

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD

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Investigation of: *

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FIRE ABOARD THE F/V NOBSKA *

NEAR CAPE COD, MASSACHUSETTS * Accident No.: DCA21FM027

ON APRIL 30, 2021 *

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Interview of: JOHN WARDROP, Mate
Nobska

Via Telephone

APPEARANCES:

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

DAVID FLAHERTY, Investigator
National Transportation Safety Board

I N D E X

ITEM

PAGE

Interview of John Waldrop:

By LTJG [REDACTED]

4

By Mr. Flaherty

17

I N T E R V I E W

1
2 LTJG [REDACTED]: All right. So I'm Lieutenant Junior Grade
3 [REDACTED] and my name is spelled [REDACTED]
4 and I'm with the Coast Guard at Sector Southeastern New England.
5 And I am here with -- if you just want to go --

6 MR. WALDROP: John Waldrop.

7 LTJG [REDACTED]: And spell out your name.

8 MR. WALDROP: It's W-A-L-D-R-O-P.

9 LTJG [REDACTED]: Okay. And then we have Mr. David here on the
10 phone from NTSB.

11 MR. FLAHERTY: Yep.

12 LTJG [REDACTED]: If you want to --

13 MR. FLAHERTY: How you doing, sir? David Flaherty; I'm an
14 Investigator for the NTSB.

15 MR. WALDROP: Right.

16 MR. FLAHERTY: My last name is spelled F-L-A-H-E-R-T-Y.

INTERVIEW OF JOHN WALDROP

17
18 BY LTJG [REDACTED]:

19 Q. All right. And if you just want to kind of walk us through,
20 kind of what happened? If you want to just start with when you
21 guys got underway, and just kind of -- the events as they
22 transpired, and --

23 A. Yeah, it was just a regular fishing trip and we were three,
24 four days into it. Just getting into the routine and we were
25 going to haul back. And we had our gear down in the engine room,

1 so we get dressed down there. And when we started hauling back,
2 we noticed a leak -- oil leak started to drip on the stack and
3 smoke and ignite, so we went up and immediately alerted them.

4 He stopped, we put out the fire there and took -- we found a
5 leak and repaired the leak and cleaned up the engine room after --
6 because we spent a couple extinguishers on it, and cleaned it all
7 up and got squared away. And after we got squared away, it set in
8 again and when we hauled back; it reignited, basically is what
9 happened.

10 Q. Okay.

11 A. And then it just took right off and then there was no
12 stopping it. And we were all out on deck before. I mean, the
13 second time it reignited, we were all out on decks. It just went
14 right up.

15 Q. Okay. So how long have you been with the company?

16 A. A couple years. It'll be two years Memorial Day, that's what
17 I know.

18 Q. And how long have you been a mariner?

19 A. 35 years.

20 Q. How long have you been in this type of industry?

21 A. 35 years fishing. 35 years.

22 Q. And what were you guys fishing for?

23 A. Ground fish.

24 Q. Ground fish?

25 A. Yep. Haddock is the main target, anyway.

- 1 Q. Okay. And then did you have a driver's license, or is it --
- 2 A. Yeah, I have a driver's license.
- 3 Q. Is it -- do you have it with you?
- 4 A. No. It's --
- 5 Q. It's on the boat?
- 6 A. -- in the process of getting reissued. It went up in the
- 7 boat.
- 8 Q. Okay. I just figured I'd check, I kind of thought --
- 9 A. Yeah. Yeah, everything I got to get redone.
- 10 Q. Okay. What's a good phone number for you?
- 11 A. You can go -- I'll give you my cell phone number because
- 12 that's common and it should be -- I should have it in a day or
- 13 two. It's [REDACTED].
- 14 Q. And what's a good address for you?
- 15 A. [REDACTED] Want the ZIP?
- 16 Q. Yep.
- 17 A. [REDACTED].
- 18 Q. Okay. And did you have a Merchant-Mariner credential?
- 19 A. No. I -- just an Operator's Permit.
- 20 Q. Okay.
- 21 A. That card they issue from -- basic Operator's Permit.
- 22 Q. Okay. All right, I'd have to look at it.
- 23 A. Yeah.
- 24 Q. What type of training or education have you had to do, with
- 25 either drills, or just operations on the vessel?

1 A. Just some drills, basic man-overboard drills, launching the
2 life raft, and putting on a survival suit. I've had that before
3 throughout my career anyway, but --

4 Q. Okay. Have you done any training on how to work certain
5 equipment on the vessel, or is it just --

6 A. No, I pretty much --

7 Q. Okay.

8 A. From -- just from being around it.

9 Q. Okay. Can you describe what a normal work day would be for
10 you?

11 A. Just set the net, tow for -- depending on where we are, three
12 to four hours, haul back, take care of the catch, haul back, dump
13 the catch, set the net again, take care of the catch on deck, and
14 haul back, over and over.

