



National Transportation Safety Board

Washington, D.C. 20594

Office of Marine Safety

Interview Summary

Accident: Fire aboard Dive Vessel *Conception* (NTSB No. DCA19MM047)

Date: September 2, 2019 at 0314 PDT

Location: Platts Harbor, Pacific Ocean near Santa Cruz Island, California, 34°02.99' N, 119°44.10' W

Person Interviewed: Capt. B. Pridden, former second captain on *Conception*

Interview Conducted By: Mr. A. Ehlers, NTSB
Mr. R. Jones, NTSB

Summary Provided By: Mr. A. Ehlers, NTSB

OVERVIEW

Capt. Pridden was interviewed via telephone on September 6, 2019, in conjunction with the investigation into the September 2 accident involving the dive boat *Conception*, which caught fire and eventually sank while it was anchored in Platts Harbor off Santa Cruz Island, California. Unless specifically delineated by quotes, the text that follows is not a verbatim record of the conversation. It has been developed from a recording of the interview.

INTERVIEW SUMMARY

Capt. Pridden provided an overview of his credentials and experience. He holds a 200-ton near coastal master (domestic), 200-ton oceans mate (domestic), less than 500-ton coastal master (international/STCW endorsement), less than 500-ton officer in charge of the navigation watch (OICNW) oceans (international), and AB licenses and endorsements. Prior to being hired by Truth Aquatics, Capt. Pridden had about 4 years' experience in the maritime industry serving on a humanitarian aid vessel, ferries, and a tour boat.

Capt. Pridden was involved with the vessel between May 26 and June 9, 2019, serving as second captain from June 1–9. He described his position as a "glorified deckhand," filling scuba tanks and other passenger support, conducting linehandling, and occasionally taking the helm when captain needed a break. He made three voyages with the vessel as second captain, one of which was an overnight voyage. The captain of the *Conception* during the accident was the captain during each of the voyages that Capt. Pridden made with the vessel.

Capt. Pridden then described a typical voyage on the *Conception*. Passengers would arrive 4–6 hours prior to getting under way (the boat was left open during this time), sign in, stow their gear, go down below, and go to sleep. The vessel usually departed on the voyage late that night or early the next morning. The crew would arrive 30–60 minutes before getting under way, conduct checks, throw off lines, and get under way.

The boat would arrive at the first dive site in the morning and anchor. A safety briefing would be conducted on this morning after breakfast. During Capt. Pridden's ride-along (to be described further later), the captain conducted the briefing. The next time it was done by the deckhand, and the third time Capt. Pridden performed the briefing. The briefing followed a script, which discussed the location of life jackets and lifeboats as well as the dive location and dive safety information. Capt. Pridden did not remember if the briefing discussed the location of the muster station or the emergency hatch. The emergency hatch was not demonstrated to passengers during the briefing.

Dives would then begin. The boat would move or stay at a site following each dive, depending on the charterer's discussion with captain.

The vessel would overnight at anchor 100–400 yds from shore in one of the known harbors around the Channel Islands, as chosen by the captain. The boat would typically anchor before dinner time. A night dive might be conducted at the anchor site. The generator ran 24/7 on voyages; the main engines were shut down while anchored.

There were no night watches that Capt. Pridden was aware of while anchored. The deck hands would wake up about 0600 and work through the last dive of the night. When Capt. Pridden asked the *Conception* captain when his watch was on the first night, he was told to be back up at 6AM. When he woke up at night, he never saw a crew member awake at night.

Passengers had access to all spaces on the ship, with the exception of the wheelhouse and engine room. Passengers were not allowed to use the galley equipment.

Capt. Pridden was hired by Truth Aquatics' owner. He was interviewed by phone, then had a "test ride" or "ride-along" from 25–28 May. He could dive during the ride-along if he wanted, but he focused on learning dive operations.

Once hired, no training was provided by the company. He was not formally trained with fire and emergency equipment once on the vessel. Instead, he asked about the fire pump and valves and received verbal information from the captain. He learned the system by asking deckhands and self-initiated learning after hours.

The fire pump was located in the engine room forward and was tied in with bilge pump. The valves were left aligned to the firepump, not the bilge. Valves on the port and starboard sides of the engine room could be aligned to the fire stations located on each side on the main deck. He could not remember where the fire pump could be started from.

No emergency drills were conducted during his time on board.

Capt. Pridden was asked if there were any equipment issues on board the vessel. He stated that a new John Deere generator was overheating. The load caused by the Nitrox generator was thought to be the problem, creating too great of a load on the generator. The crew was assigned to go down to the generator regularly to check whether it was overheating. There were no issues with electrical system and galley equipment. He recalled that there was some unknown issue with the barbeque grill during one trip.

Capt. Pridden worked with the accident captain, second galleyhand, and lead deckhand while he voyaged with the vessel. He described the unlicensed deckhands as "competent and caring" and that they were "trying to do a good job."

Capt. Pridden saw no issues with the working relationships between the crew and with the passengers. The crew was there to serve the passengers and do their best for the passengers. The only friction occurred during a 1-day voyage when passengers were "taking too much out of the sea."

Capt. Pridden left the vessel because he was "not overly comfortable with the vessel." As an example, he stated that during one voyage, when entering a fog bank, he slowed the vessel. The captain entered the wheelhouse, questioned Capt. Pridden's actions, and took over the helm.

The vessel had a Furuno radar and a computer charting program; however, the captain did not use charting system. The captain navigated visually, using the GPS tied into the autopilot to drive to a location.

Investigators asked Capt. Pridden for more information about why he left the company. He stated that he discovered that the vessel was dumping raw sewage in marine area. He secured the discharge but was told by the captain that it was at the captain's discretion. The captain stated that the vessel didn't have the capacity to hold sewage overnight. Capt. Pridden attempted to meet with owner to report the issue, but it did not happen. He later texted the owner, stating that he would not continue, noting "illegal activities." The

owner responded to the text but did not ask about the illegal activities. Capt. Pridden then reported the incident to NOAA Fisheries (via the EPA).

When asked, Capt. Pridden could not recall hearing passengers in the bunk room when the crew was in the crew berthing area behind the wheelhouse. (He could hear the television that was in the galley/salon, if it was on.) Typically, the port and starboard bridgewing doors would be left ajar at night, while the aft door to the wheelhouse/crew berthing was normally closed.

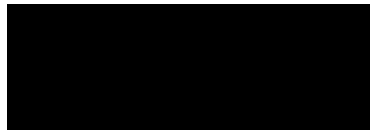
Capt. Pridden did not know of any alarms on the bridge for fire and heat detectors.

There was no way to lock escape hatch from berthing, from what Capt. Pridden remembered. There was no door on the forward stairway to berthing; no way to lock or block it.

Passengers were permitted to drink alcohol; the crew did not.

The skiff was stowed on swim platform. The skiff cradle was integrated with swim platform when it was in the raised position.

END SUMMARY



A. Ehlers
Marine Accident Investigator