-

IF YOU GO:

**Who:** Walter Banzhaf, Sea Surveyor survivor

**What:** "We Are Very Likely to Die: The Incredible True Story of the Sinking of the R/V Sea Surveyor"

**When:** 7:30 p.m. Wednesday, Sept. 21

**Sponsored by:** Noank Historical Society

**Where:** Noank Baptist Church, 18 Cathedral Heights, Noank

**Admission:** Free

**More information:** www.noankhistoricalsociety.org/calendar.html

**Walter Banzhaf still has the life jacket he wore when he abandoned Sea Surveyor.**

COURTESY OF WALTER BANZHAF

pulled from the water. Then the line to the ship was cut, and the raft started to drift.

The emergency had unfolded in just 20 minutes.

With its port side already submerged, Sea Surveyor slipped beneath the surface at 12:20 a.m. Jan. 7. Its lights were still ablaze, and for a moment they gleamed underwater in the dark.

Then they faded and disappeared.

When it was built in Canada in 1939, the motor vessel Rimouski didn't seem destined for an Atlantic grave. It spent years as a ferry on the St. Lawrence River.

EB bought the 290-ton ship in 1965 for research on underwater technology. A crane was installed to lower submersibles, hydrophone arrays were added, and oceanographic surveys were planned.

With accommodations for 16 scientists and technicians, the vessel was given a name reflecting its new role: Sea Surveyor.

Its captain had impeccable credentials. Adrian Kingsbury Lane of Noank had made a career of commanding research vessels, most recently the Woods Hole Ocean-

SEE JUST FIVE PAGE A5

Rescue at Sea



R/V Sea Surveyor

The 118-foot passenger ship and freighter was built in 1939 by Maritime Industries Ltd. of Sorel, Quebec. Electric Boat overhauled the ship in 1965 to serve as a research vessel.

ED BAILEY/AP PHOTO



USS Greenling (SSN-614)

Thresher/Permit-class nuclear attack submarine was launched by Electric Boat in Groton on April 4, 1964. The 292-foot Greenling was decommissioned in 1994.

WIKIMEDIA COMMONS



Essi Kristine

The 825-foot bulk carrier was built by Harland & Wolff in Belfast, Northern Ireland, and launched Nov. 21, 1967. In 1978, it was sold to China Ocean Shipping Co. and renamed Wen Deng Hai. It was broken up around 2006.

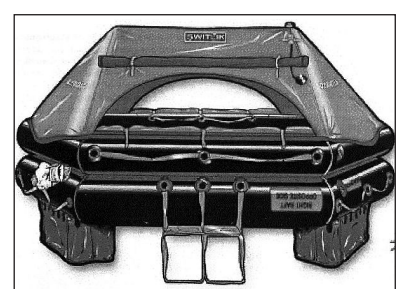
WOLFGANG FRICKE



USCGC Vigilant (WMEC-617)

Medium-class endurance cutter commissioned Oct. 3, 1964, at Todd Shipyard in Houston. The 210-foot cutter was homeported in New Bedford, Mass., from 1964 through 1989 and is currently based in Port Canaveral, Fla.

AP PHOTO



Switlik life raft

The 12 men aboard the Sea Surveyor survived high seas and gale-force winds in a life raft manufactured by Switlik Parachute Co. of Trenton, N.J. The raft had a maximum capacity of 15.

COURTESY WALTER BANZHAF



## The Survivors



**Adrian K. Lane, 49,** Noank. Captain, Sea Surveyor. Skipper of Woods Hole Oceanic Institution's Atlantis and Mystic Seaport schooner Brilliant.



**Richard P. Carlson, 42,** Groton. First mate, Sea Surveyor. Merchant Marine Academy graduate. Electric Boat naval architect.



**Stanley Olado, 51,** Hopkinton, R.I. Electric Boat crew.



**Michael W. Dunn, 26,** Stonington. Electric Boat observer.



**John J. Kennedy, 48,** Pawcatuck. Electric Boat crew.



**Walter R. Banzhaf, 22,** Ledyard. Electrical engineer from the Navy Underwater Sound Laboratory in New London. Observer.



