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: OZGUR DELI, Refits and Projects Manager
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

(9:15 a.m.)

MR. FLAHERTY: My name is David Flaherty, I'm the Investigator-in-Charge for the *Flagship* casualty. Right now it is 9:15. My last name is spelled F-l-a-h-e-r-t-y.

[redacted]

MR. [redacted]: Yeah, my name is [redacted], [redacted], I'm with the United States Coast Guard. I am the chief marine investigator for Coast Guard Sector Miami.

MR. FAMULARI: My name is 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 am the chief financial officer of RMK Merrill-Stevens shipyards.

MR. DELI: My name is Ozgur Deli, D-e-l-i. I am a naval architect and marine engineer working as refits and projects manager for RMK Merrill-Stevens shipyards.

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

MR. DELI: Oh, sure. Yes.

MR. FLAHERTY: Thank you.

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

INTERVIEW OF OZGUR DELI

BY MR. [redacted]:

Q. All right, so we want to go back to that Sunday, how did you hear about the incident and if you responded, how long did it take

you to get to the incident and what did you see as soon as you arrived?

A. Well, first I received a phone call from Victor Iglesias and he called me, he said there's a fire going on and he received a call from our security officer, he doesn't know the scale and -- but he's on the way to shipyard and less than a minute after, our PM, Avis Torres, he give me a call and he say exactly same thing except there's a fire on the shipyard, he got a call from the security, and then I immediately change and start driving to shipyard and it took about half an hour after I received the call and it was early, 1100 that I arrive shipyard. I think I am the third person that arrive shipyard after Victor and right after our CEO.

Q. And what did you observe?

A. Well, when I tried to, I mean, enter the shipyard, there were also firefighters and one of the -- and I introduced myself, I said I'm holding a management position in the shipyard and they asked me do you know the boat and what are we fighting against and I was maybe the first person giving information that this is an electric hybrid boat with diesel propulsion, so you are fighting something similar to an EV fire, that's what I mentioned.

Q. Can you tell us a little bit about the vessel as it sat in the yard prior to the incident, what is your knowledge of the vessel, the work, the scope of work that was being done? I understand that Friday was the last day of work, tell us about the

scope and known issues that you know of or were having on board the vessel.

A. Well, the vessel came here for some list of repairs, this covers electrical, mechanical, interior and painting, any kind of system functioning, there is a long list of work needs to be done, but the discussions with the builders and the owner's representative was still going on and meanwhile we were only doing some interior work in saloon, like the swollen (ph.) floors, warped cupboard doors, kind of details and fixing the solar panels racks on the roof, roof deck.

Q. Can we discuss a little bit about the solar panel?

A. Oh, sure.

Q. Yeah, give us the specific on that.

A. Well, these solar panels, they were attached to some other (indiscernible), it's through the profiles, which was holding them on the position, but there were some leaks and they were installed by self-cutting screws directly into aluminum and that was not the right approach and they were leaking, so nothing to solar panels, but they are fixing points which are those, like, the channels, the aluminum frame channels, we were fixing them with aluminum bolts by applying some silicone on the repairs, nothing to solar panels, but they are fix points.

Q. And before you had your work crew deal with that particular incident, what protocols were done to ensure that, you know, nothing was still connected by, you know, feeds to the battery, et

cetera?
A. Well, those solar panels are connected with a switch or jack, which is already protected and has kind of the (indiscernible) insulation. They were all removed, rolled, secured on the site and the solar panels were on one side of the top deck and they were not connected to the battery chargers. Some of them, on one side, installed back, but I'm not sure whether they are reconnected or not. Hopefully, they should be connected because that type of connection done in the end when everything is ready.
Q. Okay. How familiar are you with that charging system on the vessel?
A. Not really, because there was a lot of unknown about the boat and we were waiting for explanation, direction from the manufacturer.
Q. So did you guys have any kind of specific instructions or user guides or anything in relation to how to properly secure or isolate the system or --
A. Well --
Q. -- before you started working on it?
A. Well, anything we do, we were getting permission from the manufacturer.
MR. [redacted] That's it for me for right now.
BY MR. FLAHERTY:
Q. Sir, just to follow up on the work that was being done, do you have or does the shipyard have a list of work that was both

