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: DARREN HENN, Yacht Broker/Representative
DMH Yachts

via telephone

Wednesday,
May 1, 2024

APPEARANCES:

DAVID FLAHERTY, Marine Accident Investigator
National Transportation Safety Board

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

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I N T E R V I E W

(2:39 p.m.)

MR. FLAHERTY: Let's see. Today is May 1st, 2024, the time is 14:39. My name is David Flaherty, last name is spelled F-l-a-h-e-r-t-y. I'm the Investigator-in-Charge for the *Flagship* fire.

[redacted], if you could please introduce yourself.

MR. [redacted]: Yes, my name is [redacted] I am the Chief, Investigations Division for Coast Guard Sector Miami.

MR. FLAHERTY: And sir, if you could introduce yourself.

MR. HENN: Hi, my name is Darren Henn, surname is H-e-n-n, and I am the captain/owner's representative for *Flagship*.

MR. FLAHERTY: And sir, do I have your permission to record this interview?

MR. HENN: Yes, sir.

MR. FLAHERTY: All right, thank you very much. Just a little bit of background. The Coast Guard -- excuse me, the NTSB is investigating this because the vessel fire met and exceeded our limit of $500,000.

MR. HENN: Um-hum.

MR. FLAHERTY: Fortunately, there was no fatalities or injuries related to this. The NTS --

MR. HENN: Yeah --

(Crosstalk)

MR. FLAHERTY: Yeah.

MR. HENN: Yeah.

MR. FLAHERTY: The NTSB's primary goal is safety, we're not a law enforcement body, we're just looking to see if we can identify the potential cause or causes of this casualty.

MR. HENN: Okay.

INTERVIEW OF DARREN HENN

BY MR. FLAHERTY:

Q. So if you could, could you let us -- tell us a little bit about yourself, your background, what your position is and what it entails?

A. Sure thing. So I'm originally South African, I am staying and living in the U.S. on a green card currently and I have been in the U.S. for about four years now. Over that time I've been working on a shore-based service department and as a yacht broker selling yachts. Prior to that, I was 13 years as a professional captain in charter and private industry, working on multiple different vessels ranging from 40 feet all the way up to 201 foot.

Q. All right. And --

A. Yeah. Strong engineering background, as well.

Q. Oh, very good. So what is your position as it relates to the *Flagship*?

A. The *Flagship*, I was as acting project manager overseeing any of the -- the major points that were being done on board the vessel during the time of being in the yard and as well, I was

acting captain on board during the time. The -- yeah, I think I'm the only person that's ever driven the vessel on the chart (ph.), on the chart time (ph.) and the chart-glass (ph.).

Q. Okay. And let's see. So how knowledgeable are you of the vessel construction and the vessel's engineering and lifesaving/fire protection systems?

A. Pretty knowledgeable on it. I was at the factory last year, July, if I'm not mistaken, and I spent two weeks at the factory in Istanbul, Turkey, a division at facility, and I oversaw a portion of the boat at that point, vessel was delivered, and there was another gentleman which was at the factory for delivery and he was the one that deferred the final delivery acceptance or non-acceptance of the vessel before it was shipped across.

Once it arrived here in the U.S., I was basically overseeing, keeping the vessel clean, whatever systems were not working, I recorded all of those documentation and then at the point when VisionF, the facility, decided to work with RMK after they did quotations through multiple different agencies, they decided on moving forward with RMK and at that point, RMK and VisionF signed an agreement outside of our -- outside of our -- outside of the vessel and the owner, Mr. Sacks, for all work to be done as warranty work in RMK Merrill-Stevens.

Q. All right. So if I could -- if I understand correctly, the vessel was actually built in Turkey?

A. Yes, sir.

Q. Okay.
A. It's in Istanbul, Turkey.
Q. All right. And that includes all the engineering systems and everything else on board?
A. Yes, sir.
Q. All right. And when it was going to be sold, it was just -- was it going to be -- it was going to be a U.S. flag yacht, essentially, correct?
A. Yes, sir.
MR. FLAHERTY: Okay.
[redacted] do you have any questions before we discuss the casualty part?
MR. [redacted]: No, I'm good so far. Thank you.
MR. FLAHERTY: All right.
BY MR. FLAHERTY:
Q. All right, sir, if you don't mind, if you could -- could you let us know from the -- if you could just describe in your own words, were you on scene at the time of the fire at all?
A. So I was at breakfast with my wife Sunday morning up in Coconut Creek where my residence is, I got the phone call with me, I'm looking at my phone right now, at what time I received the call. I received the call -- no, that's not that one, I got to go further back. At 11:05 a.m. I received a call from Ozgur Deli, he is the -- basically the GM for RMK and was overseeing the work being done.