**Ernest G. Maxwell, 24,** Noank. Electric Boat observer.



**William G. Burgess Jr., 38,** Norwich. Electric Boat observer.



**Joseph R. O'Brien, 42,** Groton. Electric Boat crew.



**Johnnie D. Doyal, 46,** Ledyard. Electric Boat crew.



**John R. Lightsey, 43,** Groton. Electric Boat crew.



**John J. Groppelli, 33,** Pawcatuck. Electronic technician from the Navy Underwater Sound Laboratory in New London. Observer.

SOURCE: ELECTRIC BOAT; PHOTOS: ELECTRIC BOAT; UPI

# Just five words: 'Damn lucky to be alive'

### FROM A4

graphic Institution's Atlantis, later the namesake of a space shuttle. He had also been captain of the schooner Brilliant at Mystic Seaport.

The first mate was Richard Carlson of Groton, a Merchant Marine Academy graduate and yacht designer who was working as a naval architect at EB. Rounding out the crew were two engineers, a bosun, a cook and an able-bodied seaman.

Over four years, Sea Surveyor logged 25,000 miles and completed 75 missions. The 76th ended in disaster.



Cold, wet and stunned into silence, 12 men sat in darkness in a rubber life raft enclosed by a canopy. With a flashlight, Banzhaf found a manual and started to read.

"Your situation is not hopeless!" it began. He wasn't cheered. Amid waves 15 to 20 feet high, he and the others passed a bucket and took turns vomiting.

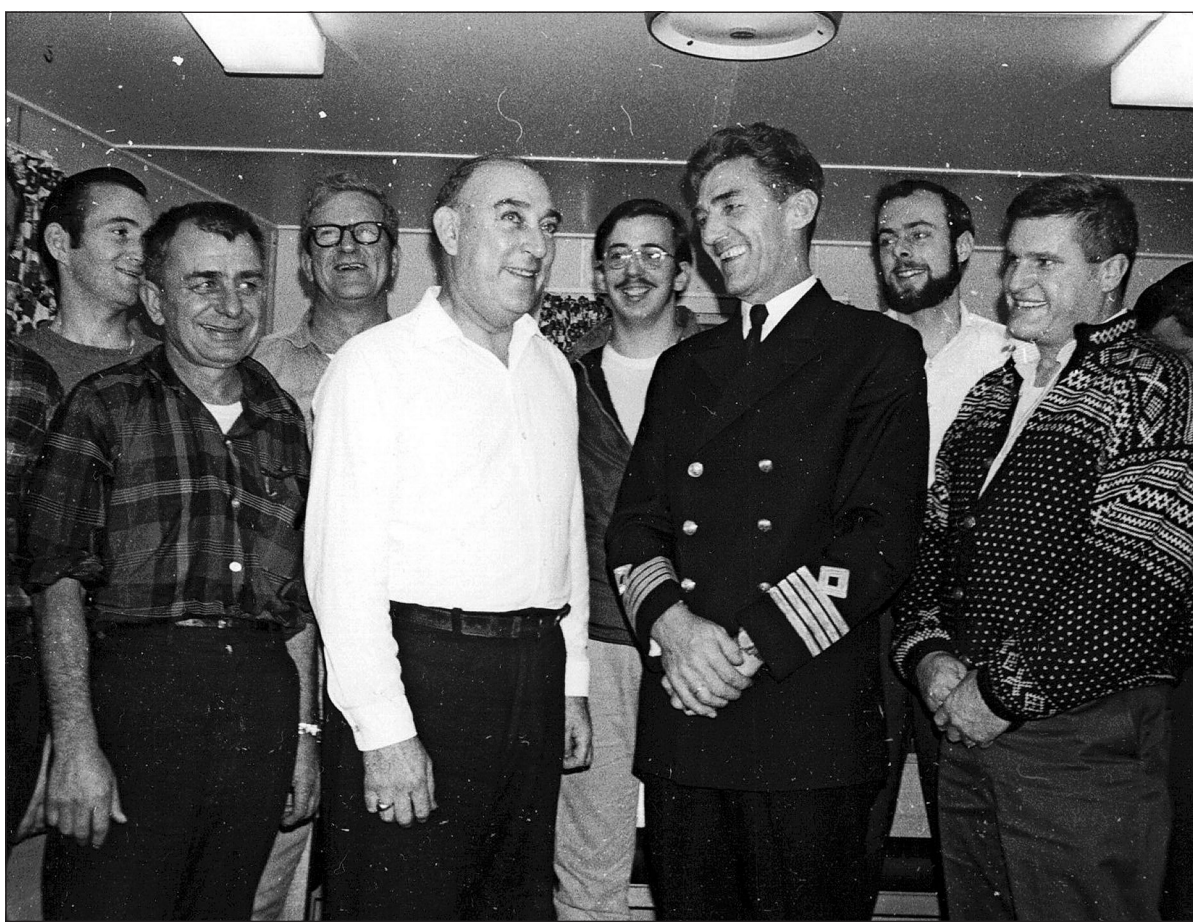
There wasn't much to say, but Lane had relevant information he kept to himself: All along the East Coast, longshoremen were on strike. That meant fewer potential rescuers in the shipping lanes.

