

CDR JEFFREY JACKSON

Below is a summary of interview of CDR Jeffrey Jackson, USCG, conducted by the AIM informal board on August 25, 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].

CDR JACKSON (XO) stated that he reported aboard HEALY in late May 2005, as Executive Officer. He completed a short familiarization cruise prior to relieving his predecessor. Previous Coast Guard assignments include: D11 Asst. Chief of Law Enforcement; Operations Officer in POLAR SEA; DUINS at the University of Rhode Island; Company Officer, USCGA; WPB 82' Commanding Officer; DWO, EDISTO. Prior to OCS he was a Boatswain's Mate who served as XPO of a cutter and at two stations.

CDR JACKSON stated that 17 August began as a routine u/w day. He spent the morning doing mostly "XO stuff," mainly consisting of paperwork and preparing a power point presentation for training later in the day. He also wrote a letter to PACAREA for the CO's signature addressing a request for more cutter training.

After lunch, he attended officers' call and quarters. At quarters the issue of ice liberty came up. Ice liberty had been an on again/off again discussion for some time. The crew had been underway for 40 days straight, and there had not been a previous ice liberty opportunity due to the high science optempo and the quality of weather and ice. On this occasion the Chief Scientist was also talking about the possibility of ice liberty, and the weather was excellent. It was about 35 degrees outside, clear and sunny. There was good multi-year ice, mixed in with some strong first year ice. It looked good for ice liberty. CDR JACKSON had previously listed ice liberty in the POD as a possibility.

CDR JACKSON gave the training he had prepared in the morning, and then began to focus on ice liberty preparations. At about 1500 he got notice the CO was in the aloft conn looking for a location to heave-to, so CDR JACKSON discussed a few issues with the CO and then went to his stateroom to get his ice liberty checklist. The ice liberty checklist covered safety items on the ice. He discussed the checklist with the new BOSN (CWO [REDACTED] who said "he'd make it happen." CDR JACKSON stated that he stressed safety to the BOSN.

CDR JACKSON then returned to "XO work" in his stateroom for another half hour or so, until he saw on his navigation screen that the ship was slowing down and was almost DIW. He began to get dressed for the ice, and started checking up on the progress of preparations. OPS (LCDR [REDACTED]) stopped by with a dive plan, saying that the ship's dive officer (LT HILL) was requesting command approval for a training dive. CDR JACKSON said that he considered the impact to the entire planned operation, e.g. whether anyone would be needed elsewhere for the ice liberty watch positions, and figured that the dive would not impact the overall requirements of the day. He also specifically asked OPS if the plan had been briefed to the CO. CDR JACKSON was told

that the CO would be briefed.⁴ CDR JACKSON stated that he is not fond of last second, or poorly planned events. He had several concerns at that time. He wanted to ensure that there would be no negative impact on the ship, that LTJG [REDACTED] (physician's assistant) was with the dive side, that the location was safe, and that the dive was not going to be near the stern, where the screw would be turning. OPS ensured CDR JACKSON the dive would not be near the screw, and that he and the dive officer would brief the CO.⁵ This meeting lasted a minute or so. This was a very short meeting with OPS, probably about a minute.

CDR JACKSON left his stateroom to head down to the foc'sle. He discussed the deployment of the brow with members of deck force, as well as the ice conditions, bear watch and how to mark off the area for liberty. He also spoke to the morale officer (ENS [REDACTED]) whom he instructed regarding her duties at ice liberty, including beverages, sports equipment, etc. He told her he wanted soda and beer on the ice, but not more than two beers per person.

Next, CDR JACKSON began a walk around on the ice. He checked the perimeter and again discussed the overall plan with BOSN. He stated that cones were placed a hundred or so yards from the ship, maybe a bit further, to mark a safe area close to the ship for ice liberty.⁷

Back aboard the ship, he learned that morale preparations were behind schedule, and provided additional guidance to ENS [REDACTED] related to timeliness. He stated that he did not want a large crowd forming around the brow waiting for ice liberty to begin.⁸

After a final check in with the bridge, CDR JACKSON granted ice liberty to the crew and science party. For the next 30 minutes or so CDR JACKSON stated that he walked around saying "hello" to the crew and scientist. He consumed one beer during this period, and would eventually consume a total of two. He stated that he walked the perimeter and monitored personnel going up and down the brow.

