ORIGINAL

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD

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Investigation of: *
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FIRE ABOARD YACHT *FLAGSHIP* NEAR *
MIAMI, FLORIDA ON APRIL 28, 2024 * Accident No.: DCA24FM035
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Interview of: VICTOR IGLESIAS, Superintendent
RMK Merrill-Stevens Shipyard

via telephone

Monday,
May 3, 2024

APPEARANCES:

DAVID FLAHERTY, Marine Accident Investigator
National Transportation Safety Board

[redacted], Chief, Investigations Division
U.S. Coast Guard Sector Miami

ARNOLD AKGUN, Chief Financial Officer
RMK Merrill-Stevens

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I N T E R V I E W

(8:49 a.m.)

MR. FLAHERTY: My name is David Flaherty, I am the Investigator-in-Charge for the --

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: *Flagship*.

MR. FLAHERTY: -- *Flagship*, yes. I'm sorry, I keep wanting to say Flag something else, I don't know why. Anyway, I'll start over again.

Hi, my name is David Flaherty, I'm the Investigator-in-Charge for the casualty involving the recreational vessel *Flagship*. Today is May 3rd, 2024, we're conducting interviews in that casualty.

If I can start with the Coast Guard, if you could please state your name, your position, and spell your last name and we'll go around the room with the person who we're interviewing being the last person to do that, please.

MR. [redacted] My name is [redacted], [redacted], I'm with the United States Coast Guard. I'm the chief of Investigations Division, Coast Guard Sector Miami.

MR. FAMULARI: I am David Famulari, that's F-a-m-u-l-a-r-i. I'm legal counsel for RMK Merrill-Stevens.

MR. AKGUN: My name is Arnold Akgun, A-k-g-u-n. I'm the chief financial officer of RMK Merrill-Stevens shipyards.

MR. IGLESIAS: My name is Victor Iglesias, I-g-l-e-s-i-a-s, superintendent of Merrill-Stevens.

MR. FLAHERTY: Whoever has the phone, if they could kind of move it towards the person being interviewed, that was coming in a little too low.

MR. IGLESIAS: Do you want me to (indiscernible) my name again?

MR. FLAHERTY: Yeah, just state your name again, see if it's clearer.

MR. IGLESIAS: Victor Iglesias, I-g-l-e-s-i-a-s, superintendent of Merrill-Stevens.

MR. FLAHERTY: All right. Sir, do I have your permission to record this interview?

MR. IGLESIAS: Yes, sir.

MR. FLAHERTY: All right, thank you.

So Juan (sic), do you want to start off with some questions?

INTERVIEW OF VICTOR IGLESIAS

BY MR. [redacted]:

Q. I guess we can go ahead and discuss that date in relation to just before the incident happened. Were you here, not here, et cetera, just --

A. No, I wasn't here, I was at home.

Q. Okay.

A. The incident happened on a Sunday, which nobody worked that day. I have a phone call from security occurred around 10:00, 10:00-something a.m., and I just confer with the company.

Q. How long did it take you to get here?

A. Approximately 20 minutes.
Q. Twenty minutes, okay. And when you arrived on scene, what did you observe?
A. When I arrived on the scene, fire (indiscernible) was already on the ship, on the (indiscernible), they were trying to -- we saw the fire from the wheelhouse of the boat. Then they start asking question, mostly fire related, what kind of fuels and tools they were staining with, also we have floorboards around the diesel and we help them to move it out of the way so they can transport the diesel out of the ship.
Q. Okay. What was your -- what was your first impression of the incident as far as did you see anything that would alarm you as to where the fire was coming from, you know?
A. When I got here the boat was definitely on fire, there was no way to say (indiscernible) on a specific reason why it caught fire at that moment.
Q. Can you tell us the characteristics of the vessel as it was moored inside the facility?
A. Shore power.
Q. What kind of -- how was the vessel laid up on the facility?
A. The vessel was, like I said before, was sitting here inside the shell, it was connected to a shore power unit with (indiscernible) 2A (ph.) voltage, if I'm not mistaken. Everything was swimming (ph.) perfectly for the last two months, something like that, on the vessel. This vessel is composed of a huge

(indiscernible) with solar panels and everything was fine until the incident happened.

Q. When was the last time workers were on board the vessel?

A. Friday.

Q. And from Friday to Sunday, anybody does actual rounds on the vessel at all?

A. Just the security guard, on Saturdays and Sundays every hour, they has to do rounds around the yard, but nobody works on the vessel, nobody has to get inside the vessel after Friday.

Q. So just a perimeter --

A. Yes.

Q. -- walk-through --

A. Correct.

Q. -- for verification where everything is good. Did the security guard acknowledge any -- any signs of anything prior to the incident?

