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: DORRIS LOPEZ, Site Supervisor/Security Guard
All American Security Services

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 D E X

ITEM	PAGE
Interview of Dorris Lopez:	
By Mr. [redacted]	4
By Mr. Flaherty	9
By Mr. [redacted]	14
By Mr. Flaherty	15

I N T E R V I E W

(12:17 p.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. This is an interview for the casualty involving the vessel *Flagship*. Right now the time is 12:17 local.

MR. [redacted]: My name is [redacted], [redacted], U.S. Coast Guard. I am the chief marine investigator for Coast Guard Sector Miami.

MR. FAMULARI: My name is David Famulari, F-a-m-u-l-a-r-i, and I am 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 RMK Merrill-Stevens shipyards.

MS. LOPEZ: My name is Dorris Lopez, L-o-p-e-z. I'm the site supervisor for the guard, security guards, so All American Security Services.

MR. FLAHERTY: Do I have your permission to record this interview?

MS. LOPEZ: Yes, I do.

MR. FLAHERTY: Thank you very much.

[redacted] if you could take it.

INTERVIEW OF DORRIS LOPEZ

BY MR. [redacted]:

Q. Okay, so we're going to go back to that Sunday but a little bit before then, I'm going to go a little bit before Sunday. Your

series of making rounds and seeing the vessel, did you ever notice anything strange, anything you want to talk about that, and then if there's nothing to discuss in that regard, then we can go straight into Sunday.

A. Okay, I never saw anything strange, you know, that I saw with the vessels, everything was fine at time the incident happened.

Q. All right. And then we understand that you were on watch that day, what time did you start your shift?

A. Seven o'clock.

Q. Seven o'clock in the morning?

A. Yes, sir.

Q. And what time was your shift supposed to end?

A. Three o'clock.

Q. How long have you been working at this particular post?

A. This particular post --

Q. Yes.

A. -- like two years, more or less.

Q. Okay.

A. Close to.

Q. Have you ever witnessed any other issues before, like other fires or anything at the facility?

A. Not at all, never. Never.

Q. So as far as you're concerned, this is the first experience --

A. That's correct.

Q. Can you tell us, you know, for where you was the first time you heard or smelled or saw something, where were you physically, what caught your attention and what actions you took afterwards?
A. I was in the gatehouse and as soon as I heard the explosion and I saw the smoke, I, you know, came back here in the back area where the boat was located and I saw the fire. Immediately, I took action, I called 9-1-1 and I contacted the RMK management and All American Security management, as well.
Q. You said you heard an explosion.
A. Yes, sir.
Q. If you had to describe it, what would it be like?
A. Extremely loud noise, like a bomb.
Q. Like a bomb. More louder than fireworks you ever heard?
A. More than usual, that's why I express myself in that way because as I say, it's the first time and what's out of the normal sound, so it was like a big explosion.
Q. Big explosion. Did you hear a single explosion, multiple explosions or just --
A. Just once.
Q. When you went and observed the smoke first, right?
A. Yes, sir.
Q. And as you saw flames, do you recall what area on the boat was in more flames in that --
A. Actually, was in the back of the boat.
Q. The stern of the vessel?

A. Yes.
Q. Okay. Did you hear anything like electrical or anything, you know, when things are burning, they start to --
A. I cannot recall that, sir.
Q. Any smell, anything that --
A. Well, honestly, I was not too close --
Q. Okay.
A. -- to smell exactly, you know, the smoke, but I swear it (indiscernible) --
Q. Yeah.
A. -- to take, you know, care of myself, as well.
Q. Of course, of course, of course. Did you (indiscernible)?
A. But I can smell the -- you know, the smoke.
Q. The smoke, right. Did it smell like plastic burning or wood or anything like that?
A. No --
(Crosstalk)
BY MR. [redacted]
Q. Gasoline burning?
A. I cannot tell you what it smelled like, I can't tell you. Like smoking.
Q. That's okay. Like, when you peeked (ph.), how long did you stick around to look, was that --
A. (Indiscernible).
Q. So you went to look and you left?

