

Statement to GOLDEN RAY MBI
September 21, 2020
Captain John W. Reed, USCG

Introduction

Thank you for your the opportunity to speak to this matter. It is an honor and privilege to be here to help shed light on the search and rescue aspects of the M/V GOLDEN RAY incident. While I have spent some time, preparing this statement, It is limited to my recollection of events from more than a year ago and I trust I will be able to convey the outstanding work of the teams involved to rescue all 24 people aboard the ship after it rolled onto its side in the early morning hours of September 8, 2019. Following this statement I will answer any questions that you have and will be more than willing to provide whatever information I can to the Board.

My role in the incident involved leadership of some of the assigned Coast Guard units and overall coordination of Search and Rescue efforts through our Command Center in Charleston. While some of the Coast Guard units responding to the incident function within the organizational structure of the Coast Guard Sector, others such as Air Station Savannah provide support through coordination and collaboration. Responsibility for the execution of the Search and Rescue mission within this portion of the Seventh District's Search and Rescue Region is delegated to me as Sector Commander. I further delegate that to a Search and Rescue Mission Coordinator, in this case it was Lieutenant Lloyd Heflin.

This incident provided an outstanding example of teamwork, risk management, and cooperation among industry and the government to achieve something that may have been the most challenging set of circumstance faced by all involved in the rescue and certainly for those trapped inside the GOLDEN RAY.

Seeing first-hand the work to save all 24 people from the GOLDEN RAY has truly changed my perspective on the industry and their ability to come together to solve a most-complex problem.

While the Coast Guard, Moran Towing, Georgia Department of Natural Resources, Glynn County, and others did great things to support the rescue of the first 20 people in less than three hours, it was a monumental undertaking over the ensuing 30-plus hours to remove the final four members.

Initial Notification (Slide 3)

I was awoken approximately 01:50 on Sunday morning September 8th, 2019 by a phone call from Commander Norm Witt, Commanding Officer of the Coast Guard Marine Safety Unit Savannah and Captain of the Port. He informed me that he'd received a strange report and was following up on it, but he was told a large vessel had rolled over in St. Simons Sound, he would confirm and get back with me. Within five minutes I received a call from our Command Center in Charleston confirming that report and the watch provided their initial actions of launching rescue resources and set us up for a conference call with senior staff.

Following that call I decided to make the three-hour drive to Brunswick, recognizing the severity of this situation. The Search and Rescue Mission Coordinator, our Chief of Prevention, and Chief of Inspections Division would also make their way to the scene to assist.

Initial Rescue Efforts (Slide 4)

While crews began to respond from Air Station Savannah and Station Brunswick our Command Center was informing Coast Guard leadership and setting up a Critical Incident Communication Call with Coast Guard Headquarters and every echelon in between. I departed approximately 03:00 and was involved in call updates the entire drive south. Our Deputy Commander, Commander Nick Wong remained on those calls for more than seven straight hours coordinating through our Command Center with supporting units, responding units, and higher headquarters. As I drove I would receive updates about the number of people on board, then the number of people being rescued, the number of people accounted for, and finally the number of people who were not rescued, but believed to be missing.

I was also made aware that Glynn County Heavy Rescue-8 was going to be attempting an entry to see if they could make contact with anyone else inside the ship. Then we received word about a fire breaking out and the plan was put on hold. We had halted operations, having rescued 20 of the 24 people aboard. I would learn later that day that our Coast Guard vessel sustained damage as the team maintained station alongside the GOLDEN RAY so people could embark. I would learn months later the smaller Georgia Department of Natural Resources boat also sustained damage during the night. It was clear, on scene initiative and sound judgment were being used by all, as we continued the mission despite damage to our equipment and some level of risk to our personnel.

Arrival and Initial Observations (Slide 5)

I arrived in the Brunswick area just prior to sunrise, but could see the outline of the vessel on its side as I proceeded to Coast Guard Station Brunswick. Once there, I received a brief update from the Station's second in charge, spoke with some of our crew and saw a number of the rescued crew from the ship as they gathered in the Station's training room. I also met with Commander Witt, Lieutenant Heflin, and a Marine Surveyor, Captain Jerome Pereira. The four of us took a boat out to the scene for an initial assessment, arriving at the scene around 07:30 in the morning. As we neared the vessel we could see and smell smoke; the odor made me think it was burning plastic of some sort. We could also smell some diesel fuel on the water and observed sheening already coming from the vessel. We could also hear the sounds of large crashes inside the hull every few minutes. We believed those noises to be the sounds of cargo falling to the port side as the tie-down systems continued to fail. We also stopped during this trip to speak with executives from the Georgia Ports Authority who were at the pier on St. Simons Island. Commander Witt was able to discuss the Port closure and impacts. We then returned to the GOLDEN RAY, noting what appeared to be the ship's movement toward buoy 19. We were not sure if this was just an optical illusion as the ship continued to roll to port (nearing 90 degrees) or if there was some level of buoyancy left in the ship and as the tide was going out

the GOLDEN RAY might be moving with it. Our greatest concern was that it would roll or slide into the main ship channel, further making the rescue of the four remaining crew a challenge and possibly cutting off the Port of Brunswick for months. We asked the tug to move back to the position on the stern to try to stop the movement and they immediately moved the tug back to the stern pushing to steady the ship in place. We then moved closer to observe and listen for any signs of life, Captain Pereira commenced knocking on the vessel's hull in hopes of hearing some sort of reply from the men stranded inside. We continued to hear an occasional crash. In the nearly two hours we were on scene that morning, we observed the vessel continue its roll maybe 5-10 degrees further to port, to the point that the port side vents became submerged, when they were completely visible on arrival. We also observed the lifeboat self launch from the stern of the vessel it it became submerged. By the time we returned to the Station there were salvage experts interviewing crew, one of the rescue swimmers had made his way to the Station to provide his insights and observations. The Korean Consulate in Atlanta sent Korean diplomats to care for their citizens. We moved to the developing Incident Command Post where a Unified Command was being set up to deal with ongoing responses to the four crew, environmental pollution, and eventual removal of the vessel.