15 Q. Okay. Okay. And for this trip, what was your position on
16 the vessel?

17 A. Mate, basically, I guess. Yeah.

18 Q. Okay. And how was the vessel operating?

19 A. It was operating fine. She seemed to be fine.

20 Q. And there was no problems?

21 A. No, no problems mechanically or -- except for when the leak
22 happened.

23 Q. Okay. What was the weather like?

24 A. It was 15 -- it was clear, 15 to 25, I don't know what
25 direction it was coming from at the time.

1 Q. Okay. What was the sea state?

2 A. Sea, probably four-foot, four to five-foot seas.

3 Q. And would you say that the weather conditions were favorable
4 for the day?

5 A. Yeah. Yep, definitely.

6 Q. And what -- how do you come to that conclusion?

7 A. Well, it's easy to work, and there's definitely -- anything
8 in a gale, usually, we'll stop if it gets too bad or, --

9 Q. Okay. And do you operate in accordance with any sort of
10 professional standards or policies -- company policies?

11 A. Just -- I don't know, normal fishing duties.

12 Q. Okay. And would you say that the company's commitment to
13 safety -- would you say, is there?

14 A. What, you want me to grade it?

15 Q. I mean, is it -- you think it's good --

16 A. No, it's definitely --

17 Q. -- or not good?

18 A. -- yeah. It's good, yeah. It was definitely a safe boat.
19 There was just a mishap.

20 Q. Okay. Are you pretty familiar with all the equipment on the
21 boat?

22 A. Mm-hmm.

23 Q. How many trips had you been on this particular vessel?

24 A. Probably -- I don't know how many trips they average a year.
25 It's got to be at least 30, so I was there for two years, and I'd

1 say 60 to 70 trips, probably.

2 Q. On this particular vessel?

3 A. Yeah.

4 Q. Do you do any sort of maintenance on equipment or --

5 A. Yeah. Well, mostly kind of fishing gear, but they have a
6 shore crew here that does a lot of maintenance when we need it,
7 and --

8 Q. Okay. Do you inspect the equipment at all when you're out?

9 A. Yeah, all the time. We're always looking for something
10 that's going to go wrong, or --

11 Q. Okay. So that morning, did you inspect all the equipment on
12 the vessel?

13 A. Well, basically the line that burst is in a hidden
14 compartment, you know what I mean?

15 Q. Mm-hmm.

16 A. -- where it's not easily accessible.

17 Q. And you said there was no other issues?

18 A. No. Nope.

19 Q. Had there been any sort of drugs or alcohol on the trip?

20 A. No. Nope.

21 Q. Okay. And when -- so when exactly did you leave New Bedford?
22 You said Monday?

23 A. It was Monday.

24 Q. Monday? And how long was the trip supposed to be for?

25 A. Seven to ten days.

- 1 Q. When did you guys arrive and start fishing?
- 2 A. Tuesday morning, probably 5:00 in the morning.
- 3 Q. And so how many sets had you guys done before the accident --
- 4 or the incident?
- 5 A. That was probably -- sets, probably 15 to 18.
- 6 Q. About how long does it take for each set?
- 7 A. Three to four hours.
- 8 Q. And about how long does it take to set the gear?
- 9 A. Twenty minutes to set the gear.
- 10 Q. So basically, you were -- it takes about 20 minutes to set
- 11 the gear, and then you let it --
- 12 A. Then we tow it.
- 13 Q. -- you drift it out there --
- 14 A. No, we pull it.
- 15 Q. Pull it?
- 16 A. Yep.
- 17 Q. For three to four hours?
- 18 A. Yep.
- 19 Q. Okay. And then you haul it back?
- 20 A. Right.
- 21 Q. How long does the haul back usually take?
- 22 A. About 20 minutes, too.
- 23 Q. And what was the plan for that day?
- 24 A. Just to keep fishing, doing the same thing. It's very --
- 25 it's monotonous, if you want to say. Or it's routine, rather, not

1 monotonous. But it's a routine operation, it's just repetitive
2 all the -- haul and set.

3 Q. Okay. When was the first indication that there was something
4 wrong?

5 A. When we were down in the engine room getting dressed, and
6 then saw it right away.

7 Q. Okay. And about what time did the first fire start?

8 A. 11:00 to 12:00, in -- 11:00 in the morning, 11:00 to noon,
9 somewhere in there.

10 Q. And where exactly was the fire?

11 A. Right on the stack.

12 Q. Okay. And what were your actions? What did you do?

13 A. Notified the Captain. I told one of the guys to run up and
14 notify the Captain, and then grabbed an extinguisher and used it
15 on the stack itself.