A. No.
Q. Did you stick around a little bit?
A. At the time I heard the explosion and I smelled the smoke, I went back and I stayed there and I called 9-1-1.
Q. Okay.
A. So I was on the phone all the time with 9-1-1, at the same time I used two mobile devices, so I contacted RMK management and All American Security management, so I was with the phone at the same time with everybody.
Q. Do you remember more or less what time that was?
A. Ten something, I cannot -- yeah. In that time frame.
Q. Okay. How fast the fire department show up?
A. Very quick, fast.
Q. Ten minutes, five minutes --
A. Very fast.
Q. -- three minutes?
A. I cannot tell you exactly because I was nervous at the same time and everything, taking control of everything, going back and forth to see the vessel, going up front to see, you know, the fire rescue team was arrived. I was looking everywhere, at the same time on the phone with everybody, so I can't tell you exactly.
Q. (Indiscernible).
A. Yes, I did. (Indiscernible), yes, sir.
Q. This is (indiscernible)?
A. Actually, I made the report, yes, sir. RMK management got

the report.
Q. The reason why some of those reports are not time stamped when it happened, that could help as well to establish a timeline.
A. Yes, sir.
Q. So we might ask you to e-mail or text us those pictures and whatever you have.
A. (Indiscernible).
MR. [redacted]: All right, I'm good.
MR. FLAHERTY: Thank you.
BY MR. FLAHERTY:
Q. So just to clarify, you were in the guard shack at the time when you heard the explosions.
A. Yes, sir.
Q. Were the windows or doors of the guard shack open?
A. Yes, sir.
Q. And were you facing towards the building or away from the building?
A. Toward the building, there are windows around the gatehouse and we have vision, you know, to see through the windows.
Q. So you were looking at the building at the time you heard the explosions, correct?
A. Not exactly at that second, but I heard the explosion and I took action immediately.
Q. So from that moment you heard the explosion, could you just describe, up until the time the fire department arrived, what you

did?
A. The fire department arrived very quick, sir.
Q. Yes. Okay, so from the -- you heard the explosion, just describe for us what you -- what the actions you did.
A. I immediately, when I heard the explosion, I respond. I saw the smoke, I immediately went back to the -- where the vessel was located, that's when I saw the fire, and I knew at that second, instantly, I call the 9-1-1 and report incident. Everything was so fast that I can't tell you exactly the time window, but it was, you know, one thing after another one, everything was taken care of, you know, really fast, sir, thank God.
Q. So when you went back there to -- the explosion occurred, you saw the smoke, what color was the smoke?
A. Dark colored, sir.
Q. Like black?
A. Dark gray, I'm not really sure, (indiscernible), dark gray.
Q. And how did you enter the building?
A. Oh, I was in the building, on my shift.
Q. I'm sorry, let me -- so were you in the boathouse -- I don't know where the guard shack is, so where were you located in reference to the boathouse?
A. Well, the gatehouse, sir, is located at the front part of the -- you know, the area, inside the building and the vessel is in the back area.
Q. Okay, so you're actually in the building when -- when you're

standing duty, right?
A. Yes, sir.
Q. Okay. So how did you proceed from where you were located when you heard the explosion and saw the smoke to the vessel?
A. I started walking and then I started to see what happened, if everything was, you know, under control, but unfortunately, I saw the fire, that's when I reported everything to 9-1-1.
Q. Okay. Was the sprinklers on at the time when you were looking at the vessel on fire?
A. I don't understand the question.
Q. There were sprinklers in the building.
A. No, sir.
Q. Okay. So the sprinklers hadn't turned on yet?
A. What's in the back, not in the building, in the back when the incident happened.
Q. Okay. When you looked at the boat when it was on fire, were the sprinklers operating at the time?
A. I cannot -- I can't tell you that, I don't know.
Q. Okay. No, that's fine, that's fine. It's what you remember.
A. I was a little far from the boat and I wasn't at good angle, you know, of vision from the whole area because it was full of fire, so I can't tell you yes or no. Fire and the smoke that, you know, blocked my vision, too, because it was really big smoke that covered the whole area when the boat, the vessel was, sir.
Q. Okay. Did you see fire on the vessel even though there was

heavy smoke?
A. Yes, sir, I did.
Q. All right. Where do you -- where would you describe that fire being?
A. I believe in the back area of the boat, sir.
Q. So do you know what level that was, like if you were looking at the boat, would it be the top level, in the bottom or in the middle?
A. So the distance that I was, sir, facing the boat was toward the (indiscernible) back area on top.
Q. And do you recall if the fire was growing in size while you were looking at it or was it kind of just -- just kind of maintaining its size?
A. Inside the boat, sir.
Q. It was inside the boat, was it growing?
A. Yes, sir.
Q. And was it growing at a very fast pace or a little slow, how would you describe that?
A. Well, under my knowledge I cannot describe that, sir, but I saw a big fire on the boat, that's all I can say.
Q. Okay. And the smoke was -- where was the smoke coming from on the vessel?
A. The same area where the fire was, sir.
Q. And was the smoke -- what parts of the vessel was the smoke coming out of?

