

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD

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Investigation of: *

ENGINE ROOM FLOODING & SINKING *
OF OSV *BONNIE G* NEAR *
ST. THOMAS IN THE U.S. VIRGIN *
ISLANDS ON OCTOBER 4, 2023 *

Accident No.: DCA24FM001

* * * * *

Interview of: ADRIAN CUMMINGS, Chief Engineer
OSV Bonnie G

via videoconference

Thursday,
October 5, 2023

APPEARANCES:

BART BARNUM, Investigator in Charge
National Transportation Safety Board

LT [REDACTED] [REDACTED] Investigator
United States Coast Guard

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I N T E R V I E W

(4:53 p.m.)

1
2
3 MR. BARNUM: Okay, the recording has started. It's 16:53,
4 October 5th, and here talking to Chief Engineer Cummings from the
5 *Bonnie G.* Sir, do we have your consent to record?

6 MR. CUMMINGS: Yes, sir.

7 MR. BARNUM: Okay. Thank you, sir.

INTERVIEW OF ADRIAN CUMMINGS

8
9 BY MR. BARNUM:

10 Q. So first off, Chief, I just wanted to get a little bit of
11 your background and experience. When did you start sailing and
12 when did you get your license?

13 A. That, sailing from since 1981.

14 Q. Okay. Please, I'm not going to ask you a million questions,
15 but if you'd kind of just talk through kind of your experience a
16 little bit and you started sailing in '81 and how did you work up
17 to get your license and when --

18 A. I start as an oiler and in 2019, I get -- 1998, I get my -- I
19 did my educational background in Panama and I got my
20 certificate --

21 Q. Yeah.

22 A. -- from oiler right up to second engineer, third engineer,
23 chief engineer. Up to now.

24 Q. Okay. And it's an unlimited license?

25 A. Three thousand.

1 Q. Three thousand horsepower, okay.

2 A. Yeah.

3 Q. And how long have you been working for the company that owned
4 *Bonnie G*?

5 A. From October the 28th, 2008 to now.

6 Q. Okay. And how about how long on the *Bonnie G*?

7 A. From the time they bought her.

8 Q. Okay.

9 A. To now. Because he was in Jacksonville for that.

10 Q. Okay. Can you fill me in a little bit about the engine room
11 on the *Bonnie G*, what kind of propulsion does she have and --

12 A. She got a fixed pitch, a fixed-pitch prop, left and right,
13 left one (indiscernible), two 1500 horsepower engines, EMD.

14 Q. Okay.

15 A. (Indiscernible) generators.

16 Q. Okay. How was everything operating prior to the grounding,
17 did you have any problems with any of the equipment?

18 A. No, everything was -- everything was operating normally.

19 Q. Okay. I appreciate that. So now I'm just going to pass it
20 over to you and I want you to kind of tell me and Lieutenant
21 [REDACTED] of your firsthand account and again, I know you already
22 told him, but if you would just repeat it for me, kind of the day
23 before, when you left St. Croix, or I guess the evening, earlier
24 in the day, up until the point of the casualty and when you had to
25 evacuate.

1 A. We left St. Croix 4 o'clock, before I started up, I started
2 onboard engines, we was in the sea by 4 o'clock in St. Croix to
3 Tortola, entrance then to -- into St. Thomas. I think we got some
4 -- the anchor, the anchor at 3:20.

5 Q. Okay.

6 A. We heave anchor at 3:20.

7 Q. Three twenty is when you were asked to heave the anchor?

8 A. No, I wasn't asked to heave the anchor.

9 Q. Okay.

10 A. He was heaving the anchor at 3:20.

11 Q. Okay. So I want to back you up a little bit, kind of tell me
12 what you were doing, where were you when the vessel was coming
13 into St. Thomas when you attempted to dock.

14 A. I was right in the engine rooms on standby.

15 Q. Okay.

16 A. Because you only got one chief and an oiler, so I was in the
17 engine room on standby.

18 Q. Okay. Was the oiler with you?

19 A. The oiler with me in St. Thomas?

20 Q. Was he also in the engine room with you, the oiler?

21 A. Yeah.

22 Q. Okay.

23 A. He was with me.

24 Q. All right. So kind of take me through the grounding of the
25 vessel, where were you during or when you found out the vessel had

1 grounded, had you been talking with the captain, kind of just take
2 me through that.

3 A. When we drop the anchor, I'm in the engine room right through
4 until they heaved the anchor, I mean, I was right here.

