

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD

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Investigation of:

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FIRE AND SINKING OF THE *CONCEPTION*
WITH LOSS OF LIFE NEAR
SANTA CRUZ ISLAND, CALIFORNIA,
SEPTEMBER 2, 2019

Accident No.: DCA19MM047

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Interview of: Channel Islands Harbor Patrol

Via Telephone

Friday,
September 13, 2019

APPEARANCES:

MARCEL MUISE, Marine Accident Investigator
National Transportation Safety Board

Channel Islands Harbor Patrol

ERIC WOODMANSEE, Patrol Officer
SGT. ANDY WERNER, Patrol Officer
GARY HIRTENSTEINER, Harbormaster

I N D E X

ITEM

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Interview of Channel Islands Harbor Patrol:

By Mr. Muise

4

I N T E R V I E W

(11:47 a.m. EDT)

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3 MR. MUISE: This is Marcel Muise. It's 11:47 in Washington
4 D.C., on September 13th. I'm one of the investigators from the
5 NTSB investigating the fire aboard the *Conception* from September
6 2nd. With me are employees from the Channel Island Harbor Patrol,
7 did I get that right?

8 MR. WOODMANSEE: That is correct.

9 MR. MUISE: That's -- all right. So who do we have on the
10 line?

11 MR. WOODMANSEE: Eric Woodmansee, Harbor Patrol.

12 MR. MUISE: Can you spell your last name for me?

13 MR. WOODMANSEE: Yeah, it's W-O-O-D-M-A-N-S-E-E, two E's at
14 the end.

15 MR. MUISE: Okay.

16 MR. WOODMANSEE: Like wood, man and see.

17 MR. MUISE: And, Eric, who's with you there?

18 SGT. WERNER: Sergeant Andy Werner, W-E-R-N-E-R.

19 MR. MUISE: Just the two of you there?

20 MR. HIRTENSTEINER: And Gary Hirtensteiner. Do you want me
21 to spell the last name for you?

22 MR. MUISE: Please.

23 MR. HIRTENSTEINER: H-I-R-T-E-N-S-T-E-I-N-E-R, and I'm the
24 harbormaster.

25 MR. MUISE: Oh, okay. All right. And I'm alone here in D.C.

1 INTERVIEW OF CHANNEL ISLANDS HARBOR PATROL

2 MR. MUISE: For -- so, Eric, can you tell us -- let's start,
3 just tell me about your agency -- what are you guys -- what's your
4 mission and what's your area of responsibility?

5 MR. WOODMANSEE: Yeah. So we're a harbor patrol, so we
6 patrol the harbor, like, during my normal duty or what I was doing
7 that night. I was patrolling the harbor, standing by for any sort
8 of emergency calls, or if there's any guest dockers that come in,
9 we can check them in. So we're basically the eyes and the ears on
10 the water in the Channel Islands Harbor.

11 MR. MUISE: So how far off shore do you guys work normally?

12 MR. WOODMANSEE: We have a nautical mile outside the harbor
13 entrance and then to the north and to the south.

14 MR. MUISE: And do you -- Port Hueneme as well, is that part
15 of your jurisdiction?

16 MR. WOODMANSEE: No.

17 MR. MUISE: It's not. Okay. So tell us a little about Boat
18 15, what its capabilities are?

19 MR. WOODMANSEE: Yeah. So Boat 15 we're in a mutual
20 agreement with the fire department. We can run Boat 15 within our
21 area, but then if there's a fire, say, outside of our area, when
22 we're dispatched by the Venture County Fire Dispatch, then we
23 operate Boat 15 for the fire department.

24 MR. MUISE: Okay. All right.

25 MR. WOODMANSEE: So essentially we're the captain of Boat 15.

1 MR. MUISE: So tell me a little bit about Boat 15's
2 capabilities?

3 SGT. WERNER: You guys want me to get that?

4 MR. WOODMANSEE: Go ahead, go ahead.

5 SGT. WERNER: All right. So Boat 15 is mutually owned and
6 operated between the Channel Islands Harbor Patrol, which we are a
7 County of Ventura agency, and the Ventura County Fire Department.

8 MR. MUISE: Okay. This is Sergeant Werner right? Just so
9 the transcriptionist --

10 SGT. WERNER: What's that? Yeah, sorry, this is Sergeant
11 Werner.

12 MR. MUISE: Just for the transcriptionist.

13 SGT. WERNER: So in that operating agreement we, for a boat
14 fire, will -- we expand our area of responsibility to be anywhere
15 in Ventura County for a boat fire.

16 MR. MUISE: Okay.

17 SGT. WERNER: And so that's how we ended up involved in this
18 call. I know that it's actually not in Ventura County, but
19 Ventura County Mutual Aid, and so that's how we ended up with
20 this.

