



UNITED STATES COAST GUARD

**REPORT OF INVESTIGATION
INTO THE
LOSS OF LIFE WHILE DIVING FROM THE
SMALL PASSENGER VESSEL H2O BELOW
(O.N. 1 136903), AT THE USS ORISKANY
WRECK DIVE SITE 24 NM SOUTHEAST OF
PENSACOLA, FL ON JUNE 1, 2020**



MISLE ACTIVITY NUMBER: 6966090

U.S. Department of
Homeland Security

United States
Coast Guard



Commandant
United States Coast Guard

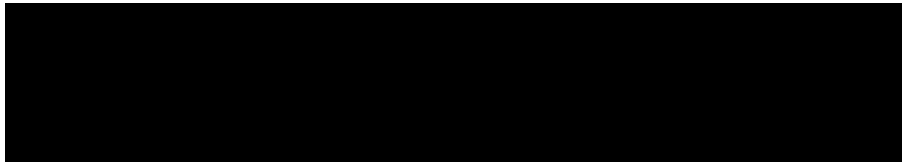
2703 Martin Luther King Jr. Ave SE
Stop 7501
Washington, DC 20593-7501
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16732/IIA # 6966090
15 June 2026

**LOSS OF ONE LIFE WHILE RECREATIONALLY DIVING FROM THE SMALL
PASSENGER VESSEL H2O BELOW (O.N. 1136903) AT THE USS ORISKANY WRECK
DIVE SITE 24 NAUTICAL MILES SOUTHEAST OF PENSACOLA, FLORIDA
ON JUNE 1, 2020**

ACTION BY THE COMMANDANT

The record and the report of investigation completed for this marine casualty have been reviewed by the Office of Investigations & Casualty Analysis. The record and the report, including the findings of fact, analyses, and conclusions are approved. This marine casualty investigation is closed.



E. B. SAMMS
Captain, U.S. Coast Guard
Office of Investigations & Casualty Analysis (CG-INV)



16732

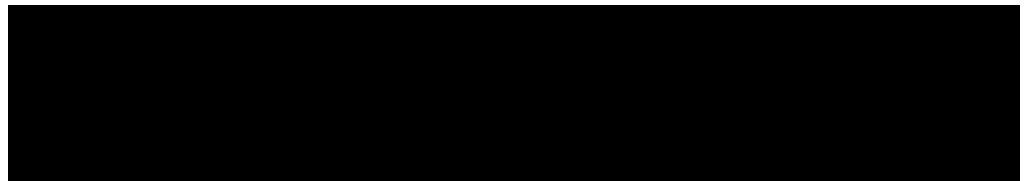
**COMMERCIAL DIVE VESSEL H2O BELOW (O.N. 1136903), PASSENGER LOSS OF
LIFE AT USS ORISKANY WRECK 24 NM SOUTHEAST OF PENSACOLA, FL ON
JUNE 1, 2020**

**ENDORSEMENT BY THE COMMANDER,
COAST GUARD HEARTLAND DISTRICT**

The record and the report of the investigation convened for the subject casualty have been reviewed. The record and the report, including the findings of fact, analysis, conclusions, and recommendations are approved. It is recommended that this marine casualty investigation be closed.

COMMENTS ON THE REPORT

1. I extend my deepest condolences to the family and friends of the diver who lost his life in this tragic accident.
2. Due to the age of this investigation, key evidence, such as the Nitrox and/or Air tanks, was unavailable. The Coast Guard is unable to rule out equipment failure or nitrogen narcosis as potential causal factors in this investigation.
3. The investigation and report contain valuable information which can be used to address the factors that contributed to this marine casualty and prevent similar incidents from occurring in the future.



J. B. WHEELER
Captain, U.S. Coast Guard
Chief of Prevention
Coast Guard Heartland District
By Direction



16732

DEC 04 2023

**COMMERCIAL DIVE VESSEL H2O BELOW (O.N. 1136903), PASSENGER LOSS OF
LIFE AT USS ORISKANY WRECK 24 NM SOUTHEAST OF PENSACOLA, FL ON
JUNE 1, 2020**

**ENDORSEMENT BY THE COMMANDER,
EIGHTH COAST GUARD DISTRICT**

The record and the report of the investigation convened for the subject casualty have been reviewed. The record and the report, including the findings of fact, analysis, conclusions, and recommendations are approved. It is recommended that this marine casualty investigation be closed.