A. The fire was located middle back, if I can say that from the angle was facing the boat.
Q. So the middle back?
A. Exactly, sir. It was too fast, that the rescue came too fast that I can't continue looking exactly at the detail what happened exactly on the boat.
Q. That's okay. No, just try to -- you try to recall. So how long did you stay in that area where the boat was and it was on fire?
A. Well, at the minute, at the time that the -- I saw the fire, I start taking picture and made a report, report things, the fire rescue came fast and when I went out front to open the gate, I went back, also, but they allow me to stay there.
Q. So have you looked at -- did you take any video at the time?
A. Yes, sir, when I --
(Audio malfunction.)
BY MR. FLAHERTY:
Q. And -- all right. You're able to provide that to the Coast Guard?
A. Yes, sir.
Q. That would be great. I'm trying to get an idea. So let's see. You were in the building, so you walked through the building to where the boats were and that's where you saw the fire and the smoke?
A. Yes, sir.

Q. All right. At the time when you were standing there looking at -- you entered the boat area, correct?
A. For (indiscernible), no, sir.
Q. At that time when you were in there, was the sprinklers operating?
A. I cannot recall that exactly. To be honest with you, I was a little nervous and I couldn't see all the detail surrounding me, sir. I just concentrate on the fire, call 9-1-1 and, you know, finish these and (indiscernible).
MR. FLAHERTY: All right, that's understandable. All right.
I'm fine, [redacted]
BY MR. [redacted]:
Q. I have a couple follow-ups. I know that there's a protocol for doing rounds.
A. Yes, sir.
Q. You have to do like tokens or, you know, walking around. From the time the incident happened, how much time were you back at the guard shack?
A. One hour before, I went back, around the boats.
Q. Were you almost due for your next rounds?
A. Yes.
MR. [redacted] So you almost do -- and just so you know, Mr. Flaherty, what I'm going to do is I'm going to take pictures of the point of view at the guard shack --
MR. FLAHERTY: Okay.

MR. [redacted]: -- and then I'll recreate where she walked to and where she actually had her angle of view from afar, I'll do that before she leaves.

MR. FLAHERTY: Great.

BY MR. [redacted]

Q. Large explosion.

A. Yes, sir.

Q. No more (indiscernible).

A. No more explosion (indiscernible), it was big explosion.

Q. Real big. When you made your rounds before everything --

A. Was calm.

Q. Calm. No smell --

(Crosstalk)

MS. LOPEZ: Nothing, nothing.

MR. [redacted]: Yeah, that's -- that's it. That's all I got.

BY MR. FLAHERTY:

Q. I just want to -- I know and I know this was a short interview for all the effort you did to come in here. I just wanted to double check. What kind of training did you have for this kind of situation?

A. Well, actually, I have the license, sir, we're trained for every situation. This is my first time that I saw that incident, but I'm well trained, sir, for everything, trouble.

Q. And how long have you been a guard?

A. Three years.

Q. And how long have you been a guard at this facility?
A. Three years, around that time, but it's not a full three years.
Q. And what's your normal rotation? Your duty cycle.
A. Every hour, sir.
Q. I understand that, but how long is your -- how long are you a guard there, what's your -- what's your work schedule?
A. From 7:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m., sir.
Q. And is that every -- what days do you work, is there -- is it consistent?
A. Well, it's not consistent, sir. Usually --
Q. Go ahead.
A. -- we can -- if I have to work weekdays, I do as well, sir.
Q. Okay. Is there anything you would like to add that we didn't ask you about?
A. I believe, sir, everything was covered in the conversation.
Q. So just to -- I'm looking at the -- the facility on Google satellite. Where in the building is the -- where do you stand your station?
A. At the front of the area, sir.
Q. And do you have -- at the -- at your station, do you have any camera feeds?
A. No, sir.
Q. Do you have any alarms for like smoke or fire? In the guard shack, is there --

A. (Indiscernible), for me inside the -- inside the gatehouse --
Q. Yeah.
A. -- no, sir.
Q. No, sir?
A. No.

MR. FLAHERTY: Okay. All right, well, again, thank you for your time, but that's all the questions I have.

MS. LOPEZ: Thank you, sir, it's been a pleasure to serve you.

MR. FLAHERTY: [redacted] do you have anything else you want to add?

MR. [redacted] No, like I said, I'm going to have her retrace her steps and I'll take pictures of that and that will be it. Thank you for (indiscernible).

MR. FLAHERTY: Yeah, that would be very helpful, thanks for doing that. All right, so this concludes the interview, local time is 12:37.

(Whereupon, at 12:37 p.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 Dorris Lopez
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