Developing Rescue Plan (Slide 6)

When we initially met as a Unified Command, there was a great deal of doubt concerning any remaining survivors, at that point, we had not heard about tapping back on the hull of the vessel, but at some point that evening word was relayed that there was at least one survivor and likely more, based on two possible locations of responses. This is where our Coast Guard capabilities started to take a back seat to the capabilities, experience, and expertise of the salvors, marine engineers, and consultants. Through the night, teams from Donjon-SMIT with assistance from other companies, developed a plan to access the hull of the ship to locate the individuals and begin communication, supply fresh air, water, food, and eventually await equipment to cut them out. I oversimplify here, because it is not an area of expertise for me. The location of the access point had to be precisely located to allow for movement and access around the ship's fuel tanks and other obstructions that would be on the bottom of the ship. The Salvage Master - Sylvia Tervoort of SMIT Salvage led the effort and with Doug Martin of Donjon-SMIT, they coordinated the involvement of at least a dozen other companies to make this rescue happen. All were now energized by the knowledge that we were dealing with at least one life inside the GOLDEN RAY awaiting our assistance, and we all hoped it was four.

Executing Rescue Plan (Slide 7)

The next morning Lieutenant Heflin and I met at Saint Simons Airport. Lieutenant Heflin had sought Coast Guard aviation support to move the initial team out to the GOLDEN RAY. Mr. Doug Martin, Donjon-SMIT and Mr. Tim Ferris, Defiant Marine briefed a team of roughly six members of Elevated Safety who would perform the initial set up aboard the ship, securing lines and rappelling to the location they would start to access the hull of the ship. There was a good amount of gear and a few people that we would need to deliver to the top (formerly the starboard side) of the GOLDEN RAY. Lieutenant (now Lieutenant Commander) Crystal Barnett, the Pilot in Command along with her aircrew were a part of this briefing and based on the

amount of equipment to be delivered planned to conduct a landing on the horizontal surface. Hearing that team come together to identify and assess risks with the crew from Elevated Safety was outstanding and spoke to the professionalism of all involved, they were intent on saving more lives and managing risks to the responders in the process. The initial contact with the group of three survivors happened about 10:15 on the morning of the 9th. After the bore scope was used another hole was drilled, roughly 2.5 inches in diameter to pass water, food and communicate with survivors. One of the Korean officers was aboard the tug boats and on scene to translate. Fresh air was also forced in by means of a gas powered leaf blower and two more holes were cut. I was called approx 13:00 to recommend we pause the operation and await a cold-cutting apparatus in order to ensure we don't use a torch or something that will cause an explosion, based on atmospheric testing. Again, while this is not my area of expertise, I happened to be in the company of a few experts who had access to health and medical professionals. I understood the need to be careful about creating sparks or flames, but knew if we had people alive in that type of atmosphere there was a great risk that they would expire before we could wait the fourteen hours for the equipment to get on scene. I conferred with the Navy Supervisor of Salvage, Atlantic if the readings we were receiving could support life inside the ship for that amount of time and whether the risks of waiting outweighed the risks of continuing the rescue to remove them from the harmful environment. He and I agreed waiting while the three survivors sat in that atmosphere was not a good option. At the time we surmised there may be some elevated readings at the site of the drilling from that operation, but we did not consider that some of the readings may have been impacted by the use of the gas-powered leaf blower. In the end I asked if they could just keep drilling the 2.5 inch holes in a large enough pattern to connect the dots and create an access. I believe each of those holes was taking about 15 minutes to cut through the nearly inch-thick steel. I understand it became even faster as holes overlapped, but it still took some time. The teams were able to access the first three survivors around 15:00 that same afternoon. We also became aware the fourth was trapped in the engine control room and while rescuers could see him through the fire-proof and explosion-proof glass they could not break through it. The challenge was met with the ingenuity, resourcefulness, and determination of the rescue team, who at this point were nearing exhaustion suffering the effects of operating for even five minutes at a time inside the ship where temperatures were greater than 155 degrees Fahrenheit. Eventually a handheld grinder was used to score the glass and with the aid of an axe they were able to access the Engine Control Room and free the final survivor.

Closing (Slides 8 and 9)

Again, I cannot overstate the outstanding coordination, communication, and collaboration that went into making this such a success from the Search and Rescue aspect. I remain grateful for the federal, state, and local government officials whose teams work, advice, and counsel informed our collective decision making. I'm further grateful for the outstanding work of the industry professionals, from the Pilot of the GOLDEN RAY, to the crew of the GOLDEN RAY for remaining calm in their egress the night before and the last four survivors for maintaining the will to live and presence of mind to move to one of the few places along the bottom of the ship where they could be accessed. We were fortunate to have the vessel's Salvage and Marine

Firefighting provider, Donjon-SMIT on scene to leverage their extensive network of partners to make the rescue complete.

The results of the rescue were a testament to the training and readiness of all involved (Coast Guard, Georgian Department of Natural Resources, Donjon-SMIT, Columbus Marine, Reed Maritime, Moran Towing, Glynn County, Defiant Marine, T&T Salvage, Haz-Mat Special Services, US Fire Pump). That training and readiness was only eclipsed by the individual courage and determination of each individual involved.

While in no way is this be the only outstanding result or interesting aspect of the GOLDEN RAY response, but it WILL always be the most rewarding.

Thank you and I am happy to answer your questions.