COMMENTS ON THE REPORT

1. This loss of a passenger was a tragic accident. I offer my sincere condolences to the family and friends of the person who lost their life.
2. The investigation and report contain valuable information which can be used to address the factors that contributed to this marine casualty, and prevent similar incidents from occurring in the future.



A. H. MOORE, JR.
Captain, U.S. Coast Guard
Chief of Prevention
Eighth Coast Guard District
By Direction



16732
03 Mar, 2026

**LOSS OF LIFE WHILE DIVING FROM THE SMALL PASSENGER VESSEL H2O
BELOW (O.N. 1136903), AT THE USS ORISKANY WRECK DIVE SITE 24 NM
SOUTHEAST OF PENSACOLA, FL ON JUNE 1, 2020**

ENDORSEMENT BY THE OFFICER IN CHARGE, MARINE INSPECTION

The record and the report of the investigation convened for the subject casualty have been reviewed. The record and the report, including the findings of fact, analysis, conclusions, and recommendations are approved subject to the following comments. It is recommended that this marine casualty investigation be closed.



Michael O. Vega
Captain, U.S. Coast Guard
Officer in Charge, Marine Inspection

Enclosures: (1) Executive Summary
(2) Investigating Officer's Report



16732
03 Mar, 2026

**LOSS OF LIFE WHILE DIVING FROM THE SMALL PASSENGER VESSEL H2O
BELOW (O.N. 1136903), AT THE USS ORISKANY WRECK DIVE SITE 24 NM
SOUTHEAST OF PENSACOLA, FL ON JUNE 1, 2020**

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

On June 1, 2020, at approximately 0815, the 36-foot United States-flagged commercial dive vessel, H2O BELOW, departed from its dock in Pensacola, Florida, with the Master, Deckhand (also serving as the Dive Master), and five passengers onboard. The purpose of the trip was to conduct dive operations at the USS ORISKANY dive site, located approximately 24 nautical miles southeast of Pensacola. While underway, the Master provided a safety briefing to the passengers, which included an overview of emergency drills, hand signals, and the location of life jackets and oxygen kits. At approximately 1040, the vessel arrived at the dive site.

Passenger 1, Passenger 2, and Passenger 3 were dive buddies. All three passengers prepared to commence their technical dives using Hollis Prism 2 closed-circuit rebreather (CCR) systems. At approximately 1050, the three passengers entered the water, conducted a bubble check, and began their descent to the USS ORISKANY's flight deck, located approximately 130 feet below the surface. Shortly after beginning the dive, Passenger 3 discovered a leaking gauge and returned to the surface, leaving Passengers 1 and 2 to continue the dive. The two divers proceeded to explore the site, descending to a depth of approximately 183.7 feet.

From approximately 1139 to 1203, Passenger 1 and Passenger 2 made several rapid changes in depth, including two distinct anomalies. The first anomaly occurred about 50 minutes into the dive, during which both divers made rapid ascents and descents within a five-minute period. The second anomaly occurred 56 minutes into the dive and lasted approximately six minutes and consisted of additional depth changes that ended with a final ascent to the surface.

At approximately 1210, the Master spotted Passengers 1 and 2 at the surface and maneuvered the vessel to their location. With the assistance of others onboard, the Master brought both passengers onto the vessel. Passenger 1 was unresponsive, while Passenger 2 exhibited symptoms of decompression sickness. The Master immediately made way toward Pensacola and contacted the Coast Guard. Passenger 3 administered emergency onboard oxygen to Passenger 2. Meanwhile, the other divers and crew performed CPR on the unconscious Passenger 1. Coast Guard Station Pensacola deployed a CG-45 which met the vessel making way back to Pensacola and extracted both injured personnel.

