

Senior Chief (ret.) [REDACTED]

Below is a summary of interview of Senior Chief (retired) [REDACTED], USCG, conducted by the AIM informal board on 12 October, 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]

SCPO [REDACTED] reported to HEALY in November 2003. He served aboard until 06 August 2005, departing just before the North Pole trip. He is now retired, working as a bus driver in Seattle, Washington. While aboard HEALY he stated that he was the Auxiliary Division Chief, and a collateral duty diver.

Prior to serving aboard HEALY, SCPO [REDACTED] completed a three year tour aboard POLAR STAR as a member of the engineering department and as a diver. He attended Explosive Ordnance (EOD) Diver training in 1998. During the late 1990's the USN did away with the 5 week SCUBA course, so CG divers attended the EOD course. The course was 8 ½ weeks long, followed by a short CG related course. LT [REDACTED] (now retired) started the CG EOD course. It was disestablished upon his departure from dive school. CG divers now attend a re-vamped SCUBA course.

SCPO [REDACTED] has completed approximately 50 dives in the Coast Guard. He was involved in putting together the MSST dive program. He conducted the pre-training for the Seattle MSST divers – 6 of 6 passed the SCUBA course.

SCPO [REDACTED] said PMS was generally contracted out aboard HEALY. HEALY's vendor of choice for dive gear PMS was usually Underwater Sports Dive Shop in Seattle. He stated that he believes records were generally kept by the dive officer, LT HILL. He stated that some records, particularly the dive training records were "lousy," and were rarely, if ever, kept up. He overlapped with LT HILL for one year. He said LT HILL took on the responsibility of logs and records, and he does not know the status of those records. He stated that he did know she kept up with the re-qualification letters that maintained currency and dive pay.

SCPO [REDACTED] stated dive ops aboard HEALY ran according to the dive manual while he was aboard. He said the first dive of any trip was usually a little rough while they figured things out again, but that after a dive or two the team really gelled. They generally followed the following process:

1. The process generally began with an assignment of duties, and a dive plan. The duties consisted of a supervisor, communications diver, standby diver, dive tenders and working divers, per the dive manual.
2. Next, the team would brief the CO, XO, OPS and often the EO if the dive was on HEALY. Boat coxswains attended all dives where the team would dive from one of HEALY's small boats. A medical representative also often attended the brief.
3. The team always conducted a GAR model at the brief, usually led by the boat coxswain.

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4. Following the brief the team would go to the locker to get ready. This consisted of pre-dive checks on equipment, per the 3M PMS system, and breaking out required gear.
5. Next, the team would load and launch the boat, or pre-stage equipment for a ship dive.
6. On the dive scene, the divers would don equipment, man stations and the supervisor would conduct the pre-dive checklist. The checklist used was generally the standard USN list. Though some dive supervisors had a slightly different list, or modified it slightly, the lists usually covered the same items. Some supervisors abbreviate the list. SCPO [REDACTED] stated that he "does not like that," and required use of the standard list when he supervised dives. He stated that LT HILL was "not a stickler" for using standard lists. He couldn't remember if LT HILL used an abbreviated list.
7. Upon completion of the pre-dive checklist, the divers would enter the water and complete in water checks.
8. The dive then commenced.

SCPO [REDACTED] stated that he would be surprised if no checklist was utilized on the dive side on 17 August. He said diving is not a casual occupation, particularly in the ice. In fact, he said that HEALY divers refused to dive with the science party in 2005 because of their perceived lackadaisical attitude. He said the science divers generally had a poor set-up, conducted inadequate training and dove with single tanks under ice – a no no.

SCPO said he is a huge fan of surface supplied diving due to the communications and control capability. The divers' depth can be monitored and controlled entirely from the surface, and there is a solid comms link that enables real-time direction and positive control. He said he recalls doing SCUBA operations under ice, but that it gave him vertigo and he only dove once in that manner. All dives in 2005 were conducted from the LCVP and were surface supplied. LT Hill had never participated in SCUBA operations under the ice.

SCPO [REDACTED] stated that he was onboard for the unauthorized polar bear swim that resulted in LT HILL being reprimanded by the XO, CDR JACKSON. At the completion of a dive day during the 2005 trip, a couple of the divers – ENS [REDACTED] and ENS [REDACTED] who were getting ready to leave the ship did an impromptu polar bear swim in their underwear. The dive had been conducted away from the ship in the LCVP. Both were tethered to the boat, and the entire swim was over in a few seconds. The dive team had not sought permission to do the swim. Later, pictures of the swim were circulated by LT HILL. The XO found out, and sternly counseled LT HILL.