21 The boat's capabilities -- so, it's predominately, primarily
22 a fire response boat and so it has 1500 gallons per minute
23 potential. We have a deck gun or a monitor upfront that has a
24 siphon tube to deploy A-Triple F foam and it also has three
25 standpipes that hand lines can be attached to, fog nozzles can be

1 attached to, other foam inducting nozzles can be attached to.
2 It's essentially a fire engine on the water. So the same hose
3 bundles that a fire engine would have we carry on that boat.

4 In addition to that, we carry extra A-Triple F foam. We have
5 a separate dewatering pump that is accessible, so that once we put
6 a fire out and have a bunch of water on a boat, we can dewater the
7 boat to keep it afloat. We also carry medical equipment on board
8 commensurate with the medical equipment you would find on a basic
9 life support system fire engine.

10 MR. MUISE: Okay.

11 SGT. WERNER: Because we are all -- we're all certified
12 emergency medical technicians as well as certified Coast Guard 100
13 ton boat captains.

14 Yes, capabilities of the boat, is there -- what else would
15 you be interested in with that? Like the horsepower on board or
16 the speed?

17 MR. MUISE: Sure. Yeah, go ahead.

18 SGT. WERNER: So it's a 32-foot Dauntless, is the model, and
19 it's a Sea Ark is the make. And currently we have two Yamaha 350s
20 powering it. Mercury. Sorry. I said Yamaha. Correction,
21 Mercury 350s that power it. And with those on board, its
22 capabilities at top speed, you know, kind of ideal ocean
23 conditions, we've got it to 43 knots, you know, with personnel on
24 board and full fuel tanks and all that. So it's a pretty high
25 speed boat, has those capabilities.

1 MR. MUISE: What makes it an NFPA code boat? Does that make
2 sense?

3 SGT. WERNER: I'm sorry, can you ask one more time?

4 MR. MUISE: What makes it an NFPA certified boat? Not
5 certified, but what code does it meet to be NFPA?

6 MR. HIRTENSTEINER: Long question.

7 SGT. WERNER: I'd have to refer you to the fire department on
8 that --

9 MR. MUISE: Okay.

10 SGT. WERNER: -- and their battalion chief, Battalion Chief
11 Gene Fong. I'm sure you've spoken with him.

12 MR. MUISE: Right.

13 SGT. WERNER: He was involved with this incident as well.
14 He's kind of the expert on all the ratings and certifications and
15 such like that.

16 MR. MUISE: Okay. All right. I have spoken to him, yeah,
17 and he had --

18 SGT. WERNER: Oh, you haven't? Okay. He'd be a good --

19 MR. MUISE: I have. I have spoken to him, and he mentioned
20 that this was an NFPA or it met some NFPA code, unlike all the
21 other boats in the area.

22 SGT. WERNER: Yeah. I think it has to do with the amount
23 of --

24 MR. HIRTENSTEINER: The equipment.

25 SGT. WERNER: -- the equipment that's on board and the amount

1 of -- you know, the gallons per minute that it can flow. And it's
2 basically because of its firefighting capabilities it gets a
3 certain rating. But the specifics, we look to the fire
4 department. That's part of our partnership with them.

5 MR. MUISE: Okay.

6 SGT. WERNER: We're kind of the boat guys, they're the fire
7 guys, and then we work together to make it happen.

8 MR. MUISE: Okay. The -- well, let's -- Eric, just tell me
9 about that evening. Tell me -- I tell you what, before we -- let
10 me pause this for a second.

11 MR. WOODMANSEE: Sure.

12 MR. MUISE: Okay, we're back on the record. Go ahead.

13 MR. WOODMANSEE: Okay.

14 MR. MUISE: We were talking about that evening.

15 MR. WOODMANSEE: Yeah, so about --

16 MR. MUISE: That evening and what --

17 MR. WOODMANSEE: -- about that evening. Yes, on that evening
18 I reported for duty at midnight. Everything was normal, routine.
19 I started my first patrol at 1 o'clock, and that basically entails
20 heading to the outer harbor to just get a sense of the sea
21 conditions, and then going to the harbor and, you know, stopping
22 in at kind of our marinas and different marinas in the harbor. So
23 it's basically just a patrol route that covers the harbor.

24 When I left -- the whole summer has kind of had this weather
25 pattern where I have usually showed up to work and it's pretty

1 clear most of the time, maybe a little bit of northwest wind.

2 On that particular night I observed or I took note when I
3 went out to the outer harbor that pretty heavy fog had rolled in
4 at about 12:30. So there was some reduced visibility, and with it
5 came a pretty decent northwest breeze, about 5 to 10 knots, maybe
6 5 to 8 knots, and I took note of it just, you know, just in case
7 we got a call offshore.