At 1327, Passenger 2 was airlifted to Spring Hill Hospital for hyperbaric treatment, while Passenger 1 was transferred to EMS and pronounced dead on scene.

Through its investigation, the Coast Guard determined the initiating event for this casualty was the death of Passenger 1. The causal factor contributing to this marine casualty was: 1) Failure to adhere with recommended dive computer decompression stops.



16732
03 Mar 2026

**COMMERCIAL DIVE VESSEL H2O BELOW (O.N. 1136903), PASSENGER LOSS
OF LIFE AT USS ORISKANY WRECK 24 NM SOUTHEAST OF PENSACOLA, FL ON
JUNE 1, 2020**

INVESTIGATING OFFICER'S REPORT

1. Preliminary Statement

1.1. This marine casualty investigation was conducted, and this report was submitted in accordance with Title 46, Code of Federal Regulations (CFR), Subpart 4.09, and under the authority of Title 46, United States Code (USC), Chapter 63. Under 46 USC § 6308, no part of a report of a marine casualty investigation, including its findings of fact, opinions, recommendations, deliberations, or conclusions shall be admissible as evidence or subject to discovery in any civil or administrative proceedings, other than an administrative proceeding initiated by the United States.

1.2. No individuals, organizations, or parties were designated a party-in-interest in accordance with 46 CFR Subsection 4.03-10.

1.3. The Coast Guard was the lead agency for all evidence collection activities involving this investigation. No other persons or organizations assisted in this investigation.

1.4. All times listed in this report are in Central Standard Time using a 24-hour format and are approximate.

2. Vessel Involved in the Incident



Figure 1. H2O BELOW moored at South Wind Marina in Pensacola, FL. Source: Sector Mobile IO

Official Name:	H2O BELOW
Identification Number:	1136903 - Official Number
Flag:	United States
Vessel Class/Type/Sub-Type	Small Passenger Vessel/Commercial Dive Vessel
Build Year:	2002
Gross Tonnage:	20 GRT
Length:	36 Feet
Beam/Width:	14 Feet
Draft:	6 Feet
Main/Primary Propulsion:	Diesel Reduction Propulsion
Owner:	
Operator:	

3. Deceased, Missing, and/or Injured Persons

Relationship to Vessel	Sex	Age	Status
Passenger 1	Male	65	Deceased

4. Findings of Fact

4.1. The Incident:

4.1.1. On June 1, 2020, the H2O BELOW was moored in Pensacola, Florida. The five passengers arrived at 0715 and completed their gear checklists, signed liability release and waiver forms, and conducted re-breaths to confirm proper operation of their diving systems.

4.1.2. At 0815, the H2O BELOW departed from South Wind marina in Pensacola, FL and got underway toward the USS ORISKANY dive site with five passengers, the Master, and Deckhand (who was also serving as the Dive Master) onboard. The Master provided a safety brief to include an overview of drills, hand signals, and the location of life jackets and oxygen kits. The Deckhand also provided instructions regarding disembarking and re-embarking the vessel via its travel line system.