But in the early morning dark, a ship did come along, so close it almost ran over the raft. By the canopy light, the men could make out rivets on the hull. Then the vessel steamed away, its crew oblivious.

With daylight, the seasickness ebbed as the storm worsened. The wind roared when the raft was atop a wave and ceased when it was in a trough. No help arrived.

"Each of us became increasingly aware that our chances of surviving were, at best, slim," Banzhaf wrote.

Darkness fell, and after 24 hours, the men spotted the lights of a distant ship, visible only when a wave



COURTESY WALTER BANZHAF

crested. Crewman Stanley Olado opened the canopy and waved the flashlight.

The ship seemed to change course, and Banzhaf was told to fire their only parachute flare, which would hang in the air and mark their position.

But just before he could, the wind flipped the raft upside down, spilling most of the men into the ocean.



There are aspects of the story that remain unresolved. Sea Surveyor sent a distress call, so why wasn't the raft found by a search? Banzhaf said a 10-degree error in longitude

may have been reported or heard, the equivalent of 530 miles.

A Navy report says that when Greenling notified EB the ship had failed to reach two possible rendezvous points, the shipyard "did not consider it unusual." And the Sound Lab told the Navy none of its personnel were aboard.

The biggest question: What happened to Sea Surveyor? No one had any idea.

When the news broke, Groton radio station WSUB placed a long-distance call and reached Carlson, whose family has a recording of the broadcast.

"The information we can give you

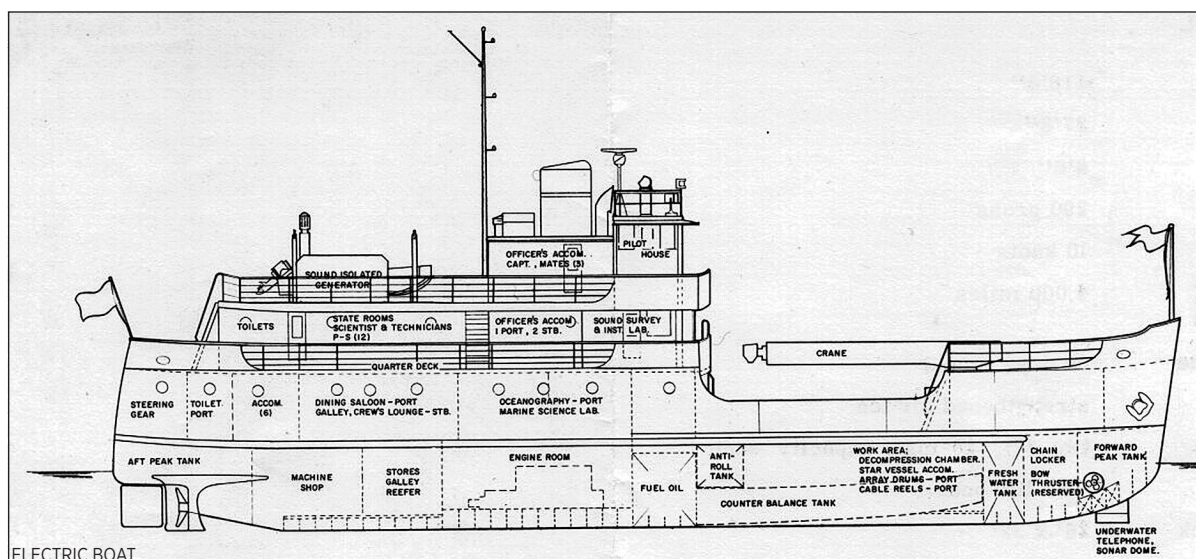
**Sea Surveyor crew members, above, pose for a photo with Capt. Edmund Haakonson, in uniform, of the Essi Kristine.**

**Left, the flashlight used by Sea Surveyor crew to attract the attention of the Norwegian freighter was displayed at a banquet in Rotterdam, Netherlands, after the crew's rescue.**

**Below, a diagram of the Sea Surveyor appeared in an informational brochure given to passengers on the ship.**



COURTESY MILDRED CARLSON



ELECTRIC BOAT

survivors. In a 1980 profile in The Day, he reduced his thoughts to five words:

"Damn lucky to be alive."