5 Q. And why did you stay down there, did someone tell you to stay
6 there?

7 A. No, because it -- because of the weather (indiscernible), the
8 weather, no, the weather was rough already, it was vital, that was
9 my place to be down there.

10 Q. Yeah. And were the engines running?

11 A. Yes, sir, the engines were running.

12 Q. Okay. But were they clutched in at all?

13 A. No, they wasn't clutched in because I did it.

14 Q. Okay.

15 A. On standby, the engine was on standby.

16 Q. Okay. At any point did you have communications with the
17 bridge? When did you talk to the bridge?

18 A. That was 3:20, 3:20 -- 3:20 they said they were starting to
19 heave the anchor. Other than that -- 3:20.

20 Q. So you were up during the time from -- in the engine room.

21 A. Right through. Right through.

22 Q. Did you feel -- how did you become aware that there was an
23 issue with the anchor, did you feel the vessel shift or was it
24 swinging or did you know that anything was going on?

25 A. After they start heaving the anchor, a heavy banging and

1 banging and banging.

2 Q. Yeah.

3 A. After.

4 Q. Okay. How long did you stay in the engine room?

5 A. I was in the engine room the entire time until somebody come
6 and called me out from the engine room.

7 Q. Who called you and how did they call you, on the phone or was
8 there a ring, an alarm?

9 A. No, they came downstairs and called me.

10 Q. What did they say?

11 A. Said Chief, you got to -- we got to go upstairs because we
12 got a grounded ship, we got to abandon the ship.

13 Q. Okay. Who was that?

14 A. Was a sailor, what's his name? Terry.

15 Q. Is he an AV or what's his position?

16 A. Yeah, yeah, he's AV.

17 Q. Okay, all right. Did you hear the general alarm, did the
18 general alarm ring at any point and was there any talk from the
19 captain to abandon ship?

20 A. What do you mean it was a regular, up on the -- up on the --
21 on the deck?

22 Q. That's when you heard the alarm?

23 A. It's when, yeah.

24 Q. Okay. Did you ever go back into the engine room to inspect
25 for any leaking?

1 A. Yes, sir. I went back --

2 Q. When did you do that and what did you see?

3 A. I went back to stop the engines.

4 Q. Oh, okay. What did you notice when you went down there and
5 stopped the engines, were the -- was anything broken, was there
6 anything that you could visually see wrong with the engines or
7 water coming in?

8 A. Yes, some water come in from the tunnel.

9 Q. Okay. I haven't been on the *Bonnie G*, I've been on some
10 supply vessels of similar construction.

11 (Crosstalk)

12 BY MR. BARNUM:

13 Q. So you have mud tanks on either side of the tunnel, right?
14 In the tunnel, that's where you have your steering gear, back
15 there?

16 A. No, the fixed -- yeah, yeah, they got steering gear, it's
17 off, in the fore peak, after peak.

18 Q. Right. And --

19 A. Steering gear in the after peak.

20 Q. So you saw water coming from the tunnel, like where would
21 that water enter, do you think?

22 A. Midship, midship.

23 Q. Midship in the tunnel, okay. What is on the skin of the ship
24 there, are there tanks or --

25 A. Tanks, tanks.

1 Q. What kind of tanks, is that the mud tanks?

2 A. Fuel tanks.

3 Q. Fuel tanks. Okay.

4 A. (Indiscernible) tanks.

5 Q. I'm just trying to understand where the hull breach was. So
6 obviously, do you think your leak -- do you think there was a
7 breach in a fuel tank or is it --

8 A. No, the breach was in the passageway.

9 Q. Okay, all right. I think I'll need to look at a schematic of
10 the vessel that will help me understand but no, thank you for
11 that. Is there any watertight doors in the engine room?

12 A. Yeah. Yes.

13 Q. Were those shut when you left?

14 A. We had no time to shut it.

15 Q. You had no time to shut it, is that -- okay.

16 A. Because the vessel will be even terrible.

17 Q. Okay.

18 A. We had --

19 Q. Okay.

20 A. Yeah, it was terrible. Maybe I lose my life.

21 Q. Understood. Okay. Did it heel over and stay heeled over or
22 was it going back and forth?

23 LT [REDACTED] He's got a drawing of the construction of the
24 vessel.

25 MR. CUMMINGS: This is the passageway, there's the engine

1 room door right here, so you could walk from here and come up
2 here.

3 BY LT [REDACTED]

4 Q. Got you. And so you said that you were getting water right
5 here?

6 A. Yeah. In the side.

7 Q. So do you think that the water was coming, coming up?

8 A. Yeah, the water come in.

9 Q. From like the -- from the keel, from underneath the ship?

10 A. Yeah.

11 Q. So coming underneath directly into the passageway, so not
12 from the sides --

13 A. It come in the vessel just like this, just like this.

14 (Indiscernible).