8 I went through my normal routine patrol and I was finishing
9 that up at about 3:30 and that's when I heard the Coast Guard --
10 what's his name -- I can't think of it -- the Coast Guard --

11 MR. HIRTENSTEINER: Long Beach?

12 MR. WOODMANSEE: No. I did notice actually Coast Guard LA,
13 they were talking on the radio to a vessel out in Santa Cruz, on
14 Santa Cruz, but I couldn't make out what the vessel or -- the
15 vessel that was on Santa Cruz, I couldn't -- I can't hear their
16 traffic but I could hear LA.

17 Shortly after I heard the -- I forget his name, but over at
18 Channel Islands, Coast Guard Channel Islands -- Livingstone. He
19 came on fire dispatch and he said -- he requested a response, a
20 fire engine to respond to the Coast Guard station in order to
21 respond to Santa Cruz island for a heart attack.

22 I took note of that because that took Station 53, which is
23 our normal station that we respond to calls with, with Boat 5. So
24 then at that point, since they were responding on the Coast Guard
25 boat, I knew that if there was a boat fire then I would get

1 another engine company who may not be familiar with Boat 15.

2 I went into the office at that point and that's when I heard
3 Coast Guard LA get back on the -- on Channel 16, VHF Channel 16,
4 and start talking to another, start talking to another vessel or
5 it ended up being the same station, and, again, I couldn't make
6 out the communication on the station side on Santa Cruz Island,
7 but I could make out Coast Guard LA and I heard them mention a
8 boat fire. I heard them mention the name *Conception*, which I'm
9 familiar with the boat just from hearing them over Channel 16 and
10 I knew that they were a sports boat, commercial boat, that ran out
11 of -- and I was pretty sure out of Santa Barbara Harbor. And so I
12 heard the boat fire, I heard the *Conception*, and then I heard that
13 there's 33 people trapped.

14 At that point -- there's a website called MarineTraffic, and
15 you can access every commercial boat that has AIS -- or
16 recreational boat that has an AIS, you can reference their
17 coordinates. I pulled up that website, I took the coordinates
18 from that -- from the -- I found the *Conception* on Santa Cruz
19 Island. I got the coordinates, I wrote them down, and I went down
20 to Boat 15 to prepare Boat 15 for the fire -- for when we got
21 dispatched. Because it was Santa Cruz Island, I figured that we
22 were going to get dispatched so I just wanted to get everything
23 ready.

24 My partner that evening showed up, he came down with me, and
25 that was Officer James Roebuck. He came down with me to Boat 15.

1 We got the engines running, I plugged in those coordinates. I got
2 a track mark, a waypoint to the *Conception*. At that point VNC,
3 Ventura dispatch, came over the radio and dispatched Engine 54 to
4 Boat 15 to respond to the boat fire at Santa Cruz Island. About
5 10 minutes later we had the boat ready.

6 I asked my partner to head up to the cul-de-sac by our office
7 and show them -- guide them down to the boat, just in case they
8 weren't familiar with where they were going. And he guided them
9 down to the boat, they got on the boat, and we cut it loose and we
10 went code out of the harbor.

11 We hit the -- when we passed -- we made it out of the harbor
12 entrance past the breakwater, and that's when we first felt the
13 swells. Right off the bat we took a pretty good, pretty good hit
14 from one of the swells, and I was -- basically the whole way out
15 there, we were in fog, too, so I had really -- I had reduced
16 visibility. I used the radar and the GPS to follow my course, and
17 from there on it was just watching those screens and making sure
18 that the fire department were able to hold on, because I was
19 taking that boat as fast as I could to get out there.

20 We, throughout that we were monitoring different calls. The
21 Coast Guard, on their small boat, got about a 10 minute to 15
22 minute head start on us, and so I knew that they would be arriving
23 on the scene before us --

24 MR. MUISE: Can I pause you right there, Eric?

25 MR. WOODMANSEE: Yeah, go ahead.

1 MR. MUISE: Is that the, is that the first 45 or the second
2 one?

3 MR. WOODMANSEE: That would have been the first one.

4 MR. MUISE: Okay. Go ahead. Sorry.

5 MR. WOODMANSEE: No, that's fine. And so it took us about 40
6 minutes of running out there. I knew that -- let's see. I saw
7 that we were just about in line with the oil derrick or oil
8 platform Gilda. We passed Gilda on our starboard side, and then I
9 could find -- on the GPS I could see Yellow Banks on Santa Cruz,
10 so I knew we were going up the front side -- I had an idea about
11 where we were going on the front side. And at that point we just
12 -- yeah, we -- the track marks took us right to *Conception*.

