STATEMENTS OF U.S. COAST GUARD FIREFIGHTING TEAMS

THAT RESPONDED TO FIRE ON M/V COLUMBIA

ON JUNE 6, 2000

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Scott Self, SN
Jeffrey Rowe, ET2
Gerry Gardner, BM1

SEVEN PAGES TOTAL (INCLUDING COVER)

Scott D Self, SN
07 June 00
CGC Anacapa

On 06 June00 I was part of two fire fighting teams that responded to a possible engine room fire onboard M/V Columbia. Fire team one consisted of ET2 Jeff Rowe and myself (SN Self), fire team two consisted of BM1 Gerry Gardner and SA Scott Lewis.
Once onboard the Columbia we were taken to the area on the car deck where the crew was mustering. Once there we noticed that no one from the Columbia was dressed out or ready to fight the fire, and only a few of them were wearing any type of breathing apparatus (SCBA). We were then introduced to the Chief Mate, who seemed very confused and unaware of the situation and of many of the vital details, next we were taken to the area right outside of the affected space where we noticed that the nonwater tight door was extremely warm. After we looked at the door we went back to the car deck and received the layout of the boat and of the affected space from the Chief Mate, which turned out to be wrong. We examined the floor plan and worked out a plan of how we wanted to attack the fire. Before going back down to the space BM1 asked the Chief Mate about electrical isolation, he said he was not sure so he asked for the Chief Engineer whom was not around, and found out that no one was sure if we had isolation or not, they were only pretty sure.
After talking and deciding that we were comfortable accessing the space to at least open the hatch and take a look, we headed down to the lower deck. Once down there another engineer told that he was "pretty sure" that we had isolation, so we decided to access the space. So SA Lewis opened the door for ET2 Rowe and myself. Once inside we were met with zero visibility and temperatures exceeding 200 degrees. BM1 Gardner followed us in and SA Lewis stayed at the door and kept handing us fire extinguishers as we needed them. ET2 Rowe and I started to spray up into the vents of the panels that were said to have been on fire, approximately two each After that we had them secure the emergency generator so we could take off some of the panels to make sure the fire was out. Once they were secure we started to take off the panels while BM1 and Lewis were changing out OBA canisters. Under the first panel we took off fire flared out and we hit it with a couple more extinguishers and it went out. Shortly after, BM1 and Lewis came down and relieved us so we could change out our canisters.
Once our canisters were changed we had them start to ventilate the space while we tore out more of the panels and breakers. It was then that we noticed that the overhead was extremely hot and we decided to try and remove the panels off of it, and could not. So ET2 Rowe and I decided that we needed to have them start cooling off the car deck directly overhead of us.
Once they started cooling off the car deck, BM1 and SN Lewis came down to relieve us. We stepped on the back deck to cool off, and decided that the biggest threat was taken care of. ET2 Rowe and I waited on the back deck until BM1 Gardner and SN Lewis. The four of us decided that we would check on the space every 15 minutes. After a few checks of the space, SN Lewis and I left to eat, and BM1 Gardner left to talk with the people from the MSO and the captain of the Columbia.

After everyone had eaten, our CO informed us, that we were to stay onboard for the night in case of a reflash. We then talked with the engineers from the Columbia that they would stand watch, and we would stand by in case of a reflash.
We were then given a room for the night and stood by on channel 69 incase of any trouble.

Scott D Self

ET2 Jeffrey L Rowe
USCGC Anacapa (WPB-1335)
08 Jun 00

1 ET2 Jeffrey L. Rowe was one of a four man fire fighting team from the CGC Anacapa that responded to an engine room fire onboard the M/V Columbia with 432 passengers and 62 crewmembers on 06 Jun 00 at approximately 1230L.

Upon arrive to the vessel the Chief Mate escorted myself and the other team members to the affected space which was located on the deck directly below the main car deck approximately center line of the ship. After a quick assessment of the general area around the main non water tight hatch to the compartment we returned to the car deck to be further briefed on the status and/or progress being made to control the fire. The Chief Mates knowledge of the compartment was extremely limited and the overall efforts of the crew to contain or do something about the fire were negligible. A majority of the crewmembers were just standing around the main ladder to the deck below watching while others came and went wearing Scott airpacks with no fire fighting gear. Just from our teams initial assessment of the area we saw no boundaries set. Once on the car deck the Chief Mate showed us a basic diagram of the ship and the compartments We were able to determine that the space had the primary entrance on centerline of the ship and an escape hatch at the far port side of the space. Also according to the Chief Mate the suspected problem was a panel located in the center of the compartment which he also pointed out on the diagram. At this point BM1 Gardner began asking if the power to the compartment had been secured. No crewmember in the area could give us a definite answer to our question. After a few minutes one of the engineers stated "the power has been secured and that nothing should be hot". At this point the other team members and myself stepped back away from the crowd and discussed entering the space. We decided that we would try and open the hatch with a ready fire team ready to enter if possible using portable CO2 bottles due to no power to run fire pumps. BM1 Gardner contacted the Anacapa at this point to pass our intentions. Also we informed the Chief Mate that we would go down and try to access the space.