16 Q. And what type of extinguisher was it?

17 A. It's a powder, I don't know. What do you call it --

18 Q. Dry.

19 A. Yeah, it's a dry --

20 Q. Okay. And about how many extinguishers did you use?

21 A. One that time, and then the rest of them all pretty much got
22 spent -- we had them all out. We had them ready after the first
23 initial flames. And I must have used three or four, I guess. I
24 don't know. I can't recall what --

25 Q. Okay. What color was the smoke?

- 1 A. Black.
- 2 Q. And --
- 3 A. Black and gray.
- 4 Q. And what color was the flame?
- 5 A. Orange.
- 6 Q. -- so what were the actions after you put out the fire?
- 7 A. Just got squared away and cleaned up what we had to,
- 8 extinguisher masks, and we took the blankets off the stack just to
- 9 clean it up, because it had been oil-soaked. And just to get into
- 10 -- we wiped the engines down, and just to get back into -- able to
- 11 fish again.
- 12 Q. Okay. And how did you -- how was the leak fixed?
- 13 A. Just to replace the line, we tracked the line because we
- 14 found out the line that was leaking and then replaced it with
- 15 another spare that he had there. I didn't replace it myself, it
- 16 was the other guy, so --
- 17 Q. Okay. Do you know exactly what the system was that was
- 18 leaking?
- 19 A. It was a hydraulic line that runs the wench.
- 20 Q. And where was this line at?
- 21 A. It runs from the engine room, up through a compartment into
- 22 the wheelhouse.
- 23 Q. And then about how long did it take you guys to --
- 24 A. -- clean it out?
- 25 Q. -- clean and --

1 A. Took us a little while, 45 minutes to an hour to get it all
2 cleaned up.

3 Q. And then about how much time before the next fire?

4 A. After we got it all cleaned up and were all squared away, we
5 set in again, and it was another three -- we made a whole tow, so
6 it was another, like, three, four hours. Then when we hauled back
7 it reignited.

8 Q. So you're in the process of hauling back at the time?

9 A. Yeah, we hauled back and set in again, and it reignited
10 because we were all out on deck dealing with the catch.

11 Q. Okay. So it was in the process when you guys were hauling
12 back, that it caught on fire?

13 A. First time, definitely, yes, and the second time, we were all
14 out on deck, so it's hard to say if it started when we were
15 hauling back and then we just noticed it later on. But it
16 happened -- it was quick, so I would say it wasn't when we were
17 hauling back. It was -- it just reignited when we were towing.
18 Because it's haul ins at the net, haul ins, you know?

19 Q. Mm-hmm. Okay. And what were your actions taken that you
20 took when the second fire started?

21 A. When the second fire started, I was down the fish hole. So
22 when I came up out of the fish hole, the whole wheelhouse and
23 (indiscernible) was pretty much engulfed in smoke, and we -- you
24 couldn't get in there. So we grabbed the EPIRB, got the raft
25 ready to launch, and one of the other guys grabbed the survival

1 suits.

2 Q. So you grabbed the EPIRB?

3 A. I didn't grab that. I helped get the raft off the --

4 Q. Okay.

5 A. -- top part.

6 Q. And so what -- I mean, did you receive instructions or --

7 A. No, we basically -- it's -- knew what to do. We saw the
8 smoke where all the safety equipment was, so we knew we had to get
9 the safety equipment out.

10 Q. Okay. All right. Do you know how many fire extinguishers
11 are onboard?

12 A. There's at least -- one, two, three, four -- it's got to be
13 at least half a dozen anyway.

14 Q. And are they all the dry chemical?

15 A. I couldn't tell you for sure.

16 Q. Okay.

17 A. Probably.

18 Q. Is there any other sort of firefighting equipment onboard?

19 A. We have a -- one of those hockey puck things. What do you
20 call those? I forget them. You know, the --

21 Q. I think they're called the grenades, is what they call them.

22 A. But you'd pull the pin, throw it in, yeah.

23 Q. Yeah.

24 A. Yep, one of those. He deployed that, too, I do believe.

25 Q. What type of -- what color of smoke and flames were the --

1 for the second fire?

2 A. Black.

3 Q. Okay. And the flames were orange?

4 A. Yeah.

5 Q. Inside the engine room, is there any sort of -- what type of
6 materials are in there? Like, is it steel, wood?

7 A. There's steel. There's some plastic, not a lot of plastic
8 but -- there's some rubber, not very much wood. There's some
9 wood, but I don't know what else I can tell you, what's in there.
10 I think that's about it.