A. According to her -- it was a female that was here on Sunday -- she walked probably hour before the incident, then she went to the bathroom, which is right next to the vessel was set, probably half or 45 minutes before the incident, then when she went back to the -- to the guard, stay informed of what happened from the guard, she hear an explosion. That was pretty much it.

Q. Is that person available to be interviewed, as well, do you know?

A. I'm pretty sure, yes.

MR. [redacted]: Do you have anything else, Mr. Flaherty?

BY MR. FLAHERTY:

Q. Sir, what's the safety protocol for a vessel that's laid up at the boathouse, any type of monitoring? Prior to like the last person leaving, is there a safety walk-through to make sure that everything's okay? Does the security guard, when they're making their round, do they board the vessel or do they just walk by them?

A. Correct. Ourselves, RMK, we check out vessels on several days just to make sure that everything is functional and on every kind of aspect, even if (indiscernible) or if the boat is connected to the shore power, is to make sure that everything is working perfectly.

So this is something that we do on several days and (indiscernible) and before we leave the boat, any employee that is relating to a specific yacht, they have to make sure that everything is in safe position and anything, tools or wire we leave on a vessel, it has to be organized in a safe place. Security guard, security guard just goes around, they never board vessels, they just go around and do their walking the whole marina every hour.

Q. Okay. Is there any kind of a safety check-off list that you have for vessels that are at your facility to ensure that, you know, appropriate equipment is off and anything else like that?

A. Only if -- we do that only if we are doing some type of

welding or hot work on the vessel, only if we're (indiscernible) work like fiberglass or something like that, we don't -- we usually don't do that.

Q. Could you describe the work that was conducted on the vessel on Friday prior to the casualty?

A. Well, the boat on the deck roof where the solar panels are located have multiple holes on their structure, so solar panels were moved to aside and we were -- no fiberglass, it was filling those holes because water was penetrating to the salon area, filling, primer and things, the roof of the vessel.

Q. Okay. And the water that was going into the salon, where was it actually going into, what area of the salon, if you could kind of be a little specific on that?

A. Well, we only have wire -- you're talking about extension cord or something like that, that's your question?

Q. The water that was leaking in through the holes, where was it entering into the salon?

A. Water. The only water that was inside the salon was relating to the panels, the roof panels and the ceiling panels, which they have some forms and it was adding (indiscernible) to the -- to the panels. So we have a stapling machine and also an air hose going inside to the salon area and the sinking (ph.) on the top of the roof of the vessel, this is where stapled the back row on the ceiling panels.

MR. [redacted]: And to be clear -- this is [redacted]. To

be clear, we're talking about water leaks, there was no issues with wiring, right?

MR. IGLESIAS: No, no, no.

BY MR. FLAHERTY:

Q. Okay. So could you describe, like, what the procedure was that they followed as they did their work?

A. Work. Basically, when they show up in the morning, we have a manager (ph.) go through the whole work-specific issues that we have for the boat, what has to be done, what has been completed. Usually myself, I walk into the work area to make sure of the stage of work that we are at that moment and just follow up with whatever we have painted on the vessel.

Q. All right. So for the work on the solar panels, did it involve turning off any electrical switches to make sure that they weren't energized in some way or there wasn't any electrical current?

A. The only electrical connection there was is the connection between panels, it's like an extension cord that goes -- they attach the power and lights and with sheets of plastic (indiscernible) or connection, they're using bolts and then you come straight to the panels (indiscernible). The system was completely off, so that would not affect anything relating to the fire, that's my understanding.

Q. And they were putting in caulking and it was -- there was no heating of any kind of surface or heated material used when you

were doing the work?
A. No, no.
Q. Do you know -- the solar panels, did they go to the main electrical board or how did they work, are you aware of how the system worked?
A. The electrical panel is used in relation to the boat. The boat is not completely full in service with the solar panels, that half of the vessel have a battery bank which is controlled by this solar panel, that this will work power in different ways on the vessel, like 110, 220, at some points can be sent to the solar panels.

It's a half (indiscernible) you can swap from solar panel, you can use solar panel, you can use your generator or you can use shore power, whatever, I mean, it's nothing that (indiscernible) to be in operation with system.
Q. Okay, so the solar panels, when in use, obviously, supplied -- the power absorbed by the solar panel was sent to the batteries on the ship for storage, correct?

(No audible response.)