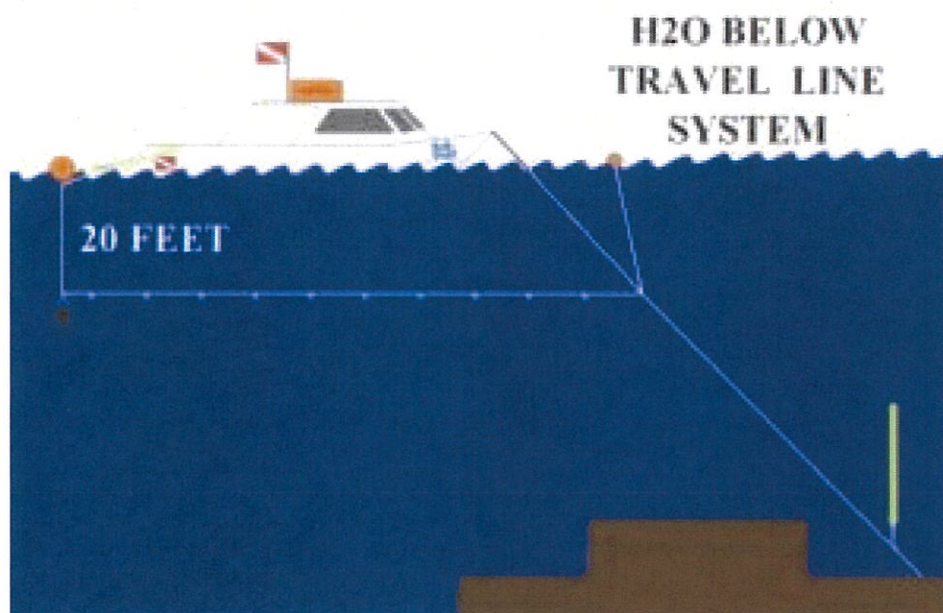


Figure 2: H2O BELOW travel line system retrieved from <https://ussoriskanydiver.com/about/>
Source: Sector Mobile IO

4.1.3. At approximately 1050, Passengers 1, 2, and 3 entered the water with their Hollis PRISM 2 CCR systems. They made their descent to 15 feet below surface level and conducted a pre-dive bubble check to ensure no part of the breathing loop was compromised, damaged, or dislodged during storage, donning, or getting in the water¹. The buddy-assisted bubble check revealed no issues.

4.1.4. At 1055, Passengers 1, 2, and 3 continued their descent down to the USS ORISKANY's flight deck located approximately 130 feet below surface level. At this point, Passenger 3 discovered a leaking gauge on his equipment and signaled to the other

¹ Hollis Inc. *Hollis PRISM 2 Operations Manual, Revision 7*. (2013). Page 87- Skill # 2: In-water Bubble Check.

passengers that he was returning to the superstructure to get out of the current. Passengers 1 and 2 continued their dive.

4.1.5. At the superstructure located 90 feet below surface level, Passenger 3 discovered that his gauge was tangled and in turn loosened the connection. Passenger 3 corrected the issue and decided to re-join Passenger 1 and Passenger 2. Following the dive plan, Passenger 3 followed the deck edge to the elevator opening in hopes of finding the other passengers. Unable to locate the others, Passenger 3 returned to the superstructure, conducted his decompression stop, and returned to the surface for the duration of the trip.

4.1.6. At 1100 after the departure of Passenger 3, Passenger 1 and 2 continued their decent to approximately 183.73ft.

4.1.7. At 1102, Passenger 1 and 2 stayed at an approximate depth of 183.73ft for 20 minutes.

4.1.8. At 1122, Passengers 1 and 2 made an ascent to approximately 137.80ft.

4.1.9. At 1124, Passengers 1 and 2 stayed at an approximate depth of 137.80ft for approximately 8 minutes.

4.1.10. At 1132, Passengers 1 and 2 made an ascent to approximately 127.95ft.

4.1.11. At 1133, Passengers 1 and 2 stayed at an approximate depth of 127.95ft for approximately 6 minutes.

4.1.12. At 1139, Passengers 1 and 2 made a rapid ascent to approximately 98.43ft, a descent to approximately 127.95ft, a rapid ascent to approximately 78.74ft, then a rapid descent to approximately 127.95ft.

4.1.13. At 1144, Passengers 1 and 2 stayed at an approximate depth of 127.95ft for 1 minute.

4.1.14. At 1145, Passengers 1 and 2 made a rapid ascent to approximately 59.05ft, a rapid descent to approximately 124.67ft, and a rapid ascent to the surface, bypassing the decompression stop at 15 meters required by their dive computers.



