



DEPARTMENT OF THE NAVY
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18 Jan 23

MEMORANDUM FOR CDR RANDY S. WADDINGTON, USCG, LEAD INVESTIGATOR

SUBJECT: Formal Marine Casualty Investigation Concerning the Fire on the Small Passenger Vessel (SPV) Spirit of Norfolk on June 7, 2022

This statement is in response to a request from the United States Coast Guard (USCG) Fifth District to participate in a USCG/National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB) hearing on January 26, 2023, as part of the USCG/NTSB joint investigation into the SPV Spirit of Norfolk (SON) Fire onboard Naval Station Norfolk (NSN) on June 7, 2022. Following are the pertinent facts as determined by a review of the Navy's participation in the SON response efforts:

At approximately 12:09 p.m. on June 7, 2022, the Regional Dispatch Center of Commander, Navy Region Mid-Atlantic, received a distress call from SON. In the distress call and communications immediately following, the SON stated that it had a fire in its engine room and was located in the Elizabeth River near NSN. The Regional Dispatch Center immediately dispatched Navy Federal Fire (FEDFIRE) units to NSN's pier area.

At approximately the same time, the Commanding Officer (CO) of NSN was notified and immediately reported to NSN's waterfront, where he quickly went to the NSN piers closest to SON to assess SON's situation. The NSN CO observed that the SON was on fire, dead in the water, and passengers were still on the ship. Concerned for the safety of the passengers and understanding that NSN was the closest berthing area, the CO gave the order to immediately tug SON to NSN. He also ordered the full activation of NSN's Emergency Operations Center.

Upon receiving the NSN CO's order, Navy harbor pilot led tugboats, under contract with the Navy, assisted SON and the civilian ships providing aid at the time. While on scene to provide assistance to SON, the Navy harbor pilot heard a distress call concerning M/V SPAR LYRA, which was traversing the Elizabeth River towards the general area where SON was adrift. The distress call relayed that M/V SPAR LYRA had lost power and steering and was in danger of alliding with NSN's piers. Assessing that the civilian tug boats were providing sufficient assistance to SON, the Navy harbor pilot and Navy contracted tugs navigated to assist M/V SPAR LYRA and were able to arrest its momentum, preventing an allision with moored Navy vessels and NSN's piers.

SON was berthed at NSN's Pier 4. The SON Master and one other crewmember then successfully evacuated SON, where they were met by Navy FEDFIRE and local area first responders from the cities of Norfolk and Chesapeake. The SON Master informed firefighters that all passengers had been previously evacuated by a separate civilian vessel while SON was still in the Elizabeth River.

Navy FEDFIRE and their local on-scene partners formed a Unified Command (UC) to coordinate rescue and firefighting operations. Once SON was berthed at NSN's Pier 4, and it

was clear all passenger and crew were evacuated off the ship, the UC shifted its focus from rescue operations to firefighting operations. NSN's CO ordered the closure of NSN's Chambers Airfield in order to shift airfield firefighting units to Pier 4. The UC directed tugs and fire engines to douse SON with water to cool SON's hull and potentially mitigate the fire's spread. The UC also ordered a team onboard to identify all locations of the fire.

Shipboard firefighting operations are particularly hazardous, and SON being a non-Navy vessel presented the risk of unknowns and unexpected events for Navy FEDFIRE. Additionally, SON lacked brows on its moored side, requiring firefighters to traverse onto the ship via fire engine ladders.

The fire was confirmed to be in the SON's engine room. The UC subsequently directed a firefighting operation to attempt to extinguish the fire. This initial response was not successful and during the operation a large explosion occurred within SON. Thankfully, all firefighters were able to evacuate the SON without serious injuries.

After the explosion within SON, the conditions onboard were judged to be extremely hazardous by the UC. Given that all passengers and crew had already been successfully evacuated, the UC determined any further manned fire response onboard the SON would place firefighters' lives in unjustified danger. Therefore, the UC decided to not send additional firefighters onboard SON and limited firefighting to external dousing of SON with water.

At approximately 6:42 p.m. on June 7, 2022, the U.S. Coast Guard took command of the UC and Navy on-scene leaders understood that the U.S. Coast Guard set the primary objective to keeping the SON afloat.

The SON remained alongside Pier 4 and was monitored for ship stability, conditions, draft, and temperature. NSN personnel and Navy ship crews continued to provide support to the UC and private contractors who specialized in salvage and hazardous material response. This support consisted of standby medical teams and providing food, water, and equipment. The equipment support included firefighting hoses, firefighting agents, SCBA re-fills, and portable de-watering equipment.

On June 11, 2022, the SON fire was officially declared to be out. On June 12, 2022, the SON was towed from NSN to a civilian pier.

The Navy is extremely thankful that no lives were lost and all children and other passengers aboard were safely rescued from the SON. The Navy also appreciates the rapid support from area firefighting teams and first responders.