13 I remember feeling -- at that point, you know, you're relying
14 -- you're running that boat as fast as you can, you're relying on
15 those GPS points, and I remember getting a little anxious to see
16 the fire just because all I could see was, you know, blackness out
17 the front windows. I couldn't see anything just because of the
18 fog and the dark, and so I just wanted to make sure that we
19 weren't going to be -- end up in a wrong location, so I remember
20 being pretty anxious at that point after passing Gilda.

21 When we passed Gilda the swell kind of laid down at that
22 point, I basically was able to get the boat just full throttle the
23 rest of the way. About a mile and half to 2 miles off the island,
24 the fog broke, and at that point I got my first sight of
25 *Conception*. There was a bright glow. It was, it was a good size

1 fire, I could tell from miles away.

2 I briefed our -- the fire department and I, we basically came
3 up with a plan. I told them -- I was just telling, briefing them
4 about how the monitor's going to make my boat react. The monitor
5 on Boat 15 puts out such a force of water that it really will, you
6 know, push the boat in different directions. So I told them -- we
7 just basically got on the same page about how we were going to
8 attack the fire. Our first priority at that point was rescue, so
9 our plans were to get on scene, get our searchlights going, and
10 circle *Conception* and search the island to find people.

11 When boat -- when the small -- Coast Guard small boat was on
12 scene, they contacted the captain on my boat, the fire captain,
13 and told him that they had been conducting the search and they
14 didn't find any of the passengers outside of the boat. So within
15 this 1 mile to 2 mile radius, we changed our plan to just going
16 straight to fighting the fire.

17 As we approached, we were about a quarter mile off, I reduced
18 speed to allow the fire department to put the rest of their
19 turnouts on and to get my searchlights going and start the pumps,
20 and that way I knew when I came on scene I wouldn't accidentally hit
21 somebody who might have been in the water. I wanted to approach
22 slow and I wanted to have my searchlights searching in front of me
23 so that I knew I had a clear access to the fire.

24 We made our way into the fire and had -- got the pumps going,
25 and basically just got the Triple -- A-Triple F foam, and we went

1 right into fighting that fire. I put the bow right on, you know,
2 probably -- we started about 20 feet off of the *Conception* and we
3 started coating the, coating the fire in foam, and we just did
4 laps around the *Conception* putting foam on it.

5 It was about probably 20 to 25 minutes into fighting the fire
6 that I noticed that the fire -- we were knocking it down, we were
7 making substantial ground. And I was kind of assessing the boat
8 layout. I could see where the fuel tank was because that would --
9 that's kind of the spot that would flare up a lot. We knocked
10 down the fire there and then it would flare back up, and then
11 there's another point on the bow that would start up.

12 So we ended up fighting the fire for about 35 to -- it was
13 probably actually about 30 minutes into the call that I noticed --
14 the fire captain had told me, hey, you know, heads up, and I
15 looked out the window; I noticed that there was some dry reef to
16 my starboard side, and that's when I realized that our -- the
17 *Conception*, you know, it had burned through the anchor line and
18 the wind had put it up on the island.

19 So I backed off, I scanned the area with the searchlights to
20 get our surrounding, and vessel assist captain, Paul, he came in
21 and he put a grapple hook on the bow of the *Conception*, pulled it
22 off the island, and then we continued fighting the fire. It was
23 probably about 70 percent contained at that point, and so we are
24 just kind of focusing on two areas. It looked like where the fuel
25 tank was located and off the bow that we were -- those were the

1 two fires that just continued to burn.

2 We moved off. Santa Barbara Harbor Patrol moved in at that
3 time, and we backed out to give them room to fight the fire, and
4 then they fought the fire for about 15, 20 minutes, as I recall.

5 The sun started to come up at that point, so we started to
6 get a visual of the island, where we were located on the island.
7 Let's see. And then Santa Barbara Harbor Patrol they backed out
8 of there. They ended up kind of pinned against the island. And
9 the smoke was shifting in different directions, the wind was kind
10 of variable coming off the island. It would come out of the
11 canyon at Platts Harbor, and then it would kind of suck back into
12 the canyon; so it was variable. They backed out of there and then
13 we went back in, resumed, and we knocked down the rest of the
14 fire. And then at that point we were just kind of standing off
15 and every time there was a flare-up, we would put water on the
16 fire.

17 Started to notice that it was getting low in the aft. We had
18 been in touch with Ventura Harbor Patrol, and they have a pump on
19 their fireboat that they were going to put in service and try and
20 get on the *Conception*. That pump ended up being out of service,
21 so things kind of started moving pretty fast there once there was
22 a couple through-holes. There was two exhaust through-holes and
23 there was, you know, a couple other smaller through-holes located
24 near the aft. So once those started going underwater it started
25 kind of moving faster.

1 And -- I'm trying to think if I'm forgetting anything. Yeah,
2 and at that point, once it started going down in the aft, we
3 started talking about where would be the best place to put it.
4 And I could see that Paul was really pulling on the boat to try
5 and get it in a good spot so that it could be salvaged or
6 investigated.