15 LT [REDACTED] Oh, I get what you're saying. So you're saying
16 that the rock was -- you know, like this is the edge of the rock
17 and then the ship laid on top of it and it was kind of like
18 banging in it there and that's where the water was ingressing,
19 directly into that passageway, so not from the sides, but directly
20 through the bottom, okay.

21 MR. BARNUM: Thank you. Maybe you could text that photo to
22 -- after the interview, text the photo --

23 MR. CUMMINGS: If I can get to go back on the boat to give it
24 a direct try -- if I could go on the boat tomorrow.

25 LT [REDACTED] No, I'll take a picture of this just so that I

1 can send it, send it to him.

2 BY MR. BARNUM:

3 Q. Okay. Chief, when you shut down the engines, how did you do
4 that, did you have to go locally and shut off the fuel racks or is
5 there a button in your control room or --

6 A. I went down and shut it, I went down and shut it manually.

7 Q. Okay.

8 A. Because I was inspecting in the engine room all the time.

9 Q. Okay. And were the engines, when you shut them down, was the
10 bridge, were they still trying to use them when you shut them
11 down?

12 A. No, no, no, no.

13 Q. No?

14 A. No, no. It was completely finished with it.

15 Q. Okay. Got you. All right. Okay, did you shut the generator
16 down, too? Electrical --

17 A. Yes.

18 Q. You did. So the vessel went black?

19 A. Yes.

20 Q. All right. Did the emergency generator come on?

21 A. No, we don't have that.

22 Q. You don't have an emergency generator, okay.

23 A. We have only two generators.

24 Q. Okay, all right.

25 A. All in the engine room.

1 Q. Okay. How would you describe your communication or your
2 relationship with the captain on board at the time? Is it --

3 A. It was good. It's good.

4 Q. Yeah. Is it typical to other captains that you work with, is
5 it better, is it worse, or things that are different?

6 A. It's hopefully so good, so good.

7 Q. Yeah. I have the benefit of seeing you right now, it's good
8 and there's kind of a smirk on your face when you're answering
9 that, so --

10 A. Because it just bring me back to the incident --

11 Q. Yeah.

12 A. -- you know, the tragic, you know -- you know, it was nice,
13 it was nice.

14 Q. Okay.

15 A. It was because I had to -- I had to -- I'm the engineer and I
16 have to go from boat to boat, to get the rescue boat, to get
17 the --

18 LT [REDACTED] You had to get it started.

19 MR. CUMMINGS: I had to jump (indiscernible), I guess, when I
20 have to go from boat to boat to get the other one stopped.

21 (Crosstalk)

22 BY MR. BARNUM:

23 Q. Tell me about that. There was an issue with the rescue boat,
24 tell me about that, how did -- is it your job to start it?

25 A. Yeah, it was my job to start it.

1 Q. Okay.

2 A. There's only one engineer.

3 Q. Right, but I -- was there a problem starting it, the officer,
4 the deck officer, couldn't start it or --

5 A. I was in the boat, but he's sick, he's sick with the
6 situation.

7 Q. Oh, okay.

8 A. So I --

9 Q. Yeah. The anchor, the captain was telling us a little bit
10 about the starboard anchor. Were you aware of any issues with the
11 starboard anchor?

12 A. Starboard anchor.

13 Q. The port anchor is the one that was being used and it broke.
14 How about the starboard anchor, was that operational, was that
15 ready to be used?

16 A. I was in the engine room, I don't know nothing -- the
17 starboard anchor, it had -- I think it got a problem.

18 Q. Yeah.

19 A. But I wasn't -- it could've dropped, though, he could've
20 dropped, he could've dropped it.

21 Q. You could've, okay.

22 A. Yeah.

23 Q. But what was the problem with it then, coming back up?

24 A. Problem was, it was -- I think it was the clutch.

25 Q. Oh.

1 A. But it could've dropped, could've gone down or not.

2 Q. Okay.

3 A. I could've -- somebody could've put it on.

4 Q. So was there a plan to fix that starboard anchor, who do you
5 tell when there's something broken like that?

6 A. It was a plan, yeah, because we drew it right up.

7 Q. Okay. Is there like some paperwork you have to fill out when
8 there's a piece of critical equipment that isn't working?

