ORIGINAL

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD

* * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * *
Investigation of: *
*
FIRE ABOARD YACHT *FLAGSHIP* NEAR *
MIAMI, FLORIDA ON APRIL 28, 2024 * Accident No.: DCA24FM035
*
* * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * *

Interview of: JOEL MOLINA, Mechanic Technician
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

DAVID FAMULARI, Esq.
Famulari, Butto & Higginbottom, PLLC
Representing RMK Merrill-Stevens

I N D E X

ITEM	PAGE
Interview of Joel Molina:	
By Mr. [redacted]	4
By Mr. Flaherty	8
By Mr. [redacted]	11

I N T E R V I E W

(10:14 a.m.)

MR. FLAHERTY: My name is David Flaherty, I'm with the National Transportation Safety Board. My last name is spelled F-l-a-h-e-r-t-y, I am the Investigator-in-Charge for the fire involving the vessel *Flag* --

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: *Flagship.*

MR. FLAHERTY: And the time -- it's currently 10:14. If you have, let's see -- [redacted]

MR. [redacted] Yeah, my name is [redacted] I'm with the United States Coast Guard. I am the Chief, Marine Investigations Division for Coast Guard Sector Miami.

MR. FAMULARI: My name is David Famulari, that's F-a-m-u-l-a-r-i, and the legal counsel for RMK Merrill-Stevens.

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

MR. MOLINA: My name is Joel Molina, M-o-l-i-n-a, I am one of the mechanic technicians in the RMK Merrill-Stevens.

MR. FLAHERTY: All right, thank you very much.

[redacted] if you don't mind starting the interview?

INTERVIEW OF JOEL MOLINA

BY MR. [redacted]

Q. So I want to go ahead and start as to do you remember the vessel showing up here for the first time?

A. More or less, yes.

Q. How soon after did you start working on it?
A. I'd say months. I have already been on that boat until I started helping the carpentry department, you know, put roof panels, mold the dockery (ph.), you know, so they could stick on there and that's when I kind of started working on that vessel, yeah.
Q. So from the day of the incident back, how often or how long had you been on the boat, would you say?
A. I'd say under a month, maybe a month total.
Q. Okay. And your duties were, you said --
A. It was assisting the carpentry department because they're low staff, I guess, in their department, so I was helping, at the moment, it would be Steve, I guess, it was Steve at the moment, also helping him with the roof panels, putting dockery on all of them, on the main salon, I believe it's called, and we finished all those, the roof panels, and then proceeded to the roof where we were told there was a water leak that was seeping through the roof panels on the top area, so we basically moved the panels, all the solar panels to the side and were repairing the holes, all the holes throughout the roof and just filling them up, basically.
Q. Describe the roof paneling, are there attachments, electrical wiring?
A. None of them were attached. There was only one or two from each side, port and starboard, that were already connected that you can't remove those unless you disconnect the wiring, so those,

we left them alone and we'll just flip them on their side so we won't have to disconnect or reconnect. So everything that we moved were already disconnected, nothing electrical, otherwise, that I know, we really didn't do anything like that, all we did is just move them to the sides, stack them, and then work on each side by section.

Q. While you were there on the boat, did you see any abnormalities, smell anything or anything that would've --

A. No, sir.

Q. -- alerted you, as a technician?

A. No, sir. No sir.

Q. Did you get a chance to walk about the boat?

A. Yeah, yes. Actually, now that I do recall, I did help our guys, this is maybe earlier in the month where we're removing fuel, I think it was diesel, I think it was, they were adjusting, I think -- I can't remember exactly what they were doing. I was helping them in their room where I was removing the carpets so they don't drop fuel or anything like that, that was like more than a month ago, I'd say, though, and yeah, that's pretty much any other moment that I recall being inside fairly deep in the vessel, in the rooms or whatnot.

Q. Okay. Did you ever have a chance to walk about interior spaces or electrical spaces where --

A. The only tight spot that I can recall being in is when I was helping those guys with -- they were removing the tank covers so

they could get all the fuel out, that's the only confined space I can recall and that's when I -- we were elaborating to them about their A/C system, their -- you know, because their A/C wasn't so that all the A/C was down there, that's what I was explaining to them at the time. Pretty much it.

Q. We heard about obviously there was tools being used.

A. Yes.

Q. What kind of tools were being used (indiscernible)?

A. So I had a Milwaukee drill, that I was using Milwaukee tools and had a couple hammers to remove the brackets from the solar panels because we had to re-bed the bolts and everything. Oh, let me see, let me see. Tie bar. That's about it.

Q. Did you have to plug in any of your tools?

A. No, sir.

Q. Everything was all --

A. Everything, the only thing that you would say we plug in were the -- you know, from the extension cords, that they were plugging in our vacuum, we had a vacuum up there to get the dust when we were sanding, but --