done on the vessel and was planned to be done on the vessel while it was there?
A. We do.
Q. Okay. If you could provide that so I have an idea of what kind of work was being done, that would be very helpful.
A. I will do, sir.
Q. Thank you. So the batteries, the lithium ion batteries, was any work done around those batteries prior to Sunday?
A. No.
Q. Are you aware of any issues with the lithium ion batteries prior to Sunday?
A. No.
Q. All right. Let's see. With the leaks, how were the leaks discovered, do you know?
A. Well, water was coming down from the overhead deck paneling. They were just small drops. Plus, when the boat was on the boat show, when they first move it, because all those solar panels are installed into a recess like a tube, not seen from outside --
Q. Um-hum.
A. -- so they filled with water and it just stuck flowing down from the rooftop deck, so the captain figured out the drains are not working and because there was some water on the deck and there was some drips coming down through the roof panels, that's how it was coming up (indiscernible).
Q. Okay. And that was on the salon deck, not the main deck?

A. That's the sundeck, the very top of the boat.
Q. Okay. And that water, are you aware if that water went further down into the vessel that leaked or was it just on that deck?
A. It was just on that deck.
Q. Okay. I don't have the plans in front of me, if I remember correctly, the lithium ion batteries are -- there are some on the main deck, there's none on that sundeck, correct?
A. Correct, they are below the main deck, so there's main deck, there's an upper deck or sundeck, and then the solar panels are on the top deck.
Q. Okay. Were there any electrical issues with the vessel outside of the solar panels having the leak that were noticed prior to the fire on Sunday?
A. Well, the electrical system of the boat is designed to be a smart system, but it was not functioning at all.
Q. Could you elaborate on why it wasn't functioning?
A. Well, as I tell, like this is designed as a smart system and everything else on the boat except the main propulsion designed to use some battery banks for some different purposes and multiple battery packs for multiple purposes, designed and run and control depending on the consumption, but as smart automation system and that was not done properly or fully or correctly for a reason that was not functioning. It was the reason the boat was here and that was also on our work list.

Q. Okay. And so when you say it wasn't functioning, could you just provide more detail on what and -- what wasn't functioning?
A. Normally, to run any services on the boat, you need a power and the source of the power is battery, so depending on the battery conditions and most of the time they're all flat, any plug you plug your device is not working, air condition is not working, and if the battery's flat, the pumps are not working and it can be fuel pump, the bilge pump or any kind of services like your fresh water pump, they are not working when the batteries are flat.
Q. Okay, so the lithium ion batteries at the time had no charge on?
A. I'm not sure about that information.
Q. When the vessel got under way for the boat show, was it under its own power?
A. Yes.
Q. Okay. Were there problems with -- and how -- do you know how -- how long ago was the boat show?
A. I think it was in late March.
Q. Okay. So from the boat show up until the time of the fire, the vessel was at the shipyard, correct?
A. Correct.
Q. Okay. What work was done, was any work done to correct the electrical issues prior to the fire?
A. No.
Q. And so when you talk about the smart system, it's essentially

a computer system, correct?
A. That's correct, and automation.
Q. All right. And so was it more on the computer side or was it an automation problem?
A. Well, I'm not really sure about the terminology, but there's a burning (ph.) control system run by a burning screen and whatever the program inside, like touch screen like a smart phone, it's manual controls or inside some (indiscernible) controls everything, like the charge, the consumption, which banks needs to be charged when, in what condition, and then you run a system which the power source will be used, that can be one or combination of different sources like the solar panels, the shore or generator or the battery banks, or one of the battery banks.
Q. Okay. And let's see. Was the shore power at the time providing electricity into the smart system?
A. Yes.
Q. And what was -- was the smart system monitoring or managing any systems at the time or was it down?
A. Well, we cannot know that.
Q. So the computer system, you weren't sure if it was operating or not?
A. I didn't check it.
Q. Oh, okay. All right. Prior to the fire, were there any issues with any kind of overheating or -- of any of the systems?
A. Well, I've only been on board in a couple of days before the

incident, I mean, maybe early the week, over the weekend or the week I've been on board to check how the work is going on, but nothing related to automation or electrical system, I just like check the flooring, like the floor laminates on the saloon and also speak with the guys how the mechanic work on the sundeck was going on to fix the solar panel attachments.

MR. FLAHERTY: Okay. Let's see. [redacted], I think that's all the questions I have for now.

BY MR. [redacted]:

Q. Yeah, I think I just have a quick follow-up, is we were told that the batteries need at least 40 percent for the system to recognize that they had batteries. At some time, to your knowledge, did that ever -- did you have to do anything to get the batteries at least at 40 percent?