9 A. Yes, sir.

10 Q. Is there something -- is there something written down about
11 that starboard anchor, you think?

12 A. Yes.

13 Q. Yeah, okay. Is there also -- do you talk to anybody, do you
14 talk to the owner regularly, do you talk to Ian?

15 A. Yeah, yeah.

16 Q. Yeah. Did he call you, did Ian call you that night of the
17 grounding?

18 A. No.

19 Q. Ian didn't call you. Did you text him or communicate with
20 him at all?

21 A. To be honest, I have no phone on me, there's only the
22 (indiscernible) the phone. My phone was upstairs, I was in the
23 engine room.

24 Q. Yeah.

25 LT [REDACTED] That makes sense.

1 MR. BARNUM: Yeah. Okay. I'm going to look at my notes
2 here, but I think that's all the questions I have for now, Chief.
3 I don't know if Lieutenant [REDACTED] has anything for you, but I
4 might have one more or two more in a minute.

5 BY LT [REDACTED]

6 Q. Yeah, let me look through the different questions that I
7 wanted to make sure that we went over. We talked about that and
8 that. And this. Talked about that one. So when we were talking
9 to the captain, he indicated that he might have, when he went up
10 to the bridge, called down to the -- down for the engineers to
11 start the engines because, since he didn't ask you to keep them in
12 idle, he wasn't aware that they were in idle. Do you remember
13 anybody reaching out to you asking to start the engines?

14 A. Somebody came down to me and tell -- and ask me to start the
15 engines and I told him the engines are running.

16 Q. Oh, okay, so it was -- so it was a crew member that came
17 down, so the captain didn't call you, he sent a crew member down.

18 A. To see engines running.

19 Q. Okay, got you. And you were like everything's good to go.
20 Perfect, okay. Just wanted to verify that. We already talked
21 about that. And then just a follow up on the -- Terry, the crew
22 member that came down, the AV, said hey, we got to abandon ship
23 and you went up to the deck and then that's when you realized the
24 situation, then you went back down to turn off all the -- all the
25 equipment. Is that a standard procedure to turn off all the

1 equipment when abandoning ship?

2 A. Yes. Yeah.

3 Q. No one told you to do it, it was just like training?

4 A. They can stop the engines from on the bridge, too.

5 Q. They could have or --

6 A. If they want to stop, you can stop from there.

7 Q. But could they shut off all of the generators and the engine
8 from the bridge?

9 A. No, no generators. Just the main engines.

10 Q. Just the main engines, okay.

11 A. Stop.

12 Q. Got you. Had the engines been turned off when you went back
13 down into the engine room?

14 A. I shut down the engines.

15 Q. So you shut them down, the bridge didn't shut them down.

16 Okay. And that's a normal thing to do or a procedure when you're
17 abandoning is to turn everything off?

18 A. Yeah.

19 Q. Yeah, okay.

20 A. To be safe.

21 Q. Got you.

22 A. (Indiscernible).

23 Q. No, I completely --

24 (Crosstalk)

25 Q. That makes sense, just follow --

1 (Crosstalk)

2 MR. CUMMINGS: -- first 2 years at sea.

3 BY LT [REDACTED]

4 Q. Yeah. It was like one of the -- and like I was explaining to
5 the captain, part of our responsibilities is to ask all, as many
6 questions as we can possibly think of that other people may ask,
7 so if I ask another question, another question about the same
8 thing, I'm trying to make sure that --

9 A. Hit the brake.

10 Q. Exactly, yeah. That's pretty much where it is, so it's
11 definitely not me --

12 A. Are you asking me question (indiscernible)?

13 Q. Yeah, I was like -- I'm not going in that direction, I'm just
14 trying to make sure that we all get it. No, I appreciate that.
15 And then --

16 A. You're not getting to write down, so looking for it.

17 Q. Exactly. I just want to know what happened, what are the
18 facts. So you went up, did you see the captain up on the deck
19 when you went up, was he already down working on the life rafts
20 and the rescue boat?

21 A. Yeah.

22 Q. Yeah.

23 A. Everybody was.

24 Q. Everybody was already up by the time you made it up, okay.

25 Understood. So the captain should've been expecting that you were

1 going to turn off the generators and go, you know, like --

2 A. We have to lash, like -- like before we shut down the
3 generators.

4 Q. Okay, so --

5 A. Because it (indiscernible).

6 Q. So you went up, made sure that the life rafts had been
7 lowered and everything was down, and then you had to go down, turn
8 everything off. Were you the last person that was on board at
9 that point?

10 A. No.

11 Q. No?

12 A. Nobody came -- everybody came together. The weather was so
13 bad and so just (indiscernible). And make the right checks at the
14 right deck.