Q. Okay. And if you could take it from there, maybe --
A. Sure. Play by play?
Q. -- just describe -- yeah. Just describe --
A. Okay.
Q. -- in your words what you saw and when did you arrive, what did you see, what was happening?
A. Okay. So I got the call at 11:05, my wife accompanied me, we jumped into our truck, drove down 95, arrived to just outside of the facility with obviously fire trucks and multiple police presence. We couldn't get too close to it, so I parked the vehicle on the side of the road, put the hazards on, wrote some notes, put it on the dash saying that I was captain on board the vessel that was on fire --
A. Um-hum.
Q. -- came down to the vessel, went through the front gate at 12:07, if I'm not mistaken, and at that point I introduced myself to the lieutenant that was -- the chief lieutenant that was at the time, the chief fire lady for -- sorry, I can't remember any of their names, I do apologize about that, and I introduced myself and then to two of the captains on the team, I introduced myself.

I gave them a walk-through on board, what was on board the vessel, lithium batteries, the amount of fuel that was on board, and they asked me a few questions at that point, which I answered. During that time, they had already got a lot of the fire under control, they started to tow the vessel outside of the shed --

Q. Um-hum.
A. -- so let me look at the time and date on the photos, of the first photo that I took. The first photo was at 12:06, I was talking to the lieutenant and at 12:19, the boat was getting pushed up against the outside T-berth (ph.).
Q. Okay.
A. There was still smoldering on board the -- on board, but there was no active flames, but the firefighters continued to -- to spray the vessel down and do boundary cooling. I'm just actively going through the photos and videos right now that I took.

At 12:30, this is the first image that I have from the -- off of the vessel, then I need to come around, they were asking questions about situations and where items were located. At this point, I offered my information over to the lieutenant, the vessel was on the dock and it looks like they had already started with foam, the foam firefighting, the expansion foam.
Q. Um-hum.
A. Moving on from there, at this point I had already informed them that the vessel will most likely be sinking due to the pitch of the vessel, number one, and number two, the -- I was monitoring the back steps that were in the water and I could see that the vessel was actively dropping down on these -- on these points, so I informed them of that. At that point, they had -- at 12:36 it looks like they already had lines on board for draining the

water --
Q. Um-hum.
A. -- out of the vessel. Let me carry on going through them. And then at 12:42, there was evidence of an additional fire that was starting in the aft cabin. Once they had evaluated this, they asked me what was easiest access into it, which I described for them to -- that there is openings, windows on the side of the vessel, as well as there's a staircase.

They asked if they could break the window, I said whatever they need to do, so they proceeded to break out the port aft, the port aft window on the side of the vessel, which they were spraying boundary cooling and then expansion foam into this. And then at that point, yeah, the vessel, that stopped burning. At 12:57, they -- it looks like they stopped spraying at 12:57. Oh, no, 1:21, sorry, was when they stopped spraying expansion foam on the vessel.
Q. Okay.
A. And by this point the vessel was, I would probably say about 35 to 40 percent beneath the water, the entire cockpit and a large portion of the salon was already in the water --
Q. All right.
A. -- as well as the superstructure touched the -- touched the water.
Q. Okay.
A. And once this happened, the vessel started sinking quite

considerably faster.
Q. All right.
A. Yeah. And then the last picture I have of the vessel actively being about as far down as she's going to go is about 1:50 p.m. was when she was down.
Q. All right. During that time period that you were there, did you visually or see and/or hear any kinds of explosions or venting or anything?
A. No, sir. No, nothing, nothing along those lines. When I was present (indiscernible) from before, there was -- there was some explosions from this side of the fire, but that is from the security guard who informed us of that.
Q. Okay. So did the vessel, while it was at the yard, did it have any type of fire or smoke detection system?
A. Yes, it had smoke detectors in each of the rooms that was into a central -- a central alarm system, so each of the rooms was -- each of the rooms had its own fire alarm, including the engine rooms --
Q. Um-hum.
A. -- and it came up to a central point which was connected to the horn of the vessel and then in the engine rooms there was automatic suppression, it wasn't -- it wasn't a -- like an automated one, it was one of the old school with thermostats on it, when the thermostat breaks, it releases.
Q. Right.