During the early portion of ice liberty a Russian scientist expressed a desire to start a polar bear swim. CDR JACKSON said "no." Subsequently CDR Jackson found out that scientist later jumped in the water. There was a discussion that more people were interested, to which he again responded "no." However, the CO later authorized a polar bear swim near the starboard anchor area, aft of where the divers were setting up. During this time the divers began to set up a dive side, and haul in equipment. CDR JACKSON monitored the progress of the set-up, noted that LT HILL arrived on scene last and began talking to her other divers (BM2 DUQUE and ENS [REDACTED]). CDR JACKSON stated that he was not particularly engaged in the dive operation, as he was concerned with ensuring the polar bear swim was far enough from the dive side, and being run safely. He felt that the dive operation was going fine at this point.¹⁰

Later on CDR JACKSON made his way past the dive side and noticed that ENS [REDACTED] left the water complaining of a leaky dry suit. The other two divers were on the surface.

More time passed, and CDR JACKSON made another round of the ice liberty area. The main purpose of this round, in addition to general safety, was to inform the crew that the galley would be shutting down at the regularly scheduled time, and that those wishing to eat should do so, so that the galley crew can enjoy some ice liberty. CDR JACKSON then went to the brow and had BMC [REDACTED] radio the bridge to tell them ice liberty would secure at 1845. Again, he went out on the ice. He wandered the ice until about 1820 and then went up to the pilot house and had a short discussion with BMCS [REDACTED] about wrapping up ice liberty. 12

CDR Jackson then stopped by his stateroom to get a hard hat. Next, he heard a pipe corpsman to the ice – but he did not dash out. He thought it might be a twisted ankle. Then he heard a pipe AED to the ice. CDR Jackson proceeded to the brow as fast as possible.

As he came down the brow he noticed people rushing to the dive side. CDR JACKSON then went over and asked someone not involved what had happened – they said the divers came up dead. He noticed CPR was being conducted in a very professional manner. He then began directing traffic on the ice to get the divers to sick bay. He desperately wanted to ask LTJG [REDACTED] what happened, but he knew he couldn't at that time. 13

14 Next, CDR JACKSON found YNC [REDACTED] and told him to get the decedent affairs folder. He then went to the pilot house and directed BMCS [REDACTED] to have IT [REDACTED] shut down all personal connectivity to control communications from the ship. He wanted to ensure proper next of kin notification. 15

Once the divers were moved to sickbay, BM2 DUQUE was moved to one table and LT HILL was placed on the other. CDR JACKSON ordered OPS to get the flight surgeon on the line and to work comms for LTJG [REDACTED]. CDR JACKSON then took up a post at the sickbay door directing traffic and keeping only essential personnel in sickbay. Maximum efforts were made to revive both divers. An hour later, they were eventually pronounced dead. There had been significant comms problems with the flight surgeon. Due to the high latitudes the iridium link kept dropping. 16 17

Following the death of the divers, CDR JACKSON began working on the follow up paperwork, messages and contacts. Much of it was being delegated. He also discussed with CPO [REDACTED] the details of body storage and movement in the ship. A mishap report was filed. 18

In response to questions CDR JACKSON stated the following.

- To his recollection ice liberty has been occurred at the same time as dive ops in the past. But, most of HEALY's dive ops had been done by small boat, not from the ship. 19
- Ice liberty policy is not written, but there is a safety checklist in the XO's stateroom.