7 Yeah, I wanted to add that when we got on scene the vessel
8 was fully engulfed. At no point was there ever a safe moment to
9 get on the boat to try and assist the passengers.

10 The boat continued to sink and basically it went under where
11 it ended up. It went aft first. The bow kind of stayed hovering
12 on the surface for quite a while and then slowly slipped under.

13 Yeah, that's about it. You want to pause it and see if
14 there's -- if I missed anything or --

15 MR. MUISE: No. That's awesome, Eric. Thank you.

16 MR. WOODMANSEE: Okay.

17 MR. MUISE: So was there any -- tell me about any kind of
18 communication issues you have out there, the range on your radios;
19 is there any black holes out there?

20 MR. WOODMANSEE: We had consistent communication with Coast
21 Guard LA and the Ventura Fire Department. I was having trouble
22 communicating with our department here in the harbor, in the
23 harbor department, but I needed two hands to drive the boat,
24 anyways, because my right hand was working the throttle, left hand
25 was working the steering wheel. At one point I talked to my

1 sergeant on the emergency phone and, because I didn't have my left
2 hand, I was getting off my track and I had to get off the phone
3 and then get back on my track line. And -- so that was the one
4 difficulty that we had with the communication, was just talking
5 with our harbor department here.

6 MR. MUISE: Do you have separate throttles for each engine?

7 MR. WOODMANSEE: I'm sorry, what was the question?

8 MR. MUISE: Do you have two different throttles -- I mean, a
9 throttle for each engine separately?

10 MR. WOODMANSEE: Yeah, we do.

11 MR. MUISE: So you can twin screw?

12 MR. WOODMANSEE: Twin screw, yeah.

13 MR. MUISE: Okay.

14 MR. WOODMANSEE: Twin outboards.

15 MR. MUISE: What kind of training have you done with the
16 Coast Guard for firefighting and for mass casualty?

17 MR. WOODMANSEE: You know, for -- I did a marine firefighting
18 training with Baywatch in Marina Del Ray that was a week-long
19 training. We do our -- when I was hired here you go through, you
20 know, your training before you become an officer, and we do an
21 extended training on Boat 15 as far as running the boat.

22 I also -- this sounds kind of funny, but we clean the docks a
23 lot of times and we use Boat 15, and you get in some really tight
24 positions, and you're running the monitor by yourself. So that
25 ended up being just incredible training, because on the graveyards

1 I'm doing that every day, putting the boat in some really tight
2 spots while running the pumps, and it just gets you so
3 comfortable, it turns you from being a good boat captain on Boat
4 15 to a professional boat captain.

5 MR. MUISE: Okay.

6 MR. WOODMANSEE: That's as far as running the boat. So when
7 we were on the sea and I had no problem -- oh, you know, there was
8 actually some -- there was a lot of communication -- I'm sorry --
9 I knew there was spots that I'm leaving out; it's been a couple
10 week since the incident, you know, and I think about it but I
11 haven't -- there are certain parts that I haven't thought about.

12 When we were knocking down that fire, the whole time we were
13 trying to preserve to keep the boat floating. And so when we
14 started to contain the fire, we were moving from the monitor to
15 hand lines. At one point, when we first got on scene, we had one
16 hand line going and we had the monitor going. I put the boat on
17 sideways on its port side so that we could -- oh, I'm sorry -- I
18 had the bow, I had the bow in at that point, had the monitor on
19 it, and then another hand line going off my port side.

20 When the fire was contained and we were knocking down those
21 small fires, we were just using the two hand lines that we have on
22 board because those will put out a lot less water than -- water
23 and foam than our monitor. So that was kind of something to add
24 to the --

25 MR. MUISE: Okay. How about training between your agency and

1 the local Coast Guard station? Do you guys do exercises quite
2 often or --

3 MR. WOODMANSEE: Yeah, let Sergeant Werner take over here.
4 Yeah.

5 SGT. WERNER: Hi, Marcel, Sergeant Werner here. So you asked
6 about training, and so when it comes to the fireboat, our Boat 15,
7 we do most of our training for that -- with that, with the local
8 fire department, Ventura County Fire Department. And that
9 training oftentimes involves our medical training as EMTs, and
10 then also involves some fire training as well, where sometimes
11 we'll utilize their resources and go through a smoke trailer with
12 our SCBAs on and stuff like that.

