

BMCS [REDACTED]

Below is a summary of interview of BMCS [REDACTED] USCG, conducted by the AIM informal board on August 23, 2006 concerning the diving incident which resulted in two deaths on 17 August 2006. AIM board members present at the interview were Captain [REDACTED] LCDR [REDACTED] and LCDR [REDACTED]

Senior Chief [REDACTED] reported TAD aboard HEALY in [REDACTED], then PCS in March 2005. This is his third deployment. He serves as the ship's [REDACTED] the unit [REDACTED] and as [REDACTED]

On 17 August, BMCS [REDACTED] was the OOD from approximately 1130 – 1530. He spent a portion of that time looking for a spot to hove to for ice liberty. Eventually he found a good spot and stopped the ship in the ice. In order to maintain position he left approximately 10 turns on each shaft.

BMCS [REDACTED] heard a rumor of possible dive ops, but he never saw a dive plan routed to the bridge, he did not attend a dive brief or ORM/GAR session, nor did he see a dive check off sheet.

This was the first ice liberty of this deployment after 35 days of hard round the clock work. Much of the crew had been on a 12 on 12 off on call rotation for helicopter operations.

As ice liberty began, BMCS [REDACTED] stated that he did not know the details of the dive ops. Overheard CO and Ops discuss the dive plan was completed and in the cabin. There was no pipe, no plan, no dive flag (code alfa), and no radio comms with divers. BMCS did speak briefly with the BOSN (CWO [REDACTED]) regarding getting comms set up for ice liberty, and requested he notify the divers to contact the bridge prior to diving.

BMCS [REDACTED] has observed dive operations conducted by HEALY's dive team and other Coast Guard Vessels. He said that the majority of dive operations last year were conducted from one of the ships small boats, the LCVP. During the dive operations from the small boat he does not remember a dive plan being routed to the bridge, but he does remember being formally told about the dive plan prior to assuming watch as OOD.

Once he got off watch, he went down to the ice and partook in ice liberty. He consumed two Alaskan Amber beers, and played some football.

He also observed the dive team. In previous dive operations, BMCS [REDACTED] stated that the dive side would normally include a supervisor, a standby diver, tenders and a diver. He thought this dive may have been unusual in that all three divers were apparently entering the water, and there didn't seem to be a clear supervisor or ready diver on the ice. BMCS said that on one of his previous ships, BASSWOOD, the dive operation seemed more organized. At this point he wasn't involved in the operation so he continued with ice liberty activities.

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Later, at approximately 1840 he came over and watched the "polar bear" dives which were taking place about thirty feet from the dive site. As he approached he saw a line tender giving four pulls on the diver's tending lines. Since 4 pulls is commonly considered a danger signal in the fire fighting OBA operation, he became concerned and decided to investigate further. At this point he believed the tenders may have been conducting training. No one seemed particularly concerned.

He asked ENS [REDACTED] one of the ship's three divers, standing at the dive side, and believed she was the dive supervisor. He asked ENS [REDACTED] about the dive profile and learned that the divers had intended a 20 foot dive. BMCS walked up to the edge of the ice, where the tenders were standing and peered down in the water.

BMCS has extensive recreational dive experience -- more than 20 years. He is a PADI open water certified diver. He has conducted dry suit dives and has taken, and helped teach, advanced SCUBA classes. As he looked over the side, he stated that he became extremely concerned when he saw both lines tending vertically, and could not see either diver. He noticed that line was still being let out. He figured, based on his experience, that the visibility was 50 or 60 feet at a minimum, potentially much further. Therefore, he knew the dive profile was being exceeded, if the 20 foot limit was in fact correct. BMCS [REDACTED] recommended to ENS [REDACTED] and the tenders that there's no way the divers should be outside of view on a 20 foot dive and that they need to be brought up into view. He told the tenders to stop letting any line out. The tenders were unable to get the divers pulled up and asked for help. BMCS immediately ordered others standing around to get on the line.

BMCS [REDACTED] stated there was a lack of dive tender supervision. He attempted to fill a leadership vacuum since there was no recognition that there was a problem.

BMCS [REDACTED] asked ENS [REDACTED] to stand next to him at the ice edge, and they discussed bringing the divers up slowly. ENS [REDACTED] also wanted to keep the divers together. With additional people on the line, the tenders began the process of pulling up the divers to a planned safety stop in view of the surface.

CWO [REDACTED] arrived on scene and asked "what's going on?" BMCS [REDACTED] explained that they were pulling the divers into view. They continued to pull the divers up for some time, and eventually they came into view. There were bubbles coming from LT HILL's mask, but it was apparent that BM2 UQUE was not breathing and neither diver appeared to be moving. BMCS took on scene control and ordered the divers brought to the surface.

BMCS ordered someone to contact the bridge and get the corpsman and stretcher bearers down to the ice. ENS [REDACTED] asked for a dive manual, as the divers were being pulled, unconscious, from the water.

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Upon beginning first aid, BMCS [REDACTED] immediately checked the equipment and noted that the depth gauges showed that LT HILL's gauge read 190 feet, and BM2 DUQUE's gauge was maxed out at over 200. This information was passed to ENS [REDACTED]

As the divers were strapped to litters and transported to sickbay, MSTCS [REDACTED] began rounding up the dive equipment, and locking up gear. BMCS knew that the ship would be departing rapidly and went to the bridge to assume the conn. BM1 [REDACTED] had the deck and conn up to that point.

In response to questions, BMCS [REDACTED] answered the following: the closest point of land was Point Barrow, Alaska at approximately 490 nautical miles. It was unclear who was in charge of the dive operation, he assumed it was ENS [REDACTED]. The engines were still on line at somewhere around 10 shaft turns ahead. The ice was multi-year and 3-4 feet thick. BMCS [REDACTED] had never seen ice liberty and dive operations conducted together. There was no dive brief conducted that he was aware of. There is no dive emergency bill or evacuation plan that he is aware of. If there is one - it's not on the bridge. BMCS [REDACTED] never heard any pipe regarding dive operations, either before or during the dive ops.

[REDACTED] bmcS  
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