National Transportation Safety Board

Washington, D.C. 20594
Office of Marine Safety

Interview Summary

Meeting with: Mr. Kyle Bingham
Date/time: June 25, 2023
Location: St. John's, Newfoundland
Interviewed by: Mr. Marcel L. Muise, NSTB; LT [redacted], USCG; LCDR [redacted], USCG
In attendance: Ms. Deborah L. J. Hutchings and Ms. Jane Shvets (counsel for OceanGate)
Case: DCA23FM036

OVERVIEW

I met with Mr. Kyle Bingham at 0930 at the Delta Hotel in St. John's, Newfoundland. Mr. Bingham was an Expedition Manager with OceanGate. He was also the Mission Director on the *Titan*'s accident voyage. LCDR [redacted] and LT [redacted] of the U.S. Coast Guard's Marine Board of Investigation participated in the interview with LT [redacted] leading.

Unless specifically delineated by quotes, the text that follows is not a verbatim record of the conversation. It has been developed from notes taken of the in-person conversation.

CONVERSATION SUMMARY

Mr. Kyle Bingham had worked for the company for four and a half years. He was also the Mission Director on the accident voyage. He had experience in the adventure tourism industry prior to joining OceanGate.

Mr. Bingham stated that the *Titan* was Bahamian flagged. When asked if he had or knew where the documentation or registration was, he said he had never seen anything but he was told the vessel was.

He stated that they had operated out of The Bahamas and they would use their "small" boat to tow *Titan* to conduct operations. He did not have any point of contact in The Bahamas to confirm the registration. They had also made trips to the Hudson Canyon.

He stated that this was the only mission of the 2023 expedition in which *Titan* left the platform to dive on the *Titanic*. Mission 1 of the 2023 expedition was the only mission of the 2023 expedition not to have "paying clients" onboard.

He also stated that this is the first time that they contracted the *Polar Prince*. He stated that they had only used *Polar Prince* or *Horizon Arctic* for *Titanic* expeditions. He stated that he holds a U.S. MMC endorsed as Able Seaman because these contracted vessels can only take so many passengers, and if he is onboard he can ride as a crewmember and not a passenger.

He stated that they have done a number of dives in US waters, to include testing in Everett, WA and that they would notify the U.S. Coast Guard if they were doing a test dive. He also stated that they knew that they cannot take passengers in US waters so they would primarily do dives with scientific personnel, some of whom may have contributed financially to scientific research but did not pay for the experience of diving on an expedition.

When asked about the construction and testing, he said that he was aware of testing but he was never involved. He stated that they had a problem with the old pressure hull, that a new one had been constructed, that they took it to the Deep Ocean Test Facility in Maryland, and that there was a video of the testing of a scale model of the new pressure hull at the University of Washington. He stated that Dan Scoville (former employee) and Phil Brooks had both served as Director of Engineering at OceanGate.

He was asked to go through the accident trip starting from when they left St. John's.

Polar Prince and *Titan* left St. John's, NL, on June 16 enroute to the *Titanic* wreck site. This was the fifth mission to the site of this expedition which began May 8. The transit took approximately 36 hours, and the *Titan* was towed behind the *Polar Prince* at a speed of 7-8 knots and with an approximately 300-350m tow length. During the transit they would conduct training, educational briefs, pre checks and other mission support activities. The platform was trimmed by the stern to allow for a better ride during the tow.

They arrived in the vicinity of the *Titanic* wreck on June 17 and reviewed the dive plan in high detail. On June 18, they reviewed the dive plan again and conducted a dive brief. At approximately 0830 on June 18, all occupants entered the *Titan* and it was sealed. They then took a "stopski" for five minutes, a planned hold to slow down the process and to allow for more safety observation. During this they conducted final communications checks and other tests prior to the dive.

After the planned hold, they commenced the dive. The platform is designed to sink to a depth of 30ft, where a diver physically released *Titan* from the platform, and they begin their descent. *Titan* had a communication system which was integrated with the onboard system. They could monitor location data and communicate via text – all of which was send up and down acoustically though the water column. The system used was a standard one made by by EvoLogics, a vendor that manufacturers hydro acoustic equipment for subsea use.

The last text from *Titan* was received at 1047 from a depth of 3355m and indicated they were jettisoning weights, a planned event to slow their descent when nearing the sea floor. After missing a 15-minute communications check, procedures called for aborting the dive after another 45 minutes with no communications (60 minutes total). The vessel was equipped with an Iridium transponder that would then allow OceanGate to meet and recover *Titan* on the surface. Given a 2 metre per minute rate of rise, OceanGate expected *Titan* to surface at about 1500.

When *Titan* failed to be detected on the surface at 1500, OceanGate, per procedure, directed *Polar Prince* to start a surface search. After three hours of searching, per procedure, OceanGate contacted the Canadian Coast Guard for assistance, who referred them to the U.S. Coast Guard's RCC Boston.

The SMC assigned Mr. Bingham as On Scene Coordinator (OSC), coordinating the on scene SAR resources. At times, Mr. Bingham was also referred to as Incident Commander. The pipe laying vessel *Deep Energy* deployed their 2000m rated ROV (plus 1000' umbilical) to search the water column. The manufacturer of OceanGate's hydro-acoustics, EvoLogics confirmed reports of banging sounds in the water to which the Deep Energy searched the water column with negative results.

Horizon Arctic arrived on June 22 with a 3000m rated ROV. They were immediately tasked to search the seabed in the vicinity of *Titanic*. On their first dive they located wreckage which Mr. Bingham concluded was from *Titan*.

When asked what went well with SAR, Mr. Bingham identified communications with the RCC and response to his resource requests. He stated an improvement opportunity was the lack of a handover between him as OSC and arriving Coast Guard vessels, who started a surface search on their own.

When asked what he thought caused the incident he stated "something structural."

He stated that he did not believe that any personal belongings were seized by authorities.

END SUMMARY