Figure 3: Passenger 2's USS ORISKANY dive retrieved from his personal dive computer.
Source: Sector Mobile IO

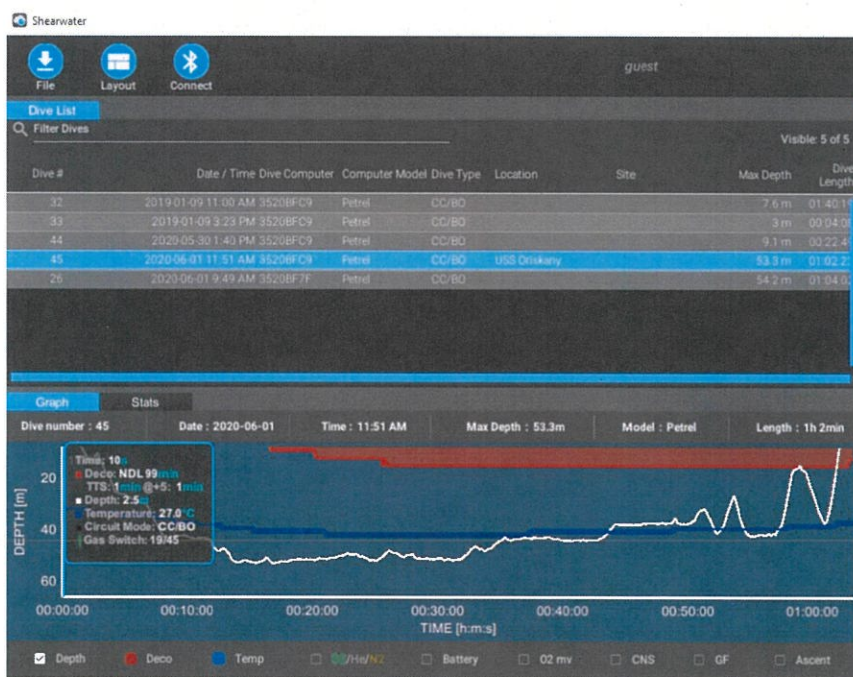


Figure 4: Passenger 1's USS Oriskany Dive retrieved from his personal dive computer.
Source: Sector Mobile IO

4.1.15. At 1210, the Master spotted Passenger 1, Passenger 2, and the deflated surface buoy lying in the water and made way to their position.

4.1.16. At 1212, the Master retrieved both Passengers from the water. Passenger 1 was unresponsive and Passenger 2 exhibited symptoms of decompression sickness. The deckhand and other passengers performed CPR on Passenger 1. Passenger 3 administered oxygen to Passenger 2.

4.1.17. At 1222, the Master notified the Coast Guard that the H2O BELOW was underway, making way at 23 mph to Pensacola Pass with 02 injured passengers, one of which was unconscious. The vessel was 21 nautical miles offshore.

4.1.18. At 1225, Coast Guard Station Pensacola deployed a CG-45 to transfer Passengers 1 and 2 from the H2O BELOW. The on-duty flight doctor was notified and believed both suffered decompression sickness and directed CPR with no more than 10 sec interruptions between compressions for Pax 1.

4.1.19. At 1258, CG-45 arrived on-scene.

4.1.20. At 1306, the CG-45 completed the transfer of the passengers and made way back to Station Pensacola to meet Emergency Medical Services (EMS) with a 20-minute estimated time of arrival.

4.1.21. At 1327, the CG-45 arrived at Station Pensacola and disembarked Passenger 1. Passenger 1 was pronounced dead on scene by EMS. Passenger 2 departed via life flight to Spring Hill Hospital in Mobile, AL. Upon arrival at the hospital, Passenger 2 was evaluated and treated in the hyperbaric chamber.

4.1.22. On June 2, 2020, at 1030, medical examiners at Sacred Heart Hospital of Pensacola, FL performed an autopsy on Passenger 1.

4.1.23. On August 16, 2020, the autopsy report stated the cause of death was arterial gas embolism due to rapid ascent while diving.

4.1.24. The Master and Deckhand aboard the H2O BELOW determined to be directly involved in the incident were subject to mandatory chemical testing for evidence of drug and alcohol use in accordance with 46 CFR 4.06. The Master and Deckhand tested negative for both alcohol and drug use.

4.2. Additional/Supporting Information:

4.2.1. The H2O BELOW is a 36-foot USCG inspected passenger vessel with required minimum manning of one Coast Guard credentialed Master and one Deckhand and is authorized to carry 20 passengers. Its last USCG inspection prior to the casualty was conducted on March 24, 2020. The vessel conducted recreational diving charters in the Gulf of America waters surrounding the Pensacola, Florida area. H2O BELOW specialized in diving charters to the aircraft carrier USS ORISKANY.

