UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD

Investigation of:	
FIRE ABOARD THE F/V *NOBSKA* NEAR CAPE COD, MASSACHUSETTS ON APRIL 30, 2021	Accident No.: DCA21FM027

Interview of: EDWARD CUNNIE, Fleet Manager
Blue Harvest Fisheries

Via Telephone

APPEARANCES:

LTJG [redacted], Investigator
U.S. Coast Guard

DAVID FLAHERTY, Investigator
National Transportation Safety Board

I N D E X

I N T E R V I E W

LTJG [redacted]: All right. I'm Lieutenant Junior Grade [redacted] with the Coast Guard; my last name is spelled [redacted]. And I'm here with Mr. Ed Cunnie, and if you want to spell your name for me?

MR. CUNNIE: Sure. Last name is C-U-N-N-I-E, first name is Edward.

LTJG [redacted]: Okay. And then I have NTSB on the phone, if you want to introduce yourself?

MR. FLAHERTY: Sure. Sure. My name is David Flaherty. My last name is spelled F-L-A-H-E-R-T-Y, and I'm with -- I'm an investigator with the National Transportation Safety Board.

MR. CUNNIE: How are you today, David?

MR. FLAHERTY: I'm doing well, thank you.

INTERVIEW OF EDWARD CUNNIE

BY LTJG [redacted]:

Q. All right. So how long have you been with the company?

A. So I was a commercial fisherman until 2001, then I went to work for Boston Harbor Cruisers; dealt primarily with inspected vessels and stuff, ferry boats, and even some larger work boats up to 240 feet. In 19 –- I'm sorry.

In 2019, I was hired by Blue Harvest, just about this time two years ago. So I'm the Fleet Manager, so I'm responsible for the trawlers. Blue Harvest also runs -- I believe it's 15 scallopers, some of whom are in Virginia and some of them are in

New Bedford. Those aren't my responsibility. I do help out from time to time, but for the most part, I'm responsible for the trawlers, which at this time, is eight vessels.

Q. Okay. And kind of just describe what the maintenance program is for the vessels.

A. So actually at this time, we were under –- we were -- we had contacted and we were in the process of using a web-based maintenance system, Wheelhouse Technologies, or Wheelhouse Tech. And we had been in discussions to employ this technology.

I don't know if you guys are familiar with it, but basically, it's a scheduler or maintenance program setup with the customer and the computer people working together and coming up with a game plan. So we had done vessel audits, which is basically going through all the systems and everything, and identifying key components and critical components and maintenance schedules. However, we had not implemented it yet. So in the meantime, the trawlers maintained a pretty aggressive schedule. We tried to turn the boats around in two days.

So what we typically do, and I have copies here if you want them, I took the last three deficiency reports -- and it's a very informal process but basically, the Captain is -- the trip aggressors fill out deficiencies, and that alerts the maintenance person on shore-side when he gets in of what needs to be done. If it's usually a major issue or a major problem, then the Captain may contact us by phone or email to let us know ahead of time.

Q. Okay. I'll take the copies.
A. Sure.
Q. You said that these are just the -- these are the copies from the --
A. Those are the past three trips.
Q. Okay.
A. So what -- the sail date is actually the intended sail date for the next trip so we know how much time we have, in other words, right?
Q. Okay.
A. Okay. You can see the lines through there with initials. That's usually the maintenance people who complete the task, they do that.
Q. Okay.
A. It doesn't always get crossed off the list all the time, but for the most part, the tasks are completed.
Q. Okay.
A. So each –- in the fishing industry some engines have our gauge. A lot of them do, a lot of them don't. So we typically go by the trip, say for just the services and the main engines and the generators or anything.

So typically, for example, our service schedule for oil changes is 250 hours, or three trips. We have pretty good idea how many –- the fishing conducted, it's 24 hours a day. We get a pretty good idea how many hours are on the engines. So we do oil

changes. The small oil changes we handle ourselves, the larger oil changes we use with the barge.

Q. Okay.

A. -- the fuel barge. And the fuel barge -- because some of our -- for example, if -- some of our main engines have a 250-gallon capacity, so they can come out and remove the waste oil and they replenish the new oil in bulk.

