

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD

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Investigation of:

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FIRE ON BOARD THE *ISLAND LADY*
PORT RICHEY, FLORIDA
JANUARY 14, 2018

ACCIDENT NO.: DCA18FM010

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Interview of: MARK FALCONE
Owner's husband and
Fill-in captain

Wednesday,
January 24, 2018

APPEARANCES:

CWO [REDACTED]
U.S. Coast Guard

[REDACTED]
U.S. Coast Guard (Civilian)

BRIAN YOUNG, Senior Marine Engineer
National Transportation Safety Board

BETH FIFER, Company Representative
Tropical Breeze Casino

STACY FALCONE, Company Representative
Tropical Breeze Casino

JAMES CARLSON, Attorney
Hamilton, Miller & Birthisel

I N D E X

<u>ITEM</u>	<u>PAGE</u>
Interview of Mark Falcone:	
By CWO [REDACTED]	4
By Mr. [REDACTED]	18
By CWO [REDACTED]	30

I N T E R V I E W

1
2 CWO [REDACTED] I'm with U.S. Coast Guard. [REDACTED] [REDACTED] he's
3 also with the U.S. Coast Guard. We are going to conduct an
4 interview regarding the vessel fire on the *Island Lady*. We are
5 going to tape record. It will be taped. That way we don't have
6 to write everything down and we can listen to your answers.

INTERVIEW OF MARK FALCONE

7
8 BY CWO [REDACTED]

9 Q. One thing, what's the last -- your last name, what's the
10 spelling, sir?

11 A. It's Falcone; F, as in Frank, a-l-c-o-n-e.

12 Q. Okay. And, sir, can you give me your position at SunCruz?

13 A. Owner's husband.

14 Q. Okay. Owner's -- fair enough. That's a good title.

15 A. I pretty much -- I do a little bit of everything. Take care
16 of the slot machines and overlook the operation.

17 Q. Captain?

18 A. Captain, 100-ton captain's license.

19 Q. Yes, sir. And is your license still valid?

20 A. Yes, it is.

21 Q. Okay. And when was the last time you drove the or captained
22 the *Island Lady*?

23 A. I quit driving after the *Miss Virginia* and the problem
24 started, every time I would drive, they would head towards the
25 boat, try to drive me out of the channel. We had reports. They

1 reported to Coast Guard, FWC that the *Island Lady* on Sundays and
2 Thursdays were driving erratic. So I told the wife, I'm not going
3 to be in that spotlight. So I quit driving.

4 Q. So we're talking a couple of months ago, then?

5 A. Yeah, a couple of months. It was probably right after when I
6 run into the building when that cable broke.

7 Q. Okay. And do you recall the date the cable broke?

8 A. No.

9 Q. Okay.

10 A. Back in October, I believe.

11 Q. And that was the last time you drove the *Island Lady*?

12 A. If they needed me to drive, if they were off, if they needed
13 a day off or something like that, I would fill -- I would be like
14 the fill-in captain.

15 Q. Okay.

16 A. What was happening, like Sundays, I would go to church in the
17 morning. I would rush over to get the boat, get it ready. Then
18 10:00, park the boat, come back at 12:00, do inventory. It was
19 just crazy, you know. It was just too hectic, because it cut into
20 my church day and everything else. I like going to church on
21 Sundays though. That was my day to drive, so I told her, you
22 know, it ain't worth it, you know, you got to put God first.

23 Q. Yes, sir. How much experience or how much interaction did
24 you have in the maintenance of the vessel?

25 A. Maintenance? I had my engineers, would take care of all the

1 oil changes and take care of most -- you know, anything needing to
2 be done. But if it was something more major, say, intercooler or
3 something they needed help with, they would get clogged up -- you
4 know, you would notice if it started running a little bit warmer
5 than usual, then we would go ahead and clean out the intercoolers
6 and stuff like that, you know. If they needed help with that, I
7 would help them.

8 Q. Okay. Would you and your engineers perform that maintenance
9 or did you ever call in maintenance, outside maintenance?

10 A. Well, we started out with outside maintenance. Yeah, we
11 would call Wayne from Detroit Diesel if we wasn't sure about
12 something. So, you know, it was a learning process for all of us,
13 you know, learn about intercoolers and stuff like that.