Struggling in the water, the men somehow righted the overturned raft and climbed back in. Banzhaf tried to shoot the flare, but it was soaked. There was fear they had lost their chance to get the distant ship's attention. Olado, who had held onto the flashlight, again waved it.

When a signal lamp lit up on the ship, the meaning was clear: We see you.

Soon a large freighter arrived and put itself between the raft and the wind. But the raft blew out of reach anyway. The ship then maneuvered so the wind would bring the raft alongside.

Still, waves tossed the ship so much that one minute its crewmen were in handshake distance, and the next they were out of sight. A line was dropped and the raft towed to the ship's leeward side, where a cargo net was lowered.

After drifting 30 miles in 26 hours, the men happily abandoned the raft. Ten climbed the net; two, including Groppelli, were so weak they had to be carried.

They learned they were aboard the Essi Kristine of Norway, 825 feet long and carrying coal from Hampton Roads, Va., to the Netherlands. They were offered dry clothes and fortified with Scotch.

Banzhaf used the ship's radio to give the Coast Guard word of Sea Surveyor's fate, and the call launched a postscript to the drama.

The cutter Vigilant was nearby, en route to assist with a man overboard on the Bluenose II, a famous schooner from Nova Scotia. But the Coast Guard diverted it to collect the Sea Surveyor survivors and bring them home.

At 3 p.m. Jan. 8, Vigilant met Essi Kristine in still-heavy seas. The transfer would be by breeches buoy: One man at a time would be placed in a harness and pulled along a line suspended between the rocking vessels.

"I wasn't about to do that," Groppelli said.

Neither was anyone else, and the idea was scrapped. Vigilant left empty-handed.

With that, the men settled in for a 10-day trip to Rotterdam. It was blissfully uneventful except for ping-pong, dinners with the officers and a Hopalong Cassidy movie with Norwegian subtitles.

Upon their arrival, they were met by EB officials who had flown over and brought fresh clothes. A banquet was held where gifts were given and gratitude expressed.

The next day, Sunday, Jan. 19, the men of Sea Surveyor boarded a flight to New York, where the national media photographed their arrival. They quickly transferred to a General Dynamics plane for the short hop to Groton.

At Trumbull Airport, as they stepped into joyful embraces from family members, they fulfilled the most important part of their mission.

Two weeks late but alive and well, they were back home.

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is zilch because ... we don't know what happened ourselves," Carlson said with frustration in his voice. "The ship simply filled up with water and sank."

Speculation filled the void. One theory was that hull plating had failed. Another was that a piece of equipment left behind during maintenance caused damage when the seas turned rough.

Three weeks after the sinking, all 12 survivors testified in a Coast Guard hearing. Lane said the ship may have struck an underwater object, but he wasn't sure. Banzhaf said the crash that woke him "physically shook the vessel," yet only one or two others heard it.

On March 5, 1970, The Day reported the Coast Guard had released "findings of fact" that only hinted at the cause; the investigating officer's conclusions were withheld. No punitive action was taken against the crew.

Banzhaf has been chasing those documents for months. He's sent many inquiries, and The Day has also searched, but nothing has turned up.

"I don't actually believe I'll ever get it," he said.



Without answers, Banzhaf may never know why he had to stare down death at a young age. In the life raft he had sad thoughts about leaving behind his wife of six months and his cat's newborn kittens.

"The strange thing to my recollection is ... I just had a whole bunch of dental work done ... and I said ... 'What a waste of money, thousands of dollars. ... It's going to lie at the bottom of the ocean.' Strange how the mind works, I guess."

If Lane and Carlson had similar thoughts, they never shared them. Lane's son Chris, and Carlson's widow, Mildred, said the two, both professional sailors, were typically mum about their experiences.

Carlson's ship was torpedoed in World War II, and "all he would ever say is, 'I went for a rowboat ride,'" his wife said. Lane offered little even as he hosted parties for the