A. Yeah, I think I have an image of it, I'll have to look back on my pictures, but yeah.
Q. All right, so there's an automatic thermal -- what was the agent for the engine rooms?
A. I cannot remember, I'm sorry, sir. I'll see if I can find an image of the tag on it.
Q. Okay. And for the smoke detection system, you said it went --
A. Um-hum.
Q. -- to a horn and that was on the vessel's bridge?
A. Yes, correct.
Q. And did the system have any kind of an external or wireless alarm, either like with the external visual or auto -- audible?
A. I do not believe so.
Q. All right.
A. Yeah, we -- the vessel, the vessel was -- we never really ran the vessel, the vessel was delivered in October of last year from Istanbul in time for the Fort Lauderdale boat show because the engines were non-functioning at the time and they were not commissioned. The vessel was towed from the cargo ship to the residential area, from the residential area to the -- to the boat show, from the boat show, towed back to the residential area and then after that it sat at the residential area for a short time before being delivered, towed down to RMK where they started beginning work on board the vessel. So there was major, major

systems that were not finished or commissioned on board.
Q. Okay, so as far you know, were the engines ever operated?
A. Yes, engines were operated, I'll have to look back at the date, but it was just before the -- just before the West Palm boat show, the Palm Beach boat show. The engines, we did a short sea trial just -- we got towed out of Miami River, we ran a short sea trial, then back in, everything was approved and then the vessel got -- we moved the vessel from Miami up to West Palm and then back via the Intracoastal at slow speed with an escort because we did not -- we weren't sure on the final usage of the engines and final engine hours were only about 14 hours on board.
Q. Okay. Is the vessel classed?
A. It is CE classification, but I cannot recall if it was A or B.
Q. Okay. And so outside of the engine rooms were there any other spaces that had fire protection/suppression systems?
A. No, sir.
Q. And do you have --
A. Besides for handheld fire extinguishers.
Q. Okay. Is there a fire control plan for the vessel?
A. At the time we had not drawn up a fire control plan for the vessel, we were requesting final drawings for the fire plan from VisionF, which we only received probably about four, four to eight days before the incident happened.
Q. That you received the plans or it was requested?

A. No, we received the plans, so it was drawings that we received and as of that point I was currently in China, I was busy looking at another shipyard, but the RMK shipyard received the same drawings. At that point and when I returned, I only came to the boat one day, on Thursday the -- sorry, let me just get the date for you, Thursday the 21st --

Q. Okay.

A. -- was the only day that I came back onto the vessel from arriving in -- arriving back from China and I didn't have time to draw up the final fire plan.

Q. Okay, so just to -- are there --

(Crosstalk)

BY MR. FLAHERTY:

Q. Are there approved fire plans or they're still in the works?

A. Still in the works.

Q. Okay. Is there anything you have available that you could share with myself and the Coast Guard?

A. I can send over the drawings that we received from the shipyard.

Q. Okay. That might be helpful. Also --

A. Yeah.

Q. -- were there -- this is a relatively -- well, it is, a very new vessel prior to the fire, did it have --

A. Yeah.

Q. -- lithium ion batteries on board?

A. Yes, sir. There was four banks in total, there was three 48-volt banks, out of those three 48-volt banks, there was 10 batteries, eight batteries, and six batteries spread out between Bank 1, Bank 2, and Bank 3, and then there was two batteries was the 24 volts on board.
Q. All right. And where were they located on the vessel?
A. The 48 volts was beneath the floor in the salon, the 24 volts was beneath the cockpit floor.
Q. Okay, so one was -- let's see, I'm looking at --
A. Yeah, the 48 volt was three, three battery banks, which was under the salon, yeah.
Q. When you say the salon, is that on the main deck?
A. Yes, sir. Main deck where the kitchen and living -- the -- yeah, the eating area and table was.
Q. Okay. And then for the --
A. The bridge deck, between the two, yeah.
Q. And the other battery bank, was that on the flybridge or someplace else?
A. No, so it was the off-cockpit, so basically, as you come onto the vessel there is the sugar scoop, the stairs leading up --
Q. Yeah.
A. -- and then there is a flat platform that's the cockpit and then before you walk through the doors into the salon, it was underneath the floor there.
Q. On the port side?

A. Central.
Q. Central, okay. I'm just trying to look at this diagram, it has a few things in there --
A. No, you're fine.
Q. Okay. And did those battery banks, were they -- they had venting and environmental control?
A. I am not aware if they -- there was venting involved, yes. For the environmental control, I'm not sure, sir.
Q. And do you know, what was the charge of the batteries at the time, were they -- had they been fully charged yet or they just had a maintaining charge?
A. So the batteries, there was -- there was times where the batteries have been at zero voltage and they were -- they were being maintained at quite a low voltage --
Q. Um-hum.
A. -- and so the system was finally commissioned and set up.
Q. And when was it finally commissioned?
A. It had not been.
Q. Oh, okay, so -- so they never really had been fully charged?
A. There would be a time that they were fully charged, yes, but they were currently not fully charged during this event.
Q. Prior to the fire, at fire, at time of fire.
A. Yeah.
Q. Who are the manufacturers of the batteries, do you know?
A. MG, which is -- I think it's a branch of Victron Energy, but