13 MR. HIRTENSTEINER: We've done a burn boat.

14 MR. WOODMANSEE: Yeah.

15 SGT. WERNER: We've in the past been able to get ahold of a
16 burn boat and practice with that. So we've trained a lot with the
17 Ventura County Fire Department. The local Coast Guard station,
18 their small boat station, Station Channel Islands next door, we
19 don't train as much with them, although we're involved on similar
20 calls with them because of our overlapping AORs, our AOR being
21 inside of their AOR. And so oftentimes we'll respond to a vessel
22 in distress and -- we single hand our boats so we get there
23 quicker, and then oftentimes they'll show up and offer assistance
24 as well with that. And so our interaction with them is more along
25 the lines of working similar calls in a similar area.

1 We do occasionally lend assistance and do some tow training
2 when they need to qualify their coxswains and stuff like that.
3 They'll lend some equipment to us, like yesterday we had man
4 overboard dummy that we borrowed and went and did our man
5 overboard drills.

6 Every year there's an event in our area -- we call it the
7 Coastal Trident -- that centralizes around Port Hueneme, and we
8 get involved with that as does the fire department, as does all
9 the other agencies, law enforcement and rescue in the general
10 area. Everybody from Coast Guard MSD down here, and even we get
11 some -- LA sheriff was involved the last couple times as well.

12 MR. MUISE: Okay. How about --

13 SGT. WERNER: Part of the training that we also have done
14 with Coastal Trident, we do both like a roundtable style training,
15 where just recently actually we did one for an oil rig, an oil
16 platform fire and how that would be responded to. And that's a
17 roundtable where we have the different agencies around and we talk
18 about our resources and how we'd respond, to do a check up on how
19 prepared we are for different things that could happen in our
20 area.

21 And then we also with the Coastal Trident usually do one, two
22 or three different hands-on exercises, where we'll put a burn boat
23 or a boat with a smoke machine on it somewhere in the harbor and
24 then we'll respond to it with, you know, fire agencies and
25 whatnot, stuff like that.

1 So I -- does that wrap up -- does that answer your questions
2 about our training with the agencies?

3 MR. MUISE: Yeah, that's good. Thank you, Sergeant.

4 SGT. WERNER: Okay. I wanted to, if I could, touch base --
5 you asked Eric Woodmansee about the communication that morning,
6 and so I wanted to kind of try to clarify it a little bit.

7 So I was there that morning land side over at the command
8 center with the Coast Guard and the Battalion Chief Leake, and
9 then Battalion Chief Fong showed a little bit later.

10 And so when we respond to things in our area we have several
11 different means of communication that we're often dealing with.
12 First -- or one, is the obvious cell phones nowadays, we're even
13 able to get some cell phone reception as far as the island. But
14 then the more marine-based stuff, we have our VHF radio, and Coast
15 Guard Sector LA, we communicate with them regularly on VHF Channel
16 16. We work on Channel 12; they like to work on 22 Alpha, 21
17 Alpha, and so we're able to communicate with Coast Guard on the
18 VHF.

19 Then when we start introducing other agencies like the fire
20 department, they have their own radio bands that they work on and
21 we have their radios as well. And so when we get a marine
22 incident, they typically will dispatch it on their Channel 1 and
23 then Ventura County will push it over to what they call Command 5
24 and Tac-6, is kind of our normal unless there's something already
25 on those bands, and that's what they did that morning.

1 So they had -- the command frequency was Command 5, and we
2 were getting very good communication between mainland and the
3 incident on Command 5, and they had Tac-6 going out at the
4 incidents. So what was happening typically was the battalion
5 chief would talk to the fire captain that was on board the Coast
6 Guard small boat and ask a question, hey, do you guys need more
7 foam? And that captain then would talk to the fire captain on
8 Boat 15 on Tac-6, and figure out how to answer that, then he would
9 come back on Tac-5 and talk to the battalion chief. And so that's
10 kind of how the communications were going back and forth from the
11 fire side.

12 Now, in addition to those communications, the Coast Guard had
13 their own interagency communications going on between their small
14 boat and Sector LA. And so we were all at Coast Guard Station
15 Channel Islands upstairs in their control room, and so you had
16 fire communications, Coast Guard communications, and then kind of
17 coming -- bringing it all together at their command table, for
18 lack of better terms, in the station there. So then that's how it
19 went down for this call.

20 Now, on most calls, we also have our local government channel
21 that we communicate just with our patrol boats on, and that's when
22 Eric was saying that we had some difficulties. We weren't able to
23 reach our local government channel all the way out to the islands,
24 where normally we're talking to each other on that, we're talking
25 to fire on their channels and we're talking to Coast Guard on the

1 VHF channels. Does that clarify or help you out with the
2 communications?

3 MR. MUISE: Yes, that does. I haven't seen a communication
4 plan, so that's perfect.

5 SGT. WERNER: Okay.

6 MR. MUISE: Tell me a little bit about the foam on -- did you
7 -- is this 3 percent foam, 6 percent foam, Class A foam?

