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# Cheeki Rafiki: Life raft found on damaged yacht



The US Coast Guard issued photographs of Cheeki Rafiki's upturned hull showing its keel had broken off

**The wreckage of the yacht crewed by four UK sailors missing in the North Atlantic was found with its life raft still onboard, the US Coast Guard says.**

The upturned hull of the 40ft Cheeki Rafiki was found on Friday but there was no sign of the crew.

The yacht began taking on water on its way to the UK after an Antigua regatta.

The US search ended at midnight local time and the RAF will no longer go out. The yacht's owners said it was a "terrible moment" for their families.

A US Navy helicopter crew discovered the wreckage about 1,000 miles (1,600km) east of Massachusetts on Friday after the search for the missing men resumed three days earlier following an official request from the UK government.



James Male, Andrew Bridge, Steve Warren and Paul Goslin (l-r) were all experienced yachtsmen

The crew got into difficulties in the same area on 15 May.

They were Paul Goslin, 56, from West Camel, Somerset; Steve Warren, 52, from Bridgwater, Somerset; skipper Andrew Bridge, 22, from Farnham, Surrey; and 22-year-old James Male, from Romsey, Hampshire.

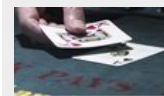
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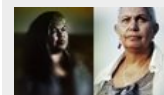
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Mr Warren's uncle, Albert Davey, told the BBC: "Prior to setting off on this return trip... the Cheeki Rafiki had won its class in the Antigua Yachting Regatta.

"It's not the ending we would want but we have got to gain some small consolation that Steve was doing what he thoroughly enjoyed doing and I think we have got to cling on to that."

Prime Minister David Cameron said: "My thoughts are with the families and friends of the crew of the Cheeki Rafiki after the sad news that its hull has been found with the life-raft unused.

"My sincere thanks to the US Coast Guard for leading the international search with great dedication - and to the US Navy, the Canadian authorities and to our own RAF C-130 aircraft who took part in it."

Many private boats taking part in the ARC Rally across the Atlantic had diverted to help in the search. The event's organiser, the World Cruising Club, is now asking the 120 sailors from 16 nations taking part - as well as other sailors - to observe a minute's silence at sunset.

The Royal Yachting Association said the search efforts of sailors and merchant ships "has been a powerful reflection of the spirit that binds the boating community".

Southampton-based Stormforce Coaching, the owners of the Cheeki Rafiki, said in a statement: "This is a terrible moment for the families and friends of the crew... We all share in their sorrow after this tragedy.

"We would like to thank all those who have participated in the search efforts."

### 'Cabin flooded'

A US Navy boat crew was deployed after the helicopter sighting and found the cabin of the yacht was flooded and its windows shattered.

A surface swimmer then identified the name on the back of the boat and knocked on the hull but there was no response.

A spokesman said: "The US Coast Guard has confirmed the life raft aboard the capsized sailing vessel Cheeki Rafiki was secured in its storage space in the aft portion of the boat, Friday, indicating it was not used for emergency purposes."

There was no sign of the men and there are no further indications as to their whereabouts.

The yacht's keel was broken, which had caused a breach in the hull, a US Coast Guard spokesman added.

An image showing the life raft still in position had been "shared with and acknowledged by the [men's] families", the Coast Guard said.

The US Coast Guard added it did not perform salvage operations as a matter of policy.

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Mr Warren's family said in a statement: "We are very sad that the US has now suspended the search.

"From the beginning we, together with the other families involved, have continued to hold out hope that he would be found alive."

They paid tribute to the US Coast Guard for leading an "exceptional search".

They added: "This is now an incredibly difficult time for all the family. We would therefore request that we are given privacy to come to terms with today's decision."

Jeremy Wyatt from the World Cruising Club sailing organisation said the chain of events was still "all speculation".

But he told BBC Radio 4's Today programme the yacht would have become unstable after the keel came off and it would have capsized "very quickly" and the crew might not have had time to launch the lifeboat.

The Cheeki Rafiki contacted Stormforce Coaching on 15 May to say it was taking on water and diverting to the Azores. Contact was lost in the early hours of 16 May and locator beacons were activated later that day.

The US Coast Guard said at the start of the search that winds were blowing at more than 50mph and the sea reached heights of up to 15ft. On 18 May an overturned hull that matched the description of the Cheeki Rafiki was spotted by a container ship.

The RAF Hercules C-130 plane operating from the Azores had been due to continue its search on Saturday.

The Foreign Office said: "In light of the US Coast Guard's decision to suspend their search for the crew following photographic confirmation that the life raft is in the hull of the boat, the C-130 will now return to the UK."

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