

CWO [REDACTED]

Below is a summary of interview CWO [REDACTED] USCG, Commanding Officer, USCGC HEALY (WAGB 20) conducted by the AIM informal board on August 24, 2006 concerning the diving incident which resulted in two deaths on August 17, 2006. AIM board members present at the interview were Captain [REDACTED], LCDR [REDACTED], and LCDR [REDACTED].

CWO [REDACTED] reported aboard CGC HEALY about [REDACTED] ago, just before the ship went to TSTA. He stated that he has no prior polar experience, but does have a substantial amount of operational time at ATON units, including First Lieutenant of WILLIAM TATE and JAMES RANKIN and several ANT's. Aboard HEALY he is the [REDACTED]. He is a qualified underway OOD, who had his final qualification board the morning of 17 August. His final break-in watch was the 0400-0800 watch on 17 August 2006.

Following his 0400 to 0800 watch, he made preparations for his OOD board with the CO. He stated the board took approximately one hour. It was a re-qualification board, so it was somewhat abbreviated. After the board, which concluded in the late morning, he was conversing with LT HILL outside her stateroom about the possibility of a dive operation if we had ice liberty. The CO came by and LT HILL began discussing a dive plan with the CO. He left the area.

Later in the day he was informed that the ship was looking for an appropriate spot for ice liberty. To prepare for ice liberty, he mustered deck force and began a detailed safety, equipment and overall evolution brief. He discussed the bear watch, crane safety, deck safety, how to make ice checks, and discussed general procedures for liberty on the ice. His talk included brow safety, position, emergency procedures, and special rigging requirements for the brow. He assigned personnel to specific locations, handed out radios, ensured certain personnel (brow and crane in particular) did not consume alcohol, and instructed someone to get a boat hook, ring buoy and other basic safety equipment on the ice. He also discussed general lay out of the liberty area and rules applicable to deck force.

Once the ship stopped he supervised the ice liberty set up in accordance with the pre-briefed plan. He made sure his team was in place and conducted a walk through on the ice. CWO [REDACTED] had his deck force mark off the ice with cones and he got final clearance from the XO regarding the ice liberty preps and location in relation to the ship. CWO [REDACTED] checked with BMC [REDACTED] at the head of the brow to ensure everything was ok and checked to see that the bear watch was roving. Several people on the ice had radios to communicate with the bridge - the bear watch, BMC [REDACTED] at the head of the brow, and CWO [REDACTED]. Ice liberty was then piped and the crew and scientists were permitted to go down to the ice.

On the ice a couple of the Ensigns were stacking the beer and soft drinks. CWO [REDACTED] stated that he knew the rule to be a limit of two beers per person. It was not officially

ENCLOSURE(84) PAGE 1 OF 3 PAGES.

(b)(6) & (7)(C)

conveyed to the crew at quarters, but passed word of mouth. He consumed two amber ale beers.

A while after CWO [REDACTED] had been on the ice, he got a call from the bridge. The bridge was asking for comms with the dive team. He believed that the dive team had a radio. CWO [REDACTED] asked BM2 DUQUE if the dive team had comms with the bridge and he was told yes, we have comms with the bridge. CWO [REDACTED] did not inquire any further. LT HILL was the ship's qualified dive supervisor. Deck department does not typically get involved in dive ops, and LT HILL did not ask for any assistance.

CWO [REDACTED] stopped by the dive side to see how things were going. He wanted to watch the dive, but tenders were still working on getting the divers ready, and he decided to head back aboard the ship.

He also noticed that a female scientist was preparing to begin a polar bear swim – jumping in the water in a bathing suit. That started a chain reaction of other people who wanted to jump in the water. This was not a pre-planned activity. CWO [REDACTED] stopped in a position somewhat between the dive operation and the polar bear swim, which were located in the same general area.

A little later, CWO [REDACTED] heard BMCS [REDACTED] ask for a radio. Apparently, there was no radio at the dive side. The request was followed by a call for the corpsman and stretcher bearers. CWO [REDACTED] made the radio calls to the bridge asking for pipes. Sensing that something was wrong, CWO [REDACTED] decided to remain where he was to act as a comms relay for the dive side and the bridge. He also assisted in getting some of the scientists and others out of the way while emergency personnel arrived and began their efforts.

Shortly thereafter, the divers were brought aboard the ship by stokes litter. Very soon after that a pipe was made for all hands to return to the ship. CWO [REDACTED] then had his deck force start rounding people up. At one point, after almost everyone was onboard, he noticed that two people were walking far out on the ice, in some emotional distress over the accident. The bear watch followed them. CWO [REDACTED] also followed, and helped escort the two members back to the ship.

Deck force then quickly brought the equipment and brow aboard and HEALY was u/w. It was a very quick and safe evolution.

CWO [REDACTED] eventually went up to sickbay, where the divers had been taken. There was a serious medical effort taking place, so he went to the science conference lounge, where his shipmates were awaiting word. After a short period, and after the CO had announced the deaths of LT HILL and BM2 DUQUE, he decided to go to the bridge and take the conn. Later, he helped store the personal effects of BM2 DUQUE. All his effects were locked up in the armory. LT HILL's were locked in the officers sea bag locker.

ENCLOSURE(84) PAGE 2² OF 3 PAGES.

(b)(6) & (7)(C)

In response to questions CWO [REDACTED] stated the following. He does not recall if there was a pipe signaling dive ops. This was the first CG dive ops he had seen. He was never asked to attend a dive brief, or informed of the plan. There was no operational risk assessment completed, so far as he could tell. There was no specific beer monitor on the ice, but the honor system was in effect and the chief's mess monitored it. CWO [REDACTED] is not aware of a dive emergency plan on the ship. CWO [REDACTED] is a member of the safety board. Dive operations are not part of the OOD qualification process. CWO [REDACTED] has had previous experience watching shipboard diving aboard an ATON cutter that utilized the Philadelphia Police Dive Team. In comparison to this dive operation, the Police Dive Team seemed to be better trained, with a better overall safety condition, "they had back ups to the back ups." Comms and safety should have been done better. The dive side did not have adequate communications with the bridge. There did not seem to be anyone with the big safety picture running the dive side.

[REDACTED], CWO3, USCG

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