8 MR. HIRTENSTEINER: Can't remember.

9 SGT. WERNER: I'm sorry; at this point I'd have to say we're
10 not sure of that. That would -- I would push that one to the fire
11 department as well, as it's -- we look to them for the fire
12 expertise.

13 MR. MUISE: Okay.

14 SGT. WERNER: And I can tell you that we carry just shy of 50
15 gallons of foam on the fireboat, and I know that morning we had
16 rounded up another 50 gallons that was getting ready to be
17 transported out there to provide more foam, right up to the point
18 where the *Conception* sank and then we stood down with that
19 operation. But we did have more foam prepared to go out. And I
20 think we still had 10 gallons left on Boat 5 at the end.

21 MR. WOODMANSEE: Um-hum, 5 gallons. Yeah.

22 SGT. WERNER: So we probably -- we used just shy of 40
23 gallons that morning off of Boat 15. And I need to apologize
24 right now. I just called it Boat 5, and I heard Woodmansee do it
25 a little while ago. Up until about 6 months ago the boat

1 designation was Boat 5, and then they just recently changed it to
2 Boat 15. So when you hear us say Boat 5, that's a slip of us
3 going back into kind of our old ways, I guess. Sorry.

4 MR. MUISE: Okay. I was going to ask you about that because
5 I've heard 5 and 15, and your AIS track actually says Boat 5. So
6 your transmitter is still programed to say Boat 5.

7 SGT. WERNER: Okay. We'll have to get -- fix that. I
8 apologize about that. It's been a pretty recent change, and so
9 there's growing pains, I guess.

10 MR. MUISE: Okay. That's fine. The foam, do you know if it
11 was fluorinated foam?

12 SGT. WERNER: Fluorinated? Isn't that the F of A triple F?
13 No, that's not; F is for foam. Aqueous -- aqueous foam forming --
14 film forming foam.

15 MR. HIRTENSTEINER: We can get that information.

16 SGT. WERNER: Yeah, I'm sorry, again, I would refer you to
17 the fire department on that. If you want, I could call you back
18 later, because I can go look at the container and read the specs
19 on it, or if you talk to one of the battalion chiefs like Fong, he
20 would know right off the top of us head.

21 MR. MUISE: Okay. We'll follow up later. That's okay.

22 And do you -- and for, Eric, was the foam effective, do you
23 think?

24 MR. WOODMANSEE: Yes. Yeah, I think it was effective. I
25 think without that foam we would've had trouble putting that fire

1 out. You could see where we were coating things and it would stay
2 on there. I did notice Santa Barbara Harbor Patrol -- I mean,
3 they said that they were putting foam on the fire. But I don't
4 know if they were having trouble inducting it, because it didn't
5 look like as much foam, or maybe it was a different type of foam
6 and it didn't seem too effective. It actually seemed to be kind
7 of pulling -- almost like it was pulling the foam that we had put
8 on there off of the fire, and that's kind of when they backed out
9 of there and we went back in.

10 MR. MUISE: Okay.

11 MR. WOODMANSEE: There was some communication about that, and
12 so we went back into fighting that fire.

13 MR. MUISE: Any idea what was on the bow that was reigniting
14 for you or --

15 MR. WOODMANSEE: I don't know exactly what kept reigniting on
16 the bow. It could have been maybe that just the fire's location,
17 it might have been -- because you have, you know, as the bow gets
18 narrower, you're going to have the deck on top, so you'd have like
19 a little bit of a tighter area. So maybe the heat was building
20 tighter on the bow. But, yeah, it seemed that -- like on the bow,
21 that those were the two main areas. So like almost midship back
22 toward the aft where the fuel tank was seemed to reignite, and
23 then, yeah, in that area by the bow.

24 MR. MUISE: Okay. And then lastly, and if this is a
25 difficult question, I understand and we can move on, but did you

1 see any human remains before the vessel sank?

2 MR. WOODMANSEE: No.

3 MR. MUISE: How about afterwards?

4 MR. WOODMANSEE: No, I couldn't --

5 MR. MUISE: How about afterwards?

6 MR. WOODMANSEE: -- I couldn't see. I just -- what's that?

7 MR. MUISE: How about afterwards?

8 MR. WOODMANSEE: After? There was a couple things that
9 floated up that looked like human remains. I didn't -- we didn't
10 pull up to them to identify them because they ended up in -- there
11 was kind of a debris field, and it was right along the island and
12 it just kind of went right towards the island, so -- and it was
13 kind of in the smoke line a little bit, so we didn't -- and then
14 we were also trying to preserve evidence, so we were trying not to
15 touch anything. So --

16 MR. MUISE: Okay. That's all I have for you, gentlemen. Is
17 there anything you want to add?

18 Well, tell you what, let me ask you this. What went well in
19 this story? Is there a piece of equipment or a procedure or some
20 training that you're glad you had that came in handy during this
21 incident?