14 Q. Uh-huh.

15 A. If it was anything major, you would, yeah, of course, you
16 know, call somebody like Caterpillar.

17 Q. So specifically for the *Island Lady*, I think you had the
18 boat, what, approximately 2 years now?

19 A. Probably 3 years. How long?

20 Q. Three years?

21 A. Only 2?

22 Q. Two years?

23 A. It had to been longer than that no? Two years?

24 Q. I thought it was November of 2015. And was all the
25 maintenance performed in-house in those last 2 years or did you

1 ever call in, you know, tech, technicians?

2 A. Usually pretty much in-house because, you know, it's always
3 -- maybe a water pump or something you would change out.

4 Q. And would you do -- did you ever have cause to do a tune-up
5 or an injector changeout?

6 A. Oh, yeah. We've done that before, yeah.

7 Q. And you would do that in-house?

8 A. In-house.

9 Q. Okay. You and your engineers?

10 A. We had Caterpillar out to, you know, look at the motors and
11 stuff to make sure they were up to par.

12 Q. Do you remember the last time Caterpillar was out?

13 A. No. I don't recall.

14 Q. Less than a year?

15 A. I don't think so. It was probably about a year ago.

16 Q. Okay. And would you just use one Caterpillar dealership or
17 technician?

18 A. If we had to order parts or something, whoever had the parts.

19 Q. So who is your distributor locally?

20 A. We use Brookville; Tampa is close.

21 Q. Is that a Ring Power --

22 A. I think they're -- Ring Power.

23 Q. Always a Ring Power dealer?

24 A. Always Ring Power.

25 Q. Okay. And do you recall the last maintenance or any job that

1 was performed in the engine room --

2 A. No.

3 Q. -- on the *Island Lady*?

4 A. I try not -- you know, I'm busy with like taking care of slot
5 machines and keeping the machines up and running. So that's what
6 I had my engineers and mechanics, you know, would take care
7 basically anything in there.

8 Q. Would the engineers or the captains, would they ever notify
9 you if there was a problem?

10 A. Yeah, they would if there was a problem. Sure, they would
11 notify us. Usually the wife.

12 Q. So Stacy would be notified?

13 A. Normally Stacy would get -- she's, you know, pretty much --
14 you know, they would consider her as the boss, the owner, so --

15 Q. Okay. And on the day of the accident were you -- can you
16 describe your day? It was the 14th, I believe, of January.

17 A. I was at the house; I know that. And I got a phone call by
18 my captain saying he was overheating, one of the motors started to
19 overheat. So I instructed him to go ahead and try to put it in
20 reverse, just in case he had something caught up in the sea
21 strainer, because sometimes you could get seaweed or maybe a bag
22 or something up in there.

23 I believe he tried to back her up and it just, you know, it
24 was still hot and it was overheating, he said. So he idled it
25 down and the temperature wasn't dropping, so he said he's going to

1 turn around and come back to the dock. So I said, well, I'll meet
2 you at the dock. You know, normal thing is you go ahead and
3 change out an impeller and off you go.

4 I was heading down Grand Boulevard, I believe my wife called
5 and she said the boat is burning up. I just lost it, you know.
6 Because I seen smoke. And I'm saying that's not my boat; that
7 can't be my boat, you know. Because it looked like it was over
8 more. Then when she told me that, I just lost it. You know, I'm
9 like, why us, you know? Why do these things happen to us, you
10 know? I was just, you know, emotional, you know.

11 So then I got to the dock. My son come down and we went out
12 in a little boat and it was just -- by that time everybody was off
13 the boat. I made it to the site. They wouldn't let nobody in.
14 They wouldn't let family members in. I told them I was an owner.
15 They put my son in handcuffs, threw him in a car because we were
16 trying to help out passengers and customers, you know, and
17 employees.

18 Just the way they handled it, I felt -- you know, I know it's
19 an investigation and all that, but just the way they handled it.
20 Wouldn't let people leave there, be with their family members or
21 anything, you know, I thought it was wrong myself. But it's an
22 investigation. I understand that. So -- I just felt like I
23 wasn't treated properly myself.