all of the inverters and electrical charging was either MG or Victron Energy, it's basically the same company.
Q. Okay. With any of the systems -- I know like the engines are -- they didn't work and then they were put into operation but going through like the propulsion system, the electrical system, the -- any other systems on board, were there any problems prior to the fire that were noted?
A. Yes, so there was issues that were noted, the -- I presented a list of items to the RMK and to VisionF, they then proceeded to go through that list, they created their own work list which I requested to see what work was to be done on board the vessel, which VisionF in Turkey did not want me to see the list of jobs that were being done, so that's why I would come day to day to see physically what jobs were being completed on board.
Q. Okay. Let's see. When you were on board prior to the fire, you were walking around, did you ever --
A. Sorry, you broke up a second there.
Q. Oh, it's okay. Prior to the fire, any time you were walking around on board the vessel, did you ever catch a scent of --
A. No.
Q. Okay, something burning?
A. No electrical scents, no burning of any sort.
Q. And what was the last day that you're aware of that people were on board working on the ship?
A. They were working on the solar panels on the flybridge, they

were not physically removing any of the wiring for the solar panels, but what they were doing was they were taking the solar panels off of the bracket and the brackets that they had installed on the flybridge was leaking through each of the points, so they had removed the top of the solar panels off, removed the screws, applied caulking and then reset the bracket where it seats, where it's seated on, and then reinstalled the solar panels.

You can currently see, on images that I sent to [redacted] you can currently see that they were still working on that because there are still solar panels that are opened on each side and there was a vacuum cleaner and some tools left on the flybridge.

Q. All right.

A. On top of the flybridge, the mini (ph.) top.

Q. Okay. Outside of the vessel being on shore power, was there anything --

A. Um-hum.

Q. -- else being charged or operated that you're aware of?

A. No, sir. So the last that I saw on board the vessel, we had isolated all powers, I had turned off the main breaker in the -- the main breaker in the portside control as you go into the salon, which basically isolated all inversion from moving to any of the refrigerator, freezers, ice machines, any of those items over there, that did not involve 48-volt systems or 24-volt systems, 24 would be the lights on board --

Q. Um-hum.

A. -- and 48-volt systems would actually only be the inversion, so -- yeah.
Q. All right. Did you turn any breakers off on the land side?
A. No, sir, I did not. When I arrived to the scene, they had already disconnected the shore power and the first time I saw the shore power was when I -- I can't remember the time of it, but as I stated earlier in the conversation, is when they pushed the vessel alongside the dock and they allowed me access to the back area, I noted that the shore power cable had been unplugged from shore and thrown onto the vessel in an organized coil.
Q. All right. So what do you think -- was that done by the fire department or by someone else, do you think?
A. No idea.
Q. All right.
A. No idea. Probably the fire department, I'm not sure, yeah.
Q. So it essentially was not connected to shore power, from what you saw.
A. No.
Q. Okay, all right.
A. I believe it was connected prior to the fire.
MR. FLAHERTY: Okay, all right. Do you have any -- oh, [redacted] do you have anything to add?
BY MR. [redacted]
Q. The only thing I want to at some point touch on is those warranty items that RMK was slated to repair. Obviously --

A. Um-hum.
Q. -- one you mentioned is the solar power leaks. Is there any other items that were on that work list that were either pending or already completed?
A. Oh, that's -- I think that you guys are going to have ask RMK for that final list. There was still on my side, there was quite a few issues that were still pending. Like I stated earlier in the conversation, they did not want to -- VisionF did not want to disclose any of the progress or what the next steps were with myself or with Mr. Sacks.
Q. Okay, other than cosmetics, right, because typically a lot of, you know, blue tape items, right, you go walk around --
A. Um-hum.
Q. -- (indiscernible) --
A. Yeah.
Q. -- do you know if any major systems, to include --
A. Yes, sir.
Q. -- this Victron Energy systems or any other --
A. Yes.
Q. -- major systems for the vessel?
A. Yes, sir. So there was -- working from the engine rooms up, the water makers had never been commissioned, so they had been installed but never commissioned, there was 48-volt charging from the altimeters on the main engines that were never installed or commissioned, the air conditioning on board the vessel had never

been final commissioned and there was issues with the chillers on board, so the air conditioning was not running during that time or for previous weeks before that. There was issues with -- fundamental issues with the electronics on board from the Victron system to charging, as well, that's why the vessel was never charged up completely. There was an assessor that came from Vision -- sorry, from VisionF and from RMK, they sent an assessor over and an electrician over from Turkey and he was doing electrical work on board the vessel. Once again, I was not disclosed on what the work was or the percentage of the work completion was.