Myself and SN Self (No. #1 team) were going to enter the compartment first with SA Lewis opening the hatch and BM1 Gardner (No. #2 team) behind us with comms and in case something happened upon our entry. Once we were set up SA Lewis opened the compartment and we began entering compartment. Once inside I began to work to my left but felt what I thought was breakers so we moved back towards the center of the compartment. Due to the thick black smoke we had very little visibility approx. 1-2 feet. SN Self began saying " I see something off to the left" which turned out to be the red lights on the control panel still energized. Still unable to see I could tell it was getting hotter and hotter to our right. As we moved closer in that direction we actually could see flames coming out of the breaker panels, which were, now directly in front of us. Unable to hit the flames with the CO2 directly we began spraying them into the vents at the bottom and also into the vents located in between the panels. I would guess that we expended approximately 4 to 6 bottles of CO2 to extinguish. Once initial fire seemed to be under control we told one of the engineers we needed to secure the emergency generator so we could get into the breaker panels without the risk of getting shocked. At this point the No. #2 team set an initial reflash watch while myself and SN Self went up to refresh our OBA canisters. Once back down the No. 2 team went up. About this same time they secured the emergency generator and we began opening the center breaker panel. Once we had it unscrewed we snatched it down and several of the breakers fell out with the panel glowing red. Within seconds the inside of the panel reflashed and was engulfed in flames. Once again we knocked it back down with CO2 And continued removing all of the three-affected panel covers and removing all the hot breakers.

Around this time the No. 2 team relieved us. We passed to them what we had been trying to do and that there were still a couple more panels to remove. Sometime during the next thirty minutes the No. 2 team started trying to naturally ventilate the space using the escape hatch. When we returned to the space the third time the space seemed to be well ventilated but still allot hotter than what it should have been. After looking around the compartment we found the overhead to be extremely hot still at which point we told one of the crewmembers we needed to check the car deck and if possible to start cooling it. We attempted to tear out the overhead but due to the steal grating and the amount of screws holding it up it was impossible. Around this time the No.2 fire team relieved us once again. During this entire time we only received help from two crewmembers which were wearing scott airpacks with no FFE. While up taking a break the MSO, AML Engineer and State Fire Instructor, Mr. Brevik arrived onscene. Upon returning to the space the No. 2 team told us that Mr. Brevik wanted us to run some tests for him in the compartment. After checking the temperature in various locations in the compartment we discovered the overhead was still around 160 degrees and he requested that we remain in the compartment for reflash until the temperature lowered. After approximately 30 minutes SN Self and myself exited the compartment.

At this point BM1 Gardner and myself discussed possible options for setting up reflash watches. Due to the amount of OBA canisters we were expending and four extremely fatigued team members, we realized we were going to need to request help from the M/V Columbia crew for reflash watches. Around this time Mr. Brevik retested the space and let us know the overhead temperature had dropped below 135 degrees and the O2 level was 21%. Mr. Brevik mentioned he was heading to the bridge to brief the captain so BM1 Gardner accompanied him to the bridge to discuss possible watch schedules or our return to the CGC Anacapa. At this point we began making fifteen minute rounds of the compartment while also shifting turns going up to eat. BM1 Gardner returned from the bridge and informed our team that we would be remaining onboard until our arrival into Juneau, AK the following morning. He also stated that the crew would handle the fifteen minute rounds throughout the night but we would be readily available if our assistance was needed. The night passed with no further assistance or problems.