15 Q. Um-hum. Got you. So by the time you got everything turned
16 off, you came back up, everybody was still up on deck?

17 A. Yeah.

18 Q. Okay.

19 A. Everybody was assisting to putting the life boat, getting the
20 rescue boat ashore, so that when (indiscernible) pulling away from
21 the wreck. To be safe, we kind of went in (indiscernible).

22 Q. Understood.

23 A. Somebody might lose their life at the time. I presumed that
24 we didn't need that.

25 Q. Um-hum.

1 A. I was (indiscernible) up to the boat, go to the next boat,
2 start the engine and they start up. Tried to get --

3 Q. Everybody --

4 (Crosstalk)

5 MR. CUMMINGS: -- as possible from the wreck.

6 LT [REDACTED] Um-hum.

7 MR. CUMMINGS: It's a normal procedure.

8 LT [REDACTED] Understood. All right, I'll pass it back to you
9 to see if you have any follow-up questions.

10 BY MR. BARNUM:

11 Q. Chief, how do you normally communicate with the bridge?

12 A. We got a -- we got a telephone in the engine room, normally.
13 First, the engine room.

14 Q. Okay. Did anybody call you on that telephone during the
15 accident?

16 A. No.

17 Q. The only indication that you had that something was going on
18 was the crew member telling you to start the engines, even though
19 they were started, and a crew member telling you to abandon ship.

20 A. Abandon, abandon the boat at the time.

21 Q. Right. But no one called you from the bridge and said Chief,
22 start the engines, Chief, what are you doing, come up here, we're
23 abandoning ship?

24 A. Nobody called me on the phone.

25 Q. Okay.

1 A. Somebody come and formally tell me.

2 MR. BARNUM: Okay, okay.

3 BY LT [REDACTED]

4 Q. How far of a distance is it for a crew member to get down
5 into the engine room?

6 A. Maybe about 40, maybe about 60 feet, 80 feet.

7 Q. How many decks is it below the main deck?

8 A. The main deck, the main deck, next deck.

9 Q. So it's just one deck below?

10 A. Go down the step.

11 Q. And then down the tunnel?

12 A. Um-hum.

13 Q. Okay. How long do you think it takes somebody to make that
14 journey?

15 A. Maybe 1 minute.

16 Q. Okay.

17 A. Just in case of emergency, so maybe.

18 LT [REDACTED] Got you.

19 BY MR. BARNUM:

20 Q. So when you're leaving, for instance, you're departing
21 St. Croix, how does the captain know that his engines are ready to
22 go, does he call you or does he just know that you're going to
23 have them started?

24 A. They (indiscernible) to the bridge, start the engines, start
25 engines, okay, Chief, we're leaving at 5 o'clock. (Indiscernible)

1 it is in the bridge.

2 Q. Okay. So he doesn't call you before you leave, he just sees
3 it and then he leaves.

4 A. Yeah, "Chief, you ready yet?" "We're ready."

5 Q. Okay. Okay, all right. Last question I have for you, Chief,
6 is -- I ask everybody. Is there anything that could've happened
7 differently or you wish that would've happened differently that
8 might've been able to prevent this casualty?

9 A. I wish we could -- I wish -- if we could've saved it, I wish,
10 I wish, I wish if it could be better than what? In the kind of
11 weather and circumstances, anybody would like to see what kind of
12 -- what kind of -- you know why, you don't need the vehicle to
13 crash, you don't -- you know. And if you could save the vehicle
14 from crashing, it's better for you.

15 Q. Right.

16 A. I mean, everybody making a dollar, so --

17 LT [REDACTED] Um-hum. That makes sense.

18 MR. BARNUM: Okay. Thank you for your time, Chief, I really
19 appreciate that information. I'm going to stop the interview
20 unless, Lieutenant, do you have anything else to add?

21 LT [REDACTED] No further questions.

22 MR. BARNUM: Okay, it's 17:18, I'm going to stop the
23 recording.

24 (Whereupon, at 5:18 p.m., the interview concluded.)

25

CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the attached proceeding before the
NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD

IN THE MATTER OF: ENGINE ROOM FLOODING AND SUBSEQUENT
 SINKING OF *OSV BONNIE G*
 NEAR ST. THOMAS IN THE U.S.
 VIRGIN ISLANDS ON OCTOBER 4, 2023
 Interview of Adrian Cummings

ACCIDENT NO.: DCA24FM001

PLACE: via videoconference

DATE: October 5, 2023

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.



Karen D. Martini
Transcriber