



National Transportation Safety Board

Washington, D.C. 20594
Office of Marine Safety

Interview Summary – DCA21FM028

Interview of: Mike Dollins – Chief Engineer of the *Mary Lynn*
Date/Time: March 10, 2022 – 1205 to 1220 CDT
Location: Conference call
Interviewed by: Adam Tucker – NTSB and Bart Barnum - NTSB
Attendees: None
Accident: May 18, 2021, engine room fire aboard the towing vessel *Mary Lynn* at mile 176 upper Mississippi River, St. Louis, Missouri.

This interview summary is compiled based on NTSB investigator notes taken during a follow up interview of Mr. Mike Dollins who was the chief engineer of the towing vessel *Mary Lynn* at the time of the casualty on May 18, 2021.

- When asked of the venting of the day tank being through the storage tanks, Mr. Dollins commented that the day tank stayed full all the time. It was constantly run through, and the fuel return would run into whatever fuel storage tank that was open. This allowed for delivery of cool fuel to the engines and served to circulate the fuel to prevent algae growth in the fuel tanks.
- With respect to the day tank being located above the engines, thus providing a positive pressure to the fuel line, related to his previous statement to investigators the problem experienced on the starboard main engine with the filters being sucked dry and that he thought it was because of a pinched O-ring. Knowing that there was a head pressure above the filters, Mr. Dollins was asked if the filter canister being sucked dry was something he would expect to see with a split O-ring and positive head pressure. Mr. Dollins stated that when that happened, the boat was idling when he changed the filter and there was a three-way valve on it that he used to bypass the filters so he could carry out the change. As far as the filters being sucked dry, there should have been a pressure bias and it should have blown out instead of blown in.
- Mr. Dollins noted there was algae in the system and questioned if any part of the fuel line pipes that may have gotten blocked due to algae.
- Mr. Dollins said he thought he had the fuel oil return valve to the storage tank “cracked open” when he was getting ready to take on fuel on the day of the accident. He noted that fuel would return from the engine to the tank that was open. When he was getting ready to take on fuel, he always shuts off the return lines. He noted that it used to be before that unused fuel from the engines returned to the day tank, but that was changed so that cool fuel could be supplied to the engines, so the return fuel went to the storage tanks. He said he forgot to open the valve and thought he had it cracked open, but he didn’t check it.

- When asked about the duplex fuel filter assembly on the port side main engine, Mr. Dollins said the glass bulb blew off and the fuel hit the exhaust. He was standing by it when it happened.
- With respect to his comment that there was an overpressure in the fuel system, Mr. Dollins was asked if fuel was being taken from the day tank with the unused fuel returning to it, how could the day tank could overflow if there was not something else pumping into it? Mr. Dollins said that the transfer pump, which fills the day tank, was on, and that it was always kept on when the main engines were running.
- When asked to confirm the fuel transfer pump was on at the time of the accident, Mr. Dollins said yes it was.
- When asked how big the day tank was, Mr. Dollins said he could not recall exactly but thought it was less than 1500 gallons or maybe 1000 gallons.
- When asked if the transfer pump was on at night or when he recalled turning it on, Mr. Dollins said if the main engines were running, the transfer pump stayed running all the time. The boat was sitting there idling before they took on fuel.
- When asked to recall from when he was informed the fuel barge was at the *Mary Lynn* to load fuel, if the transfer pump was still on, Mr. Dollins said he would have had to turn the pump off. He said the fuel transfer pump has to be off when taking on fuel so as to not cause an overflow. He shut the pump off to take on fuel and after that changed the fuel filters. After that, he got everything back together. When asked if he turned the transfer pump back on after they completed taking fuel, Mr. Dollins said yes, he did.
- When asked the capacity of the transfer pump, Mr. Dollins said he did not know what it was.
- When asked how many gallons of fuel the *Mary Lynn* loaded that day, Mr. Dollins thought it was 20,000 or 25,000 gallons but noted he could not recall exactly.
- When asked, given that he was up about 2 hours earlier than his scheduled watch change, what the deckaneer who was on watch at the time was doing, Mr. Dollins recalled he was still around. He had the deckaneer hook up the hose from the fuel flat to the boat. He was there on the side of the boat at the hose connection during the fueling.
- When asked about his work rest history form which he filled out for the Coast Guard, and that he had only about 2.5 hours of sleep after getting off watch before being back up, and if he felt tired, Mr. Dollins said, “not really” and that he was used to it since he has been doing that for 32 years. He noted that 6 hours on and 6 hours off is hard to get used to but after that long you get used to it. He said he was awake, and he made a mistake and that was it.
- Mr. Dollins said that on most boats he has worked on, there is only one valve for the return line, and it was only closed when there was work that needed to be carried out. The *Mary Lynn*’s fuel system had different things done to it because the fuel got too hot.

End of summary