22 MR. WOODMANSEE: I think that our training on Boat 15,
23 running that boat as much as we do really helped. I think that
24 our partnership with the fire department worked really well
25 because, you know, I was able to get them on scene, put them where

1 they wanted. Every time they asked me where they -- you know, how
2 they wanted to attack it, where they wanted to be, I was able to
3 put that boat where they needed it.

4 I think that our response as far as the way that our system
5 that's set up, we were able to get Boat 15 ready to go on our side
6 and respond without any delays. I think that running out there
7 through the fog and the dark, I think that having our radar system
8 and our GPS. Without those two things, it would have been a very
9 difficult thing to find.

10 Let's see. As far as attacking the fire, the crew that I
11 ended up on, Engine 54, one of them, he was familiar with Boat 15.
12 He had been at 53 for a long time, so he had a lot of knowledge of
13 the foam and the pump, and so he was able to kind of direct his
14 crew about where, you know, our extra foam was located, how the
15 induction system worked. So I think that getting, you know, the
16 fire department on the same page with Boat 15 and having him on
17 board -- he just happened to be on board that day -- that was
18 really helpful. Because when I was captain in that boat, you
19 know, I couldn't really leave my chair, I couldn't take my hands
20 off the wheel or the -- you know, the --

21 MR. HIRTENSTEINER: Throttles.

22 MR. WOODMANSEE: -- throttles.

23 MR. MUISE: I forgot to ask you about Ventura City's Boat 1.
24 What -- she ran into some problems, I understand?

25 MR. WOODMANSEE: Yeah, so it sounded like one of the engines

1 went out of service on the way there, and I think that when we
2 were requesting their water pump -- and this is maybe just me
3 putting things together; I'm not exactly sure of the series of
4 events, but I know that I spoke to one of the officers that was on
5 Boat 1. When he opened up the hatch, it was -- you know, there
6 was some sort of diesel leak, so it was equipment failure. And so
7 I'm just guessing at that point they were unable to get their
8 dewatering pump in service because of that.

9 MR. MUISE: Okay. So there was no attempt to dewater the
10 vessel at any time by any -- like vessel assist or the Coast Guard
11 or you guys?

12 MR. WOODMANSEE: When it got to the point where it started
13 going in the aft, we were basically putting together equipment to
14 get it ready to start dewatering, but it ended up going quicker
15 than -- you know, our little hand, our hand dewatering -- or not
16 hand, but our smaller portable dewatering pumps, we weren't --
17 wouldn't have been able to use that. That wouldn't have been
18 effective. We needed something of a higher capacity where we
19 could get a higher reach, because that vessel was still smoking
20 and the whole -- everything was still hot on top. We, you know,
21 there's no --

22 MR. HIRTENSTEINER: Hazardous.

23 MR. WOODMANSEE: It was a hazardous area. So we needed
24 something that we could get up and over the gunwales and get
25 pulling that water out of there, and we just didn't have the

1 equipment without -- it seemed that Boat 1 was the only one that
2 would have been able to dewater the vessel if it -- if that
3 would've been effective. You know, that was kind of our only
4 option.

5 MR. MUISE: Okay.

6 MR. WOODMANSEE: I guess we just didn't have a safe way to
7 get our portable pumps on board, is what I'm -- in a nutshell,
8 what I'm trying to say.

9 MR. MUISE: Do you think it flooded through the -- started to
10 flood, at least, through the wet exhaust?

11 MR. WOODMANSEE: The two engine exhaust pipes, those were our
12 -- you know, those are large through-holes, and when those started
13 to hit the waterline, then things really accelerated. But the
14 water was definitely every -- all the water that we were putting
15 on board there seemed to be going back and focusing toward the
16 aft, so it was kind of pushing those through-holes underwater
17 first.

18 MR. MUISE: Okay. All right. Anything else gentleman?

19 MR. HIRTENSTEINER: No.

20 SGT. WERNER: I'm good.

21 MR. WOODMANSEE: Un-huh.

22 MR. MUISE: Okay. It's 12:34 on the East Coast, and I will
23 secure the recorder.

24 (Whereupon, at 12:34 p.m., the interview was concluded.)

25

CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the attached proceeding before the

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD

IN THE MATTER OF: FIRE AND SINKING OF THE CONCEPTION
WITH LOSS OF LIFE NEAR
SANTA CRUZ ISLAND, CALIFORNIA
SEPTEMBER 2, 2019
Interview of Channel Islands Harbor
Patrol

ACCIDENT NO.: DCA19MM047

PLACE: Via Telephone

DATE: September 13, 2019

was held according to the record, and that this is the original,
complete, true and accurate transcript which has been transcribed
to the best of my skill and ability.



Wade Donovan
Transcriber