ET2 Jeffrey L. Rowe

ET2 Jeff. L. Rowe

Gerald J. Gardner, BM1
07 Jun 2000
USCGC Anacapa (WPB-1335)

On 06 Jun 2000 I was part of a Two team (four man – 2 men per team) fire fighting team sent over from CGC Anacapa to fight a Engine room fire onboard the M/V Columbia (a Alaska State Ferry with 452 passengers aboard). When we got onboard we made contact with the "Chief Mate" for a SITREP, he was the Onseen Commander, I asked if we had charged fire hoses? He said we did not and couldn't because we were on emergency power and could not energize the fire main system. I then asked if we had Electrical Isolation? He said he didn't know, the team and I talked about what info we had and I called the Cutter to let the CO know what we had.
Then we talked it over as a team and came up with a plan to access the compartment (crack the door) to see if we still had a active fire, and if we did we would close the door until we had hoses.
The chief mate then showed us a floor plan for a compartment that he thought was on fire, but we found out after we entered the space it was not the right plan.
We had to go down a flight of stairs to the lower deck to get to the compartment and as we were going down the latter one of the two engineers that were in the compartment when it caught on fire told us we did have Electrical Isolation in the compartment.
The crew members on the ferry were not dressed out in fire fighting gear, So we talked about what our plan was as a team and I informed the CO on our ship of our plan and that we were the only fire fighters, our CO said ok, but he didn't want us separated-we were to stick together as a team, I said ok.
We descended to the lower deck and energized our OBA's, ET2 Rowe and SN Self entered first after cracking the door with no visible re-flash they entered followed by me BM1 Gardner and SN Lewis who was handing us CO2 fire extinguishers, the compartment was filled with black smoke and we couldn't see the fire (it was hard to see each other and we were two feet apart). And the compartment was extremely hot.
ET2 and SN Self found the glow and the fire on their right side on entering the space and shot CO2 in the vents for the power panels, we estimated the fire to be about 200 degrees because about a hour and half later we measured the temp and it was 160 degrees.
We decided as a team that since we all energized our OBA's and the same time that we better leave the compartment in shifts to keep a team in there at all times, SN Lewis and I left first and changed out our canisters and returned and changed out with ET2 and SN Self.
Upon return we continued to look for fires and found behind a set of circuit breakers red hot coils and the plastic housing for the breakers re-flashed and caught fire (very small flames about 4-6 inches) I hit it with the CO2 I had and asked one of the engineers from the Columbia if we can take those out and he said yes and took a screw driver and pried the first one off and then we changed out with ET2 and SN Self.
By the time we returned ET2 and SN Self had opened most of the panels and overhauled the three affected electrical panels, so we changed out and we opened the rest of the panels and told the engineers from the Columbia to open the escape hatch at the opposite side of the compartment to naturally ventilate and they did without a re-flash.

The next time we changed out with ET2 Rowe and SN Self, we went aft on the ship for cool air and during that time ET2 had suggested that they start to cool the deck above (car deck). So when we returned to change shifts they we cooling the deck and were setting up to power ventilate the space, so SN Lewis and I stood by with fire extinguishers while the Columbia crew energized the blower without incident.
After 15-18 minutes of power venting I exited the space and met Mr. Brevik a fire school instructor from Juneau and gave him a SITREP at that time our alarms for our OBA's went off so we switched with ET2 and SN Self and I told ET2 that Mr. Brevik wanted them to do some test in the compartment, he said ok.
When we returned ET2 said the O2 test was too low for us to be in the compartment without OBA's and the overhead temp was still 160 degrees. Mr. Brevik said he wanted to keep a team down in the compartment at all times until it was safe to be in there without a OBA, ET2 and I were getting concerned with the amount of OBA canisters it would take, so we agreed to call our CO and he agreed.
During this time Mr. Brevik did some more tests and the compartment was now safe to enter without OBA's so I told him we want to get off the Columbia and return to our ship, he said the Captain of Columbia wanted us to stay onboard for the ride back to Juneau. We recommended that the Columbia dress out a fire team of their own to help with the re-flash watch.
The Captain of the Columbia didn't want to do that instead he wanted us to stay onboard and for us to do all the watches, we decided I should go topside and talk to the MSD personnel and the Captain to discuss our options and the rest of the team would eat some food in shifts, because we were concerned about fatigue and the amount of hours/energy we had already used, when I got to the bridge the LT. From the MSD asked what my rate was and I told him BM1 he said great would you mind giving some chemical tests to the crew I said no I wouldn't mind, so I gave the chemical test to two engineers with negative results, then the LTJG that was with the LT from MSD said he could do it now, So I returned to the lower decks and briefed the rest of the team.

Our CO told us we would make the trip to Juneau on the Columbia so we developed a plan with the engineering dept on Columbia to be on watch/recall with them during the trip back.
We returned safely without incident.

The above statement is true to the best of my knowledge.

Gerald J. Gardner, BM1, USCGC Anacapa