- The two beer limit is not written, and had traditionally been enforced with a checklist. The checklist proved to be cumbersome, and was abandoned for this ice liberty. 20
- After I noticed that the polar bear dives continued I discussed it with the CO. The CO said he thought it was o.k. 21
- The dive plan stated that this dive would include all three divers in the water. CDR JACKSON stated that he does not know CG or USN policy regarding the manning requirements of dive operations. [REDACTED]
- LT HILL was the dive officer and dive supervisor.
- HEALY was 500nm from the closest point of land – Barrow, Alaska.
- The maximum range of the ship's embarked helicopters is 100nm. 22
- There is no diver evacuation plan aboard HEALY.
- There is no dive emergency medical plan aboard HEALY.
- When divers are in close proximity to the ship the screws, suction, rudder and 23 sonar are typically secured. A checklist is routed with the dive plan to accomplish the tag out procedure.
- This dive was not a "ship dive," and CDR JACKSON stated he believes the requirements may be different for a dive from the ice as opposed to on the ship.
- There was no checklist routed, and no tag outs were performed for this dive. 24
- Underwater science equipment (bottom mapping sonar) was operating at the time of the dive operation. CDR JACKSON said he did not know this fact until a day later, when he was informed by the civilian sonar tech.
- CDR JACKSON is not familiar with LT HILL's diving experience. He knew she 25 had attended dive school, but he isn't sure how many dive hours she has completed.
- CDR JACKSON stated that BM2 DUQUE is a recent dive school graduate.
- CDR JACKSON stated that [REDACTED] attended dive school as a cadet at 26 the Coast Guard Academy.
- CDR JACKSON stated that hyperbaric chamber training is supposed to be done at the beginning of each deployment, but was not done, to his knowledge, this time. It was completed before the 2005 deployment. He said it may have been done on the transit between Seattle and Barrow – he was not aboard for that portion of the trip. [REDACTED]
- LT HILL reports to OPS, who reports to the XO. CDR JACKSON is LT HILL's reporting officer.
- At times LT HILL had exhibited poor judgment in the past.
 - Last year LT HILL had a dive mishap, in which she over inflated a dry suit and rapidly ascended. LT HILL was not certain of any requirement to report the incident. CDR JACKSON instructed her to fill out a class "D" mishap report, which she did. 27
 - During the 2005 deployment LT HILL allowed two members of her dive team to conduct an unauthorized polar bear swim from a small boat working dive operations apart from the ship. CDR JACKSON expressed a great deal of displeasure with her in a resulting counseling session. He told her this incident gave him concern about her judgment as a Lieutenant 28

and an OOD. He also "chewed out" the boat coxswain. He does not remember if this incident was documented in her OER.

- LT HILL asked to do a dive operation for D13 (OAN) sometime last year. CDR JACKSON was concerned whether LT HILL possessed the ability to decline the mission if the particular buoy tender CO (a strong willed individual) pushed her on it. He re-enforced the need for her to do so if she had concerns regarding safety. 29
- CDR JACKSON noted that LT HILL sometimes lacked the seriousness required of an officer.
- When CDR JACKSON expressed concern about the lack of an operational dive compressor LT HILL informed him that she could operate by filling tanks at a commercial facility in Seattle.
- CDR JACKSON sat in on LT HILL's OOD board, prior to relieving the prior XO. He had some concerns about LT HILL's failure to understand rule 2 of the ROTR.
- Dive operations were not a typical part of any OOD board, but questions vary.
- CDR JACKSON was sometimes concerned with the Operations Officers (OPS) attention to detail. He is a talented and dedicated officer, with great operational skill, but sometimes has administrative issues.
- CDR JACKSON conducts material inspections every Saturday morning, and on Tuesdays on his own. He looks for general hygiene and orderliness. He has had several issues with the dive locker. At times he has found it not "aesthetically pleasing." He has told LT HILL to "make it so."
- The last time he visited the dive locker was a couple of weeks before the incident.
- The locker is better than it was – cleanliness wise.
- CDR JACKSON is not familiar with dive team record keeping requirements. He does not recall what records were required while he was OPS in POLAR SEA.
- CDR JACKSON said he's not "up to speed" as to what is or isn't in the dive bill. 30
- CDR JACKSON said he learned of the divers' final depth while in sickbay, when he overheard someone saying that LT HILL had been to 190 feet, and BM2 DUQUE had maxed his depth gauge.
- He said that neglecting to mention diver depths in the mishap message was an oversight and his fault. The focus was on getting the message out in a timely manner. He realizes how that omission could appear – but he did not intend to hold back information. 31
- The HEALY Cutter Organization Manual is a work in progress – he has been working on it for over a year. 32