MR. FLAHERTY: Okay.

MR. [redacted]: Thank you.

MR. HENN: No, no problem. There was leaks in the -- there was a leak going into the salon, but that was an extremely minor leak and only -- only when saturated when the boat was being washed, was leaking, there was a lot of blue take -- blue tape cosmetics, sorry, and then some very minor cosmetic items, but nothing, nothing serious.

BY MR. FLAHERTY:

Q. So sir --

A. Yes, sir.

Q. -- just from your, you know, your experience with the vessel and what was going on --

A. Um-hum.

Q. -- do you have any thoughts or -- on what may have occurred to have caused the fire?
A. Honestly, I've been trying to wrack my brain on it and I have no idea. I was hoping that once the boat is visible and had started floating and they've cleared the water out of it, that I would be able to see what -- where, where and what happened, but as of now, no, sir, I do not, I have no idea what would've been the cause for it or how it started.
Q. Okay.
A. Yeah, I do apologize for that, yeah.
Q. That's all right. What's your -- what's the status of the boat, do you know, on salvage?
A. I'm sitting right next to it, so I've been here for the last few days now, they have floated the stern of the vessel, then they finally released it from the suction, from the mud, from being sunk, so the stern of the vessel is currently off the ground, but the vessel is -- majority is still in the water.
Q. All right. After the vessels are floated, do you have any idea of what the status is, what -- where they're going to take it --
A. Yeah.
Q. -- or any of that stuff?
A. So yeah, I spoke to -- I spoke to the salvage crew, it will be going on the same Miami River, it's going to be moving, they said about a half a mile up the river and there will be -- the

vessel will be kept at a yard. Another gentleman said that they will mostly be wrapping the vessel until a stage when all of the assessors and investigators have all been informed and collected and they will unwrap the vessel and open the scene, but no, no idea of exact location or the time frame for that.

Q. Okay, all right. Is there anything else you'd like to add concerning this incident?

A. No, just I'm very, very, very glad that nobody was hurt and there was no major other damage to -- to anything. RMK has been and continues to be very helpful in all aspects and very respectful environmentally, as well as with any help that's needed, they are very accommodating on that point and the team up here are very good and I'm very glad that the fire suppression system, the sprinklers worked --

Q. Um-hum.

A. -- because that saved -- that saved additional vessels, as well as the facility, so I was very happy about that.

Q. Yeah.

A. And no -- nobody was injured, nobody was hurt, no loss of life, no firefighters were injured, so that's the most important part of my perspective.

MR. FLAHERTY: Yes. [redacted] do you have anything else you'd like to add?

MR. [redacted] No, I'm good. Thank you so much for your time, we appreciate it and actually, you being on scene, having

corporate knowledge, right, on the vessels, it's definitely --

MR. HENN: Um-hum.

MR. [redacted] -- key to this investigation, so we might be picking your brain more as we go along.

MR. HENN: Not a problem, guys, I'm very -- I'm very happy to help. I'm very happy to help in any way, I've got nothing to hide, so I'm -- if you guys have any questions or anything, feel free to ask me, I'll try and look back to see if I can get any images of the suppression system in the engine room and I'll send that over to you, [redacted]

MR. FLAHERTY: Yeah. Also, if you have any pictures of the batteries, that would be helpful, too.

MR. HENN: Yeah, yeah. I can -- I can go back, there should be -- I've done quite a bit of photos and stuff on board, so I'll go through my phone and I'll send over any information that I have.

MR. [redacted] Are they like -- like baby blue in color?

MR. HENN: Yeah, yeah, the baby blue MG lithium batteries.

MR. [redacted] Okay, yeah, I'm on their website right now, I'm taking a look at their --

MR. HENN: Yeah.

MR. [redacted] Thank you.

MR. FLAHERTY: All right, well --

MR. HENN: Oh, no problem at all. For the Victron systems, I know that there was three Skylla chargers and then there was two

or three Quattros, which is the inversion/chargers, as well, on board.

MR. FLAHERTY: Okay.

MR. HENN: Including smaller chargers and those kind of things, but --

MR. FLAHERTY: All right. Well, sir, with that, it's 15:14 on May 1st, 2024, this concludes the interview. Thank you very much for your time.

(Whereupon, at 3:14 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 Darren Henn
ACCIDENT NO.:	DCA24FM035
PLACE:	via telephone
DATE:	May 1, 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