BY MR. FLAHERTY:
Q. Hello?
A. Yes, I said yes. I'm sorry, I --
Q. All right. So when your personnel were working on the solar panels, there was -- they didn't at all do any disconnecting of electrical wires prior to starting the work of removing the solar

panels to fix the leaks?
A. No, like I said before, the only wires that was disconnected is the one that attached panel to panel, (indiscernible) plan system, all the panels (indiscernible) lights. So like I said before, it's like an extension cord --
Q. Um-hum.
A. -- a plastic connection that imports (ph.) and then you can flip the power to one on top of the other one. Even if you want to -- for some reason one of the panels doesn't have a connection (indiscernible), you can just attach all the panel to the connection and interface the panels. It's just part of an inline system, not in parallel to the battery or to the power system of the boat.
Q. Okay, all right. And what -- what systems, if you're aware, were operating on the vessel from the electrical shore power connection?
A. Mostly everything was in (indiscernible).
Q. All right, was it like -- go ahead, I'm sorry.
A. At that moment the vessel doesn't have A/C from -- doesn't have anything running except the shore power and battery chargers.
Q. So the battery chargers were still -- were on at the time when your crew left and you said that the A/C system was also on?
A. No, it was off, off.
Q. Oh, it was off, okay. So could you just list anything that you're aware of that was on at the time when your crew left on

Friday?
A. The only thing was the -- as far as I understand and I know was the shore power. I'm not sure, I cannot completely answer the question because we have a battery charge that was attached to the vessel, but I'm not sure if it was connected and disconnected completely at that moment. Ozgur might be able to give you that answer later. But that's it, that's pretty much everything else was completely disconnected, everything was shut down.
Q. Do you know if the lithium ion batteries were being charged at the time?
A. There is a small issue with the lithium batteries, sometimes the battery chargers can kick off, so to bring the battery charging on the charging mode, you have to drain the batteries to an amount of charge. They say to five percent. And for some reason that was getting low, we have to charge it into one point where the battery charger can keep up and we have to do that every -- over months, maybe once a month, something like that, just to bring the battery back to the right charges so the -- actually battery charger (indiscernible).
Q. Okay, so at the time -- when was the last time the batteries had -- the lithium ion batteries had to be charged?
A. The last time was charging, if I'm not mistaken, it was between Tuesday, Wednesday of last week.
Q. Okay. And by chance, did any of your workers, people working for you or you, yourself, when you're on the vessel, did you ever

notice any unusual smells that you couldn't maybe trace at the time?

A. Never.

MR. FLAHERTY: Okay. All right.

[redacted] I don't have any further questions.

BY MR. [redacted]:

Q. Yeah, I have just a couple follow-ups. You said the system was off, do you know who actually turned that system off?

A. The reason the system was off is because, for example, A/C system, the air conditioner has multiple problems after we fix it, so we keep that system completely off all the time, and that was the recommendation by manufacturer.

Also, during the (indiscernible) here, we don't (indiscernible) in any system that is not needed, we don't from any power or any power mode that is not needed for the vessel while the boat is connected to the shore power.

Q. So for the sake of argument, you had shore power for a reason; if not, you would have them disconnect it, right, it would be without any power. So when you put the shore power on, you were feeding something, does that include bilge pumps, does that include other -- other --

A. Yeah, just (indiscernible) like batteries, bilge pumps, in case they needed any, they can connect whenever they want by -- by a panel, any (indiscernible), any panel for, let's say, light they need them in a specific place of the boat or if they need to do

any work, they won't be able to turn on the system if they have to work on it.

Q. Right. So my question is, is why not disconnect the shore power if nobody was going to be on board?

A. We cannot keep the boats without shore power, otherwise, if there is a battery failure or something like that, the bilge pump would've still worked and for this water leak penetration, from the chance that it won't sink.

MR. [redacted] I just want to -- I wanted to clarify that it's probably the most important part --

MR. IGLESIAS: Yes.

MR. [redacted] -- of the system is the water and --

MR. IGLESIAS: Yes.

MR. [redacted] -- there wasn't anything else. Okay, all right. That was it.

BY MR. FLAHERTY:

Q. Oh, I just have one follow-on question, did the -- did the vessel have a fire or smoke detection system on board?

A. The boats have the -- these catamarans, they have to split engines (ph.) from -- each side have like a fire system which is composed by a pressurized tank and a fire line, it's -- right now there is not any smoke detector, be sure that I can say yes, I saw a smoke detector or something like that, I don't recall having seen it.

Q. And the fire -- it had a fire suppression system for each

engine room.

A. Yes.

Q. Okay. Were there any other fire suppression systems on the vessel other than the two engine rooms?

A. Not that I know.

MR. FLAHERTY: Okay. All right. I'm fine, are you fine?

MR. [redacted] Yeah, I'm good, thank you.

MR. FLAHERTY: Okay. It is 9:11, this concludes the interview. Thank you very much for your time.

(Whereupon, at 9:11 a.m., the interview concluded.)

CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the attached proceeding before the

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD

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|---|---|
| IN THE MATTER OF: | FIRE ABOARD YACHT *FLAGSHIP* NEAR MIAMI, FLORIDA ON APRIL 28, 2024<br>Interview of Victor Iglesias |
| ACCIDENT NO.: | DCA24FM035 |
| PLACE: | via telephone |
| DATE: | May 3, 2024 |

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.

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Karen D. Martini
Transcriber