Q. Okay.

A. So we have those records. We have -- of course, we buy stuff, rags, consumable stuff like that. We have records of that, too, if we need --

Q. Okay. Do you –- do you know about how much fuel would have been onboard still --

A. The *Nobska*?

Q. Yeah.

A. We were thinking about 8,000 gallons. That’s in four tanks. So, there’s two half tanks and two forward wing tanks. The half tanks are a little bit bigger than the forward tanks and of course, there’s some fuel consumed during the course of the trip. And the half tanks are not typically filled or pressed all the way. Just because of stability, all –- just because we --

Q. Okay. And then can you kind of describe the different hydraulic system on the vessel?

A. So the trawl wenches are controlled hydraulically and the controls are what they call HRO-style. So basically, it’s a

hydraulic –- air-over-hydraulic system. So the main hydraulic coil, that's actually the mover for the wenches. It's very high pressure, 2,500 pounds, typically larger, supply lines and return lines (indiscernible) inch and a quarter, for example.

The control system utilizes a lot lower pressure and much smaller diameter system. And basically, what it is, is the little hydraulic system moves the valves to the bigger hydraulic system. That's the way it works. So instead of having this huge pipe going up into the wheelhouse, for example, and a huge valve, you just have a little one. And there's a little hydraulic line that goes down. And then there's a bigger bow mounted on the wall in the engine room that actually controls the flow of the hydraulic coil system.

Q. Okay.

A. I don't know if that makes sense or not.

Q, So, what would be the pressure that's going up to the --

A. So the HRO system, I think it's a thousand pounds or less, typically.

Q. And is it one engine that controls all the hydraulic --

A. So fishing boats do it different ways, but most of our fishing boats have a dedicated hydraulic engine. So on the *Nobska*, it was a 3408 Caterpillar. And if I'm not mistaken -- I'm not sure on this, I think it was 380-horse, roughly.

So basically, this V8 Caterpillar engine at 380-horse, has a gearbox mounted to the back of it, direct-drive, no clutch or

anything. And attached to that gearbox are three hydraulic pumps.

So, one hydraulic pump typically does one wench. The second hydraulic pump typically does the other wench because there's one wench on each side. Then the third pump typically drives the net drums and maybe some other, like, a bagging boom or hoisting cargo wench or something.

The boat also has a backup hydraulic system, which is basically just an electric motor. I think it’s a 30 or 40-horse electric motor with some valving and stuff. So to activate that, that’s in case you lose your engine and you can’t -- you don't have a prior mover to power your system. So what they'll do is two valves we can isolate and operate this backup hydraulic system. But the only problem with that is it’s slow. It’s just designed more to get your gear back aboard, it’s not designed to fish to –- as a backup system to fish with.

Q. Okay. Do you happen to have any sort of drawings of the vessel, like how the hydraulic system is in the engine room, and --

A. There’s no marine drawings of any of this stuff. There –- we do have surveys, and we actually just had a survey done the day the boat left, or just before the boat left. There is some pictures and photographs in there. I can see if I may have some photographs of the configuration and stuff, but the hydraulic system, primarily, is on the aft engine room bulkhead.

Q. Okay.

A. And the hydraulic engine is –- it –- so the way the engine was configured is what we call tank-tops, or wing tanks. So the fuel -- the sides of the fuel tank don't go from the overhead to the floor. They go, like, halfway up from the floor, and from the bilge, so it's like a step.

So when you enter the engine room, you'll actually come down a shorter ladder and are standing on the fuel tank-top. So you can actually see the frames and stuff of the hull. And then the main engine's nestled between these two tanks. So you actually step down a second time to walk alongside the main engine.

Q. Okay.

A. So this hydraulic engine was mounted all the way aft, on top of that hydraulic tank-top -- I'm sorry, fuel tank-top. We did that because with hydraulics, you want the least amount of run-on pipes, hoses, and whatever. So the pumps were right there, against the back wall of the engine room. The hydraulic tank was right there, the reserve tank. So all your suction lines are nice and short, and then all your hydraulic hardware, your valving and your pressure valves and release and everything is all typically mounted on the back wall.