24 Q. Was this on the land side or were you still on the boat?

25 A. This was where the boat -- right there when all the police

1 and ambulances all that, yeah.

2 Q. Did you take the small boat and, let's say, beach it or, you
3 know, pull it up to land and then get off?

4 A. No. I went up around, come up on land a little bit. I seen
5 everybody was already off the boat, everybody was up on land.

6 Q. And then you walked over there to --

7 A. No.

8 Q. No?

9 A. Took the boat back to the dock, got in my car and drove in.

10 Q. I see. Okay.

11 A. And that's when I was met with like the Gestapos, you know.

12 And one woman cop was just pushing me and pushing me. I'm like,

13 it's my boat, you know, I'm trying to help the people. You guys

14 are keeping them hostage here. They're wet. They got

15 hyperthermia and, you know, it was just a bad -- the whole scene

16 was just a bad scene, you know, and --

17 Q. Okay. And at what point -- when you got waterside, when you

18 saw the *Island Lady*, how far engulfed was the boat or was it over

19 with? I don't know.

20 A. It was pretty much gone. It was down to the waterline, and

21 just --

22 Q. So there was no pilothouse left? There was no upper deck

23 left?

24 A. I don't believe -- I don't -- I just know it was just pretty

25 much gone.

1 Q. Okay. Going back to a discussion with the captain, I know
2 you said he -- he said that the engine overheated and you gave him
3 some instruction to try and possibly clear a sea strainer
4 obstruction. Did he indicate why it was overheating or why he
5 thought it was overheating?

6 A. No.

7 Q. Or did he say it was smoking?

8 A. He just said it was overheating.

9 Q. Okay.

10 A. I believe he said an alarm went off, you know, that it was
11 overheating.

12 Q. Okay. Did you only have one phone call with the captain that
13 day?

14 A. I believe so. I don't recall, but I do believe so.

15 Q. Okay. Subsequently, in the -- almost, you know, a week after
16 here, has the captain ever indicated why he thought the boat
17 caught fire?

18 A. No.

19 Q. Or has any employee indicated why they thought the vessel
20 caught fires?

21 A. Not at all.

22 Q. Do you have an opinion?

23 A. The only thing I could think, maybe a fuel line, maybe, a hot
24 pressure fuel line was just (makes sound), like a mist. Because
25 that thing, looking at the video, went up so quickly. I mean,

1 that was a very well-maintained vessel. I mean, even the Coast
2 Guard when they would come there and do their inspections, they
3 used that vessel as like a role model. Because I know Tampa is a
4 training facility.

5 Q. Yes, sir.

6 A. I even went down there one time with it there -- supposed to
7 be inspected topside and they were down there and they were taking
8 pictures and looking. I'm like, what are you -- they said, oh,
9 we're just -- we're training and this is such a well-kept vessel
10 that, you know, we're showing some of these. And they said, well,
11 we'll go back up, you know, and -- but it was a very well-
12 maintained vessel. I mean, it was a great vessel. I mean, we
13 enjoyed it and, looking at the way that thing went up, I would
14 never -- I don't think I would ever buy a wooden boat. And I see
15 why you guys don't look so lightly on them, because when they
16 burn, they burn.

17 Q. They're very difficult to put out, that's for sure.

18 A. Well, I'm just saying that the time that it went up so
19 quickly --

20 Q. Yes, sir.

21 A. -- it just blows my mind. I would never imagine it would go
22 up that quick.

23 Q. Yes, sir.

24 A. It was like a dried-out Christmas tree.

25 Q. Yes, sir. Do you have any photographs of the engine room?

1 A. I don't.

2 Q. No. Okay.

3 A. The Coast Guard would have them because they were taking
4 plenty of pictures.

5 MR. [REDACTED] When were they taking pictures; do you remember?
6 What they (indiscernible)?

7 MR. FALCONE: Probably last year when they were -- you know,
8 for an inspection.

9 MR. [REDACTED] Do you remember any names associated with that
10 visit?

11 MR. FALCONE: I'm trying to think. The one guy that's got
12 the neck problem, had some operations and stuff. He's a civilian
13 now.