A. Yes, the manufacturer recommended us to use an external battery charger to use like to charge the batteries, otherwise the boat turns into at that floating weight. So none of the bilge pumps or the safety of the boat will not be working.

Q. And am I to surmise that that external battery charger is on the boat right now?

A. Yes, most probably, most probably. I can't say it, but most probably.

Q. And that was being fed from shore power?

A. That's correct. But not the main shore power. When we need to charge it, they have an additional external cable, extension

cable, to charge differently than the main shore connection line.
Q. I understand.
A. Yes.
Q. So as needed, the battery charger was used?
A. That's correct.
Q. Okay.
A. Yeah.
Q. And this was a marine grade battery charger, do you remember what kind of battery charger it was?
A. Not really. We have to check the specifications. There were two battery chargers, by the way, for that purpose, for 48- and 24- volt banks. And normally -- I mean, they use two different extension cables to run two different battery chargers and one of them, as far as I remember, was always on to charge the 24-volt battery banks, the other one was as needed.
BY MR. FLAHERTY:
Q. All right. And the -- excuse me. The 24-volt battery banks, where were -- where was that located?
A. They are at the aft, below the aft main deck of the vessel.
Q. Okay. And the battery bank that's located on the main, it's located on the main deck, correct, the other one?
A. Below the main deck, correct.
Q. Below the main deck.
A. They were both below the main deck, basically.
Q. When you say below the main deck, you're not saying the next

deck down, you're saying it's integral with the main deck level?
A. When I say below the main deck, it means, you know, like the hull, second time around, like the raised hull, between the hulls, and the area, the bilge, and then the main deck, so it was between the main deck and the hull.
Q. Okay. Let's see. Did those -- are you aware if those battery banks required constant ventilation?
A. I don't know, sir. It's not my knowledge, maybe it's more of our electrical engineer's knowledge.
MR. FLAHERTY: Okay.
BY MR. [redacted]:
Q. At any time did you guys here, as a shipyard, communicated with the maker of the -- of the system or was it always through the shipbuilder?
A. Always through shipbuilder.
Q. Never directly?
A. No. Because it's their boat, their design. Given like our team's experience, we prefer not to do anything by our knowledge and experience without their approval, because it's a new system boat, just like buying an expensive electronic car that you cannot fix like old mechanical cars, same kind of stuff.
Q. Were most of the communications over the phone, e-mail?
A. Well, mainly by phone and using WhatsApp because the manufacturer is in Turkey and we are native Turkish speakers, it was easier for communication, I mean, we're using Facetime through

WhatsApp.

Q. By any chance, did you supply them with any images as to this is the way we set up the chargers, this is what the panel is doing, anything like that that we can get?

A. There are some folders, I can archive them and share with you.

MR. [redacted] Okay, thank you. That's it for me.

BY MR. FLAHERTY:

Q. Are you aware of, at any time after the -- oh, just -- when did the vessel arrive at the shipyard?

A. The 19th of January, first time arrived to the shipyard.

Q. All right. From that point up until prior to the fire, were any of the lithium ion battery banks opened up and maybe moved or examined or anything like that?

A. No.

MR. FLAHERTY: All right. All right, that's all the questions I have.

[redacted], do you have any questions?

MR. [redacted]: No. No, sir. Thank you.

BY MR. FLAHERTY:

Q. Sir, just something I ask sometimes with the interviews, especially people who are familiar with the vessel involved and I'm just --

A. Yes.

Q. -- asking you to speculate, but do you have any ideas of what

may have caused the fire?
A. Well, I cannot guess what might cause the fire, but I'm maybe the first technical person who arrived on site during the fire and I seen like, while the firefighters are fighting with the incident, they asked me like what are we fighting against and I seen that they were a little like stressing to finish the fire and I told them this is an electric hybrid boat and then they say well, that would make sense, kind of like really, and they changing their watering strategy into chemical foams and the smell and everything there and the fire, like the duration and everything, it just gave me idea of the battery.
Q. Okay. All right. And you're basing it on basically how the fire was and the smells and stuff that you noticed?
A. My observation during the fire.
Q. Okay. All right. Is there anything else you would like to add?
A. Not in this stage.
MR. FLAHERTY: Okay. All right. Well, it's 9:37 a.m. and this concludes the interview. Thank you very much for your time.
MR. DELI: You're welcome, sir. Thank you.
(Whereupon, at 9:37 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 Ozgur Deli
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