4.2.2. The company, Douglas Marine Service, serves as the managing owner of H2O BELOW.

4.2.3. The Master of the H2O BELOW was employed by Douglas Marine Service. He was the holder of a USCG Merchant Mariner Credential and had been a licensed Master for 11 years.

4.2.4. On January 10, 2008, Douglas Marine Service implemented their Oriskany Dive Accident Management Plan which included pre-dive recommendations and emergency procedures for dive operations. This accident management plan was onboard the H2O BELOW and followed by the crew at the time of the incident.

4.2.5. The USS ORISKANY was sunk approximately 24 nautical miles southeast of Pensacola, Florida as an artificial reef in May 2006. She rests upright in 215 feet of water. Scuba diving at the USS ORISKANY is classified as an advanced dive.

4.2.6. Douglas Marine Service requires all divers to either hold an advanced dive certification or have a minimum of 25 dives completed prior to diving at the USS ORISKANY. Each diver is also required to bring the following items for their dive charter: 1) certification card for their specific type of dive, 2) scuba system to include regulator, BC, gauges, 3) dive system to include mask, snorkel, fins, boots, and weight/belt, and 4) two tanks of NITROX or AIR. Dive computers are highly recommended. H2O BELOW charters supplies each diver with a surface marker buoy as an additional safety measure.²

4.2.7. On January 16, 2019, Passenger 1, Passenger 2, and Passenger 3 all attended a Tech60 Dive course in Florida. During this time, they planned a trip to dive at the USS ORISKANY in June 2020.

4.2.8. Passenger 1 was the deceased. Passengers 2 and 3 were his dive buddies.

4.2.9. Passenger 1 was a 65-year-old, 6 ft 2 in, 234-pound male and a certified dive instructor. He also held Tech40 and Tech60 diver certifications. Passenger 1 arrived in Pensacola, FL on May 30, 2020, for a planned dive trip at the USS ORISKANY dive site with Passengers 2 and 3. Upon his arrival, on May 30, 2020, Passenger 1 conducted a pre-dive (check-out dive) to ensure all scuba diving equipment was in good working order and properly fitted.

4.2.10. Passenger 2 was a 56-year-old male who began his dive career in 1987. He was a certified dive instructor and held Tech40 and Tech60 dive certifications. Passenger 2 has conducted over 5,000 dives. On May 25 and 26, 2020, Passenger 2 conducted two pre-dives (check-out dives) to ensure all scuba diving equipment was in good working order and properly fitted. He later arrived at Pensacola, FL on May 31, 2020, for the planned dive trip at the USS ORISKANY with Passengers 1 and 3. Prior to the incident, Passenger 2 conducted over 60 dives in the past twelve months.

4.2.11. Passenger 3 was a 71-year-old male and a certified dive instructor. He held a Tech60 dive certification. Passenger 3 arrived at Pensacola, FL on May 30, 2020, for a planned dive trip at the USS ORISKANY dive site with Passengers 1 and 2. Upon his arrival, on May 30, 2020, Passenger 3 conducted a pre-dive (check-out dive) to ensure all scuba diving equipment was in good working order and properly fitted.

² Information retrieved from H2O BELOW charters website <https://ussoriskanydiver.com/services/uss-oriskany/>.

4.2.12. Passengers 1, Passenger 2, and Passenger 3 personally owned and brought their scuba gear equipment from Blue Octopus Dive Shop in Alexandria, VA. The Blue Octopus Dive Shop was co-owned by both Passenger 1 and Passenger 3. It also served as Passenger 2's place of employment from September 2017 through January 2019.

4.2.13. Passengers 1, 2, and 3 utilized Hollis PRISM 2 CCR systems. Two gas supplies (diluent and oxygen) are required for CCR systems. Each Hollis PRISM 2 system also consisted of counter-lungs and a scrubber and four bottles (oxygen, diluent cylinder, bail-out bottle, and deco bottle).