14 MR. [REDACTED] Describe the (indiscernible) --

15 MR. FALCONE: Older guy, older gentleman.

16 MR. [REDACTED] Kevin Austin (ph.).

17 MR. FALCONE: Kevin, yeah. Very nice guy, super nice guy,
18 and he would train these young guys and all and --

19 BY CWO [REDACTED]

20 Q. Okay. So we discussed service, the engine service, the Cat
21 service generators. I know I didn't ask specifically about them,
22 but had they been serviced recently or any casualties or issues
23 with them?

24 A. No casualties. I know when they did an inspection they
25 required us to put a Racor filter, they wanted us to put the bowl

1 underneath.

2 Q. Yes, sir. The bowl, yeah, the stainless-steel bowl?

3 A. That's right a stainless steel. I practically -- I had a dog
4 bowl, I had made one. They said, no, we want -- it's got to be
5 the new one. So we went out and bought a brand-new Racor. Didn't
6 come that way, so, you know -- passed before with that, but we did
7 it.

8 Q. Yeah. It's used for impact, so --

9 A. Right. So we put that on there, but -- no, they were good,
10 good generators.

11 Q. Uh-huh.

12 A. One was a main one and one was like a backup generator, in
13 case one went down, we would always have a backup on there.

14 Q. Yes, sir. Did you track the hours on the engine or do you
15 know anyone if they tracked the hours on the engine?

16 A. Yeah, that would come up on your -- we would scroll -- every
17 trip out, we had a maintenance log -- it was not maintenance. It
18 was log and it had Gauge 1, Gauge 2, Gauge 3, Gauge 4, the engine
19 speed and the load, gallon per hour.

20 So every time we went out, usually at the little bank, the
21 deckhands would go ahead and jot down each on of those. One was
22 engine temp, oil pressure, transmission pressure, and then
23 transmission temperature for each motor. We would just scroll
24 through. So every trip out, every trip back, they were required
25 to do that.

1 Q. Okay.

2 A. So we always had a book like that, that was maintained. I
3 always instructed the captains never run the thing over 80 percent
4 load. You know, I want to save my motors and make them last as
5 long as we can.

6 Q. Right.

7 A. So, we never ran them over 80 percent, you know, on each
8 motor.

9 Q. Where was that log kept?

10 A. Right there in the wheelhouse.

11 Q. Of the boat? Okay.

12 Fixed firefighting system, do you recall the last time it was
13 serviced?

14 A. Had to be with the inspections.

15 Q. Okay. With the Coast Guard inspections?

16 A. Yeah, Coast Guard inspections.

17 Q. Okay.

18 A. They would come out, I'd meet up with them. They go through
19 all the fire system, all the extinguishers. If they were old, I'd
20 tell them just replace them.

21 Q. So the technician would come out and it would coincide with
22 the Coast Guard inspection; is that what you're saying?

23 A. Absolutely, yep.

24 Q. Okay. And do you recall who you hire or who that technician
25 is?

1 A. No. That would go through the office.

2 Q. Okay. Who at the office handles that?

3 A. It would go through Diane. She's a great help at the office.
4 And she would contact Beth. We'd go ahead and line it up for them
5 to come out. They would inspect all the boats and keep them up to
6 date.

7 Q. Okay. Okay. And then --

8 A. Do I get to ask any questions?

9 Q. Yes, sir.

10 A. Just one.

11 Q. The *Tropical Breeze*, same situation, your maintenance is
12 performed generally in-house?

13 A. Absolutely.

14 Q. Okay.

15 CWO [REDACTED] That's it. Thanks.

16 MR. FALCONE: I got a question.

17 CWO [REDACTED] Sure.

18 MR. FALCONE: You guys probably got the autopsy report on
19 that girl. They say she didn't go there for like -- till 10:00 at
20 night. I don't believe the boat fire caused her death, and that's
21 bothering my captain pretty bad. I was wondering if you guys knew
22 anything on that?

23 CWO [REDACTED] The medical examiner still is conducting their
24 investigation and they have not released any information to us,
25 sir.

1 MR. FALCONE: All right.

2 CWO [REDACTED] And it'll be weeks.

3 MR. FALCONE: Because I heard from different people that know
4 people in the hospital and stuff that, you know, you're going to
5 be blown away when you get that autopsy. I just didn't know if
6 you guys knew, and it bothers my captain that someone died.