During 2005, LT HILL was involved in a dive mishap. LT HILL was diving, with SCPO as the dive supervisor. LT HILL had been collecting science samples (jelly fish) at 60 feet sea water (fsw). The plan was that she would collect samples on the bottom (60 fsw), then ascend to 40 fsw and deliver the samples to a net suspended from a line. The line would then be hauled up and she would return to the bottom. After collecting a set of samples she came up to 40 fsw, but apparently did not remove air from her dry suit.

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She lost track of her depth, and was not aware that she was rising in the water column. She came all the way to the surface in an out of control ascent. She was given a neurological exam by SCPO [REDACTED] with negative results. She was then instructed to return to 60 fsw, and conduct in water decompression to complete any omitted decompression time. After the dive SCPO told LT HILL to report the incident to the command. She did not, so SCPO informed the XO. The XO again sternly counseled LT Hill and the ship sent a mishap message.

SCPO [REDACTED] stated that during 2005 the team conducted dive chamber training with the pilots and deck force to ensure that everyone knew how to operate and transport the dive recompression chamber. SCPO stated that most of the time the team was too far from land to fly the divers to the closest recompression treatment facility, usually in Anchorage. Because of the distance they did not call the facility in advance. SCPO believed that if they needed to contact the facility they would have plenty of time during the transport of the injured diver. The dive team had discussed performing a treatment in the HEALY's transportation chamber. No one had ever been trained to do that, but SCPO [REDACTED] felt it was possible if necessary.

In response to questions, SCPO stated the following:

- SCPO [REDACTED] said that LT HILL always dove with 50 lbs of dive weight. Her dry suit was too large and she generally wore three sets of clothes under the suit to stay warm. She typically compensated with extra weight. SCPO [REDACTED] said that he never wore more than 30 lbs.
- SCPO [REDACTED] stated that split fins provide little to no torque, and are typically good for light diving. They will fold if you try to kick too hard, or generate power. He said they do not work with a large amount of weight, based on his experience.
- SCPO [REDACTED] never dove with BM2 Duque. He knew him from the ship, but not as a diver.
- He stated he had a hard time maintaining the minimum required dives for currency aboard HEALY, mostly due to the small crew. He said diving underway often conflicted with ship operations and training, and when HEALY returned to port the crew was granted a month of rotating 96's. Dive training suffered as a result.
- Aboard POLAR STAR divers used the NOAA tower, and dove in port quite a bit. This was not done aboard HEALY. He said the HEALY dive team may have dove one time at the NOAA facility.
- Compared to other dive officers SCPO [REDACTED] had worked with (LCDR [REDACTED] LCDR [REDACTED] and LT [REDACTED] LT HILL was "looser with rules and regulations."
- Command support aboard HEALY was generally good if the dive was set up to assist the ship. Otherwise, there was no support. It was hard to do a non-operational training dive. It was easier to dive aboard POLAR STAR than HEALY, mostly due to the larger crew. It was easier to get away.

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- It does not make sense to have a collateral duty dive program, it's too dangerous. The Navy considers dive operations a primary duty and the Coast Guard should as well.
- One of the dive tenders in 2005 was LTJG [REDACTED]. However, SCPO [REDACTED] does not know if LTJG [REDACTED] completed the required PQS. He said tenders are not as critical in surface supplied dives, because the comms diver, and supervisor can easily control the dive with hard wired comms and gauges on the surface.
- SCPO [REDACTED] said that he does not remember a dive safety survey aboard HEALY.
- SCPO is not sure who filled the tanks aboard HEALY. He said it might have been the MSST.
- SCPO said he felt pretty good about the status of the dive team when he departed the ship. He said he later became concerned when he heard that the personnel situation changed, and the team had only two divers (HILL and DUQUE) with minimal experience.
- He said the status of the dive locker was generally atrocious aboard HEALY. He said he often worked on it, but there wasn't much space or time.
- He said LT HILL may have been under pressure to get the dive done on the 17<sup>th</sup> because it would have likely been the last chance they'd have had to get some ice experience before LT HILL departed the service. Upon her departure the team would have lost all experience had DUQUE not completed a few ice dives.
- Just prior to HEALY's deployment LT HILL mentioned to SCP [REDACTED] that there were no dives scheduled for the upcoming trip. She also mentioned that it would be tough for a new dive officer unless the divers got some experience on this trip. SCPO recommended that she ask for some TAD dive support so she could get some dives in.
- SCPO stated that he believes that DUQUE's regulator may have free flowed under ice – and led to a loss of his air supply.
- SCPO [REDACTED] stated he did not think the equipment exchange system is working with the dive school. He remembers that LT HILL had difficulty getting new gear, or old gear rotated out.

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