Q. Okay.

A. So what that means is, the hoses and wires and wire chases leading to the wheelhouse is pretty much, I would say, probably four feet, three feet in front of that bulkhead leading up. So it's not like an inspected vessel when you have to have fire stops

or any through-hole penetrations, have to have fire seal on them or anything, we don't have any of that. We also do not have a fixed firefighting system, primarily just because it's hard to make it airtight when the boat's built this way.

Q. What type of hose would they have replaced? Like, with the -- what type of hose is it that they would have replaced, in the fitting --

A. As a far as the hydraulic hoses? So at 8:00 in the morning, Brian Jannelle contacted me by phone, said that they had a hydraulic leak and a small fire. And he said that we -- they put it out, but they were coming home. So I said okay, I agreed to that. And then I said, make sure -- look around to see if there's something you can't see.

So this hose that he described is a quarter-inch diameter, which is a number four, and it's a GIC hose, so it's a higher-pressure hose. It's a 3,000-pound rated hose; it's a one-wire. So it has a wire reinforcing, basically. And so he did not have a spare hose to replace this one that was lost in that initial, small fire. So I suggested to him that he take one from another system on the boat which in this case, was the wings -- or the stabilizing system. And because the gear was still deployed in the water, and he would not be able to retrieve it without repairing this hose.

So the idea at the time was -- is to put the hose on, retrieve the gear, and then come home. So they did that, and then

in his eyes, he felt like everything was contained and it was safe to proceed and continue fishing and kind of overruled his original decision because he felt like -- that they had examined things close enough and couldn't see any more signs of damage or visible wear or concerns.

So I purchased another hose. And I was -- actually put it onboard one of our vessels that was leaving Saturday, from here. And I did not plan on being here myself Saturday, so I left it on the boat Friday when I went home. And the crew at the time was going to bring the hose out to the *Nobska* so that they could now put it on the stabilizing system because they had cannibalized it for a hose. But of course, that never happened.

Q. Okay.

A. And the hose was about -- I think, 25 feet long, approximately.

LTJG [redacted]: David, did you have any questions?

MR. FLAHERTY: Sure.

BY MR. FLAHERTY:

Q. Do you know when the last time the hoses were replaced or renewed?

A. No.

Q. Okay. Is there any documentation there that might be in the office that can provide some info on that?

A. More than likely not. We typically replace hydraulic hoses when we feel that they have to be replaced. I mean, we do it all

the time, so we may be able to -- we may be able to go back into our purchase records and stuff like that, and extrapolate that data. That was one of the goals with the web-based system that we were going to, that this would all be documented.

Q. Right.

A. But at this time --

Q. During your experience, in your current job -- and have these hydraulic hoses that you utilized, have they previously failed? Or have you come across any other failures?

A. So as you may well know, the fishing fleet is aging quite a bit, and so that's one of the items that fail frequently, hydraulic hoses, because of the pressures and everything about them. So we change them all the time, we constantly are changing them.

And sometimes we change it because we have to, but most of the time, we catch it ahead of time. Whether it's a break or something, it just gets very challenging when it's in a space where you can't actually, visually see it, you know?

Q. Right.

A. So we do enough work on the boats that we're in every space, pretty much as much as you can be.

Q. Mm-hmm.

A. We're not very –- I fished before and I was a Marine Engineer. And we can't get engineers; I'll be honest with you, we can't get engineers. So Blue Harvest has kind of taken it upon

themselves to try to maintain these boats shore-side as much as possible, versus, say, at sea. It was typical. And so, that said, we try to keep our eyes open and peeled for glaring deficiencies that maybe the crew doesn't even catch, especially if we're working in an adjacent area or something. So --

Q. Okay. All right. Yeah, that answers -- I have no further questions right now.

LTJG [redacted]: Okay. All right. I don't have any other questions, either.

MR. CUNNIE: You're going to keep those there?

(Whereupon, the interview was concluded.)

1

CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the attached proceeding before the

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD

IN THE MATTER OF: FIRE ABOARD THE F/V *NOBSKA*
NEAR CAPE COD, MASSACHUSETTS
ON APRIL 30, 2021
Interview of Edward Cunnie

ACCIDENT NO.: DCA21FM027

PLACE: Via Telephone

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.

[redacted]
Transcriber