7 FEMALE SPEAKER: Bothers all of us.

8 MR. FALCONE: Bothers all of us, you know.

9 CWO [REDACTED] Absolutely. I can imagine.

10 MR. FALCONE: And I don't believe it had anything to do with
11 the boat fire.

12 MR. CARLSON: Well, I think part of this investigation, part
13 of litigation that you'll be involved with, we'll have that record
14 in due course.

15 CWO [REDACTED] We always reserve judgment until we actually see
16 the medical examiner's report.

17 MR. FALCONE: Oh, yeah. It just bothers all of us and, you
18 know.

19 CWO [REDACTED] I don't know the answer to that.

20 MR. FALCONE: I got one more question. I'm looking at a
21 boat, fiberglass, how do you look on fiberglass --

22 FEMALE SPEAKER: Let's finish this. We are recording --

23 MR. FALCONE: I'm done.

24 FEMALE SPEAKER: We have -- you're not -- you're done, but
25 you wait till we're done.

1 MR. FALCONE: All right. I was just trying to get an opinion
2 on different vessels, because I'm looking at one.

3 FEMALE SPEAKER: All right. We're still on recording here
4 under an investigation.

5 MR. FALCONE: He said he was done with me.

6 FEMALE SPEAKER: He's done. There's two more people here.

7 MR. FALCONE: Oh, I got this guy. Oh, sorry.

8 MR. [REDACTED] That's okay. I'm [REDACTED] [REDACTED] I'm with the
9 Coast Guard also.

10 MR. FALCONE: How you doing?

11 MR. [REDACTED] I'm well.

12 BY MR. [REDACTED]

13 Q. I'm a civilian employee with the Coast Guard, that's why -- I
14 don't want you to think --

15 A. Lot of civilians.

16 Q. -- I don't want you to think that I didn't put my uniform on
17 or anything.

18 A. All right. I've dealt with a lot of civilians.

19 Q. So, the -- you say you work with -- that your engineers take
20 care of the oil changes and everything.

21 A. I don't normally do oil changes and all that. If they run
22 into a problem with seagrass or something or -- maybe they're
23 getting seagrass into the sea strainers or they need to be
24 replaced, and stuff like with the Coast Guard inspection, they
25 made us replace all the sea strainers on the *Tropical Breeze*, I'll

1 get more involved with stuff like that.

2 Q. Okay. But you say that the engineers do the oil changes,
3 right?

4 A. The engineers, yeah.

5 Q. So who are those folks that do that?

6 A. That would be, what's his name, William Pintye and Josh. I
7 don't know Josh's last name. William, I got from Marchman. We
8 hired him from the school. Figured we'd start looking into the
9 technical schools, you know, we get somebody that knows a little
10 bit about motors.

11 Q. Okay. Then Josh was the other one?

12 A. Josh is the other one. He's very knowledgeable. He worked
13 on a lot of shrimp boats and very knowledgeable, you know, when it
14 comes down to it.

15 Q. Okay. Can we talk about some of the alarms on the boat
16 please? It sounds -- when you were talking earlier about
17 scrolling through --

18 A. Right.

19 Q. -- each vessel has its own system that logs pressures, fuel
20 consumption, et cetera, et cetera, and there's a menu that drives
21 through those.

22 A. Yes, sir.

23 Q. I would imagine each one of those devices for each engine
24 will kick off temperature, pressure alarms, et cetera, et cetera.
25 Is that system a Caterpillar system?

1 A. Yes, sir.

2 Q. Okay. Outside of that system, was there a fire detection
3 system on the vessel?

4 A. I believe so. Yeah.

5 Q. Okay. And that fire detection system, do you know where the
6 fire monitors were that would alert a crew member or somebody
7 operating the vessel where a fire would be?

8 A. My understand, probably them cone-looking things over the
9 motors probably would be the detectors, right?

10 Q. I haven't been in your engine room, so --

11 A. I would think -- they had these cone-looking things that were
12 over top, so they probably would be the ones that would detect it.
13 I'm not a fire guy as far as them systems, how they work. I know
14 they supposed to put the fire out.