Q. Is that like into the vessel --

A. -- everything was --

Q. -- or from the facility?

A. No, it was from the facility. It was an extension cord running off the side.

Q. Okay. Pneumatic powered, so they were pneumatic tools?

A. I think so, yes.
Q. Do you remember (indiscernible)?
A. Pneumatic, you mean?
Q. Pneumatic, yeah, air.
A. Yeah, yeah. Air, like air tools?
Q. Yeah.
A. Yeah, we had air -- we had two air hoses running off the side, as well.
MR. [redacted] Okay. That's it for right now, for me.
BY MR. FLAHERTY:
Q. Sir, I appreciate you coming in and talking with us. At any point was any equipment, electrical equipment plugged into the vessel?
A. No. I think there was maybe one time where they plugged in a fan, but the fan wasn't working, I guess there was no power, so they never really ended up leaving nothing plugged into the boat or nothing, that's where the extension cords came in.
Q. Okay. Could you describe the kind of work you did on Friday?
A. On Friday I was on the roof, I was filling up the holes that we had grinded out, there were already minor holes all over the roof, so we grinded those down to put filler in, to smooth it out, and so we sanded them and removed some brackets for the solar panels to put two bolts in them --
Q. Um-hum.
A. -- and two bolts, a couple of brackets, we put bolts on

them --
Q. Okay.
A. -- to pull down to -- so they could, you know, tie in.
Q. And the material you were grinding, what kind of material was it?
A. It was like, what's it called -- it's like -- what was the roof made out of? It's like putty, you know, like hard --
UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: Bondall (ph.)?
MR. MOLINA: Bondall, Bondall. It's like the whole roof was like Bondall, yeah.
BY MR. FLAHERTY:
Q. So it wasn't aluminum or fiberglass that you were grinding?
A. No, sir.
Q. All right.
A. There was aluminum under it, once we get like -- once you -- if you grind down, you'll see the aluminum, that's as far as we'll go, that's where we added the filler.
Q. Okay. And for the filler, it was cold filler?
A. Yeah, it was -- it dries like in 30 minutes, it's like a regular, like, filler that you could, you know, use in a car, that once you apply, it dries within 15 minutes, so -- and then we sanded them all down.
Q. Okay. Was there any problems with the removal of the solar panels?
A. No, sir. They're all pretty -- when I got up there, they

were all pretty much disconnected and from -- that's like I told the gentleman earlier, there was only two panels from, say, when we were on port side, there was only two panels that were connected that you couldn't, you would have to like disconnect them and get more extent to it --

Q. Right.

A. -- and we let them alone, we'll just flip them on the side, so let's say we'll have the solar panel laying down, we'll fix the holes, prime them, fill them up, prime them and then we'll let it dry and then we'll flip it and then work on the other side.

Q. Okay. I don't know if this was asked before, but when you were on board, did you have any -- did you smell any, like, burning?

A. No, sir. No burning smell, nothing like that at all.

Q. All right. Did you see anyone working around the lithium ion batteries?

A. No, sir.

Q. And what time did you -- did the work -- was the work completed?

A. I'd say, because we were -- we weren't on it for too long because we applied the filling and then we had to wait for the filling to dry and then we sanded those down and then we continued installing some of the brackets, you know, I needed a partner to -- you know, somebody will come up, put the screw down while somebody holds the nut from the bottom --

Q. Right.
A. -- but we weren't -- I'd say on the top, we were maybe three, four hours and then in the last couple hours of the day, because we were on the vessel for the whole day, in the last couple hours, we were putting two bolts.
Q. Okay. And were all the tools that you used removed from the vessel at the end of the work?
A. The majority of the tools were, but a couple of tools did get left up top just because it was a small, little confined pass that you go through, so we left a Milwaukee Impact, which was mine, like a five-pound mallet that we're using with a pry bar to lift up the brackets that were placed already --
Q. Um-hum.
A. -- but -- and a vacuum, a vacuum and maybe an angle grinder that we used to dig into the holes that were damaged --
Q. Right.
A. -- and that's pretty much it.
Q. Okay. And what time did everyone leave the vessel?
A. I believe maybe 2:30, 2:50-ish, everybody kind of stops towards 3:00.
MR. FLAHERTY: Okay, all right. [redacted] do you have any additional questions?
BY MR. [redacted]
Q. And going back to the Impact and your Milwaukee tools and grinders, which ones were pneumatic, which ones were electrical,

and which ones were manual?
A. The only electrical one is the Milwaukee Impact, the air grinder was an air tool, which is -- should've been just thrown away because we had everything disconnected, we'll just roll it up and leave it there. I think that's it, that's the only thing that I know that --
Q. And the vacuum was electrical?
A. The vacuum was electrical, it was unplugged, it was off to the side, as well, we'll connect it when we need to pick up the dust from sanding and whatnot.
Q. How many guys were in your work group?
A. On the boat?
Q. Yeah, that particular -- that Friday.
A. It was just me and another guy.
Q. Nobody else came on the boat you remember seeing? (Indiscernible) all the work.
A. No, sir. The only people that I can say that were on the vessel was probably Steve, the carpenter, I think he was in the middle salon, I think they were working on the floor, if I'm not mistaken.
Q. Was he by himself or --
A. I do not recall. He might've been getting help from his other carpentry partner, Abraham. I know I recall seeing him, you know, through the window a couple times that I would go up, but I'm not entirely sure.

Q. When you left, was anybody left behind or were you one of the last ones to go?
A. I think I got off first just because what I had done was, I had to wait pretty much for it to dry, the caulking. Maybe the guys on the side were probably the last ones, I'm not entirely sure.
Q. As far as you're concerned, when you left there may have been people still on board?
A. I think so, maybe the carpenters
MR. [redacted] That's it for me.
MR. FLAHERTY: All right. Yeah, that's -- I'm fine. Thank you, sir, for your time.
MR. MOLINA: No problem.
MR. FLAHERTY: Unless you have something else to add?
MR. MOLINA: No. No, sir.
MR. FLAHERTY: Well, it's 10:27, this concludes the interview. Again, thank you for your time.
(Whereupon, at 10:27 a.m., the interview concluded.)

CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the attached proceeding before the

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD

IN THE MATTER OF:	FIRE ABOARD YACHT *FLAGSHIP* NEAR MIAMI, FLORIDA ON APRIL 28, 2024 Interview of Joel Molina
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.

Karen D. Martini
Transcriber