11 Q. Okay. For the first fire, what type of machinery equipment
12 was running when the fire started?

13 A. Just the main engine, generator, and a hall vent -- the wench
14 engine.

15 Q. What about for the second?

16 A. Same thing.

17 Q. Same?

18 A. Yeah.

19 Q. Is there any sort of fire boundaries for the engine room?

20 A. What do you mean, like --

21 Q. So, like --

22 A. Just like a dam, kind of, like, thing, or --

23 Q. So, on a lot of ships, you have the doors and compartments
24 that are rated a certain -- so I'm just asking --

25 A. Yeah, yeah. Yeah. Not that I know of, no.

- 1 Q. Okay. Are there watertight bulkheads?
- 2 A. Yes, there are.
- 3 Q. Okay. Can you tell me kind of what --
- 4 A. There's one in the engine room from the floor peak to the
5 engine room, there's a watertight door.
- 6 Q. Okay.
- 7 A. From the engine room up, there's some doors at the top of the
8 stairs. I don't know if they're completely watertight, but
9 they're steel doors.
- 10 Q. Okay.
- 11 A. And yeah, that's about it.
- 12 Q. Okay. Have you ever done fire drills with the crew?
- 13 A. Yeah.
- 14 Q. Did you do any on this trip?
- 15 A. Not this trip, no.
- 16 Q. Do you know how much fuel was onboard at the time?
- 17 A. I don't know. Probably eight to 10,000 gallons, maybe.
- 18 Q. Do you know how much other, like, hydraulic oil would have
19 been onboard?
- 20 A. I don't know how much the hydraulic tank holds. It was
21 probably a barrel of oil, of lube oil on board. In the hydraulic
22 tank, I couldn't tell you how much it holds.
- 23 Q. Okay. For that second fire, can you tell me all the spaces
24 that were on fire during that time?
- 25 A. Just the engine room and wheelhouse. When I came up out of

1 the fish hole, you couldn't even get in the boat.

2 Q. Okay.

3 A. So I couldn't really pinpoint.

4 LTJG [REDACTED]: Okay. David, did you have any other questions?

5 MR. FLAHERTY: Yes.

6 BY MR. FLAHERTY:

7 Q. How are you doing, sir?

8 A. Good, how are you?

9 Q. Good, thank you. Hey, where is the hydraulic pump, that type
10 of -- that operates the system?

11 A. They're in the engine room, I do believe.

12 Q. Okay. So the ship only has one main engine, one generator,
13 and then the pump itself; is it -- it's an electrical pump for the
14 hydraulics? Or is it something else?

15 A. It has a -- it's the main engine. There's two generators and
16 a wench engine.

17 Q. Okay. And the wench engine is, like, a piston-driven engine?

18 A. Yes, it's a regular Caterpillar engine.

19 Q. Okay. And so that provides the hydraulic --

20 A. Yes.

21 Q. -- pressure --

22 A. Yes.

23 Q. -- and you guys use that to move the wench around and
24 everything, so there's no --

25 A. Yeah.

1 Q. -- there's no direct drive to, like, the engine, like a --

2 A. Not to the main engine, no. It's totally separate --

3 Q. Okay.

4 A. -- from the main engine.

5 Q. All right. The -- when the first fire happened, what was
6 your reaction to -- by the crew, were you like okay, maybe we
7 should head in, or, hey, we think everything's fine, we should
8 probably stay out?

9 A. After we got it all cleaned up, it seemed like it was pretty
10 minor, where you wanted to continue fishing. It seemed it was
11 under control, that we could keep going.

12 Q. How long -- oh, I'm sorry.

13 A. No, it's all right, go ahead.

14 Q. How long have you sailed on that boat?

15 A. Two years.

16 Q. Have you experienced anything like this before?

17 A. No.

18 Q. All right. Do you know how old the hydraulic lines were?

19 A. I do not know.

20 Q. Okay. So when the second fire happened, did it happen in the
21 exact same area as the first fire, or was it in a different
22 location?

23 A. I think -- like I said, I was down the fish holes, and when I
24 came up, you couldn't even get into the boat, so down the engine
25 room somewhere. I would say in the same vicinity.

1 Q. All right. And has there been any problem with that wench
2 engine and its operation?

3 A. No, it's pretty well-maintained, and it's -- yeah, we've had
4 no problem with it.

5 Q. Okay. And by chance, did you hear anything unusual before
6 you knew that there was a second fire?

7 A. No. Nope.

8 Q. Okay. All right. That's all the questions I have.

9 LTJG [REDACTED]: Okay.

10 MR. FLAHERTY: Thank you.

11 LTJG [REDACTED]: Yeah, that's all I have for you.

12 MR. WALDROP: Okay.

13 LTJG [REDACTED]: All set. Thank you very much.

14 MR. WALDROP: Okay.

15 (Whereupon, the interview was concluded.)
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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 John Waldrop

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.



Transcriber