15 Q. Okay. But let me differentiate between two different things:
16 a fire extinguishing system and a fire detection system; something
17 that would register either heat or smoke, as opposed to something
18 that would extinguish a fire. And I guess my question is a little
19 more germane to something that would detect heat or smoke. Do you
20 know if there was a system like that on the vessel?

21 A. I believe so, yes.

22 Q. Do you know where those monitors were located on the vessel?

23 A. It would be located in the bridge, in the wheelhouse.

24 Q. Okay. Well, that would be like an alerting station.

25 A. Right.

1 Q. So, if the alert station gets a signal, there's somewhere on
2 the boat that there's going to be a sensor that will detect
3 something and send a signal to that alarm panel. Do you know
4 where the sensors were located?

5 A. I believe they're right over the motor, is my understand,
6 them cone-looking things over top the motors. I'm not a hundred
7 percent how that system works.

8 Q. Okay. In addition to anywhere on the -- in the engine room,
9 do you know if there's any sensors anywhere else on the vessel for
10 that?

11 A. No. I would think they would be in the engine room. We
12 don't have a galley on there, nothing like that. I believe on the
13 -- if we had like a galley where you cook and all, it would
14 probably be one over the stove.

15 Q. Okay. So the alarm, we've identified the sending units and
16 then now we've got the thing that tells you there's an alarm, and
17 you made inference that there's one on the bridge. Can you
18 describe what that looked like or how it operated? Was it a
19 light? Was it an audible alarm? Was it a combination of the
20 both?

21 A. I don't recall. I believe there's an audible. There was a
22 black box over to the right of the wheelhouse. I believe that was
23 part of that fire system.

24 Q. Okay. And that black box, you think it was audible?

25 A. I would believe so.

1 Q. Was there a light or a visual alarm on it?

2 A. I'm not sure. I don't recall.

3 Q. Okay. Have you ever had the opportunity to be present when
4 that system was tested or maintained?

5 A. No, sir.

6 Q. Okay.

7 A. I mean, I've been there with the fire guy when he walked
8 around the boat to check fire extinguishers and all of that. But
9 as far as how that system works, I believe there's a button up
10 there. There was this red button up there that had a cover on it.
11 I'm sure you probably hit that button, it probably send it off.

12 They wouldn't have put a cover on it, right, if they wanted
13 you to hit it.

14 Q. Those units that tell you how many -- or, I'm sorry, those
15 devices for each engine that will tell you oil pressure, rpm, and
16 everything, we can kind of scroll through the menu.

17 A. Uh-huh.

18 Q. They also indicate how many hours on each vessel. Do you
19 recall the hours on each -- I'm sorry, on not the vessel, but the
20 engines. Do you recall ever scrolling through there and seeing
21 how many hours were on the engines?

22 A. I don't recall. I believe they probably will have 10,000
23 maybe. I'm not sure.

24 Q. What would you base that on?

25 A. What would I base what on?

1 Q. 10,000?

2 A. I would just think that's where they were around. We could
3 probably look when we bought the vessel. I believe they were
4 around that area, you know, when we purchased the vessel. It
5 probably would be on that survey sheet.

6 Q. Okay.

7 A. And just that number, for some reason, popped in my head.

8 Q. You said that there were logs on the bridge where a crew
9 member would log -- I think you made reference to rpms, pressure;
10 at certain intervals they would make annotations on certain things
11 that you wanted to observe. Other than the maintenance logs --

12 A. Can we get one of them sheets in here? [REDACTED] probably got
13 it. He prints them out don't, he?

14 Q. We can look at one later. I don't have any questions with
15 what was logged.

16 A. It just jot down your oil pressure, oil temperature,
17 transmission temperature, transmission pressure. It had rpms you
18 were running. It had load.

19 Q. Okay.

20 A. Because we would always -- we always ran them on
21 temperatures. You know, I would put them on load. When I got up
22 on plane, I could see my load.

23 Q. Okay.

24 A. I would just back them down, keep them down below 80 percent
25 load. I would never run the motors 100 percent, none of my

1 captains would. They weren't allowed to, you know. We kept that
2 vessel down at the minimum. So everything was jotted down in them
3 logs on the way out and on the way in. This way we could always
4 monitor how things are working, you know, to keep them up, make
5 sure there's no changes.