4.2.14. The Hollis PRISM 2 CCR systems function by recirculating the gas that divers breathe. In a CCR system, the circular path gas takes are referred to as the loop. The gas flows from the counter-lung that contracts when a diver inhales and expands when a diver exhales. As a diver inhales, fresh gas from the counter-lung flows through the inhalation hose on the left then through the exhalation hose on the right. The gas then flows from the exhalation hose into another counter-lung and then into the scrubber which removes carbon dioxide waste as the gas passes through it.³

4.2.15. Pre-dive checks are required when utilizing a rebreather system and are crucial to perform before every dive.

4.2.16. An in-water bubble check is a critical task to perform upon entering the water for an underwater dive. During this evolution, the dive buddy will check for any sign of water leaking into the breathing loop and inside the scrubber. At this time, the diver must also check their mouthpiece, hoses, and counter lungs.⁴

5. Analysis

5.1. *Failure to Adhere with Recommended Dive Computer Decompression stops.* According to passenger 1's recorded dive history, he did not complete his dive computers recommended decompression stop at approximately 15 meters prior to surfacing. Passenger 1 conducted a dive lasting 1 hour and 2 minutes that included rapid changes in depth. Passenger 2, who conducted the same dive profile, surfaced exhibiting symptoms of decompression sickness and was subsequently treated in a hyperbaric chamber. Dive computers are essential tools designed to enhance diver safety by calculating ascent profiles and reducing the risks of decompression sickness. These devices track depth and dive duration and apply decompression models to estimate nitrogen absorption in the body during a dive. As divers descend deeper, nitrogen levels increase and require controlled ascent, and decompression stops to allow safe release from the tissues. By failing to complete the decompression stop indicated by the dive computer, Passenger 1 surfaced without allowing for sufficient time for inert gas to be safely released from body tissues. If passenger 1 had completed the dive computer's recommended decompression stop prior to surfacing, it is probable that Passenger 1 may not have suffered decompression sickness and a subsequent loss of life.

³ Information provided in 4.2.14 and 4.2.15 was retrieved from the PADI Rebreather & Advanced Rebreather Diver Course Instructor Guide, section III. Basic Function of CCRs.

⁴ Hollis Inc. *Hollis PRISM 2 Operations Manual, Revision 7.* (2013). Page 87- Skill # 2: In-water Bubble Check.

6. Conclusions

6.1. Determination of Cause:

6.1.1. The initiating event for this casualty was the death of Passenger 1. The causal factor leading to this event was:

6.1.1.1. Failure to adhere with recommended dive computer decompression stops.

6.2. Evidence of Act(s) or Violation(s) of Law by Any Coast Guard Credentialed Mariner Subject to Action under 46 USC Chapter 77: This investigation did not identify any evidence of acts by any Coast Guard credentialed mariners subject to action under 46 USC Chapter 77.

6.3. Evidence of Act(s) or Violation(s) of Law by U.S. Coast Guard Personnel, or any other person: This investigation did not identify any evidence of acts or violations of law by U.S. Coast Guard Personnel, or any other person.

6.4. Evidence of Act(s) Subject to Civil Penalty: This investigation did not identify any evidence of acts that would warrant a civil penalty.

6.5. Evidence of Criminal Act(s): This investigation did not identify violations of criminal law.

6.6. Need for New or Amended U.S. Law or Regulation: This investigation identified no matters needing new or amended U.S. law or regulation.

6.7. Unsafe Actions or Conditions that Were Not Causal Factors: None.

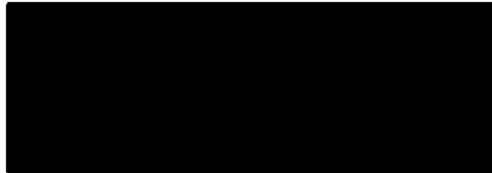
7. Actions Taken Since the Incident

7.1. No actions taken.

8. Recommendations

8.1. Safety Recommendation: There were no proposed actions to add new or amend existing U.S. law or regulations, international requirements, industry standards, or U.S. Coast Guard policies and procedures as part of this investigation.

8.2. Administrative Recommendations: No recommendations.



Lieutenant, U.S. Coast Guard
Investigating Officer