6 Q. Okay. So those logs unfortunately burnt up with the vessel.
7 Are there any other logs that were kept shoreside that would show
8 any maintenance done on the vessel, oil changes, changing of
9 hoses, changing of belts, anything done to the engines?

10 A. I believe my engineer would keep something, you know. I
11 should hope so.

12 Q. Buy a new car, you open up the glovebox, the owner's manual
13 is in there: change oil every 3,000 miles, rotate your --

14 A. Burned up too.

15 Q. Okay. So was there -- so you had --

16 A. Oh, yeah, we had the manuals for the 3406. There were
17 manuals for those. The receipts were in there when the motors
18 were bought. I had all that, I mean.

19 Q. Okay. So that was all on the boat?

20 A. (No audible response.)

21 Q. You said when the engines were bought, were they -- when you
22 all -- and I understand this -- the vessel was a recent
23 acquisition for the company, maybe 2, 3 years?

24 A. Right.

25 Q. When you acquired the vessel, the engines came on the vessel

1 too or were they -- was the vessel repowered after --

2 A. That vessel had three motors at one time. Yeah.

3 Q. When you bought the vessel?

4 A. It had two.

5 Q. It had two motors.

6 A. Yeah.

7 Q. And do you recall the types of motors that were on the --

8 A. 3406s. Yeah.

9 Q. Okay. So since the company acquired the vessel, those are
10 still -- those 3406s were the engines that were on the vessel when
11 you acquired the vessel?

12 A. Yes, sir.

13 Q. I know the logs -- you said the engineers have maintenance
14 logs that should help us answer some of these questions I'm
15 asking, but off the cuff, do you remember the last time the water
16 pump impellers were changed?

17 A. No. That's not something I deal with.

18 Q. Have you ever changed a water pump impeller on the --

19 A. I've had before.

20 Q. -- on the *Island Lady*?

21 A. Uh-huh.

22 Q. Can you describe that process?

23 A. Well, you just take the little plate off the back, pull the
24 one impeller out. I think I even looked at one, one time that was
25 all cut up up in there, you know. You pull that out. You slide a

1 new one in. Grease it up a little bit so it slides in nice, put
2 the cover back on.

3 Q. How big is that impeller?

4 A. It's probably like that.

5 Q. So probably a 2-inch, 3-inch diameter?

6 A. I would think so, yeah.

7 Q. It's a rubber impeller?

8 A. Rubber impeller, yeah.

9 Q. Again, I'll preface, I know you're hoping that the mechanics
10 have a log on some of these things, but do you remember the last
11 time the intercoolers were cleaned or maintained?

12 A. No. I think they just do it on a regular basis, you know,
13 preventative maintenance.

14 Q. When you say it was done on preventative maintenance, is
15 there a company policy or anything that establishes what that
16 preventative maintenance is?

17 A. I'm not catching that question.

18 Q. Okay.

19 A. I had an engineer would come in, come in on a daily basis.
20 His job was to maintain the vessels and make sure, you know, the
21 intercoolers were clean and oil changes on a regular basis and --
22 we kept up on them, you know.

23 Q. Okay.

24 A. We don't want the motors to go on us because they're
25 expensive to replace. Now if you ask me about me and my car, that

1 would be different.

2 Q. I think on the day of the accident I think you said that you
3 received a call from your captain. I imagine that's Captain -- I
4 forgot; what was his name? John?

5 A. Michael Batten.

6 Q. Mike?

7 A. Yes, sir.

8 Q. And I think you stated that you told Captain Mike to put the
9 engine in reverse to clear the strainer?

10 A. Try to put it in reverse and see if that would go ahead and
11 bring the temperature down, because sometimes you'll get seagrass
12 caught up in there. Certain times of the year that seagrass gets
13 real bad.

14 Q. Okay. And so, Captain Mike said, hey, boss, put it in
15 reverse, man, it's still overheating?

16 A. I don't think it was a long conversation. I think I just
17 told him: hey, put it in reverse, try that, you know.

18 Q. Okay. Did he say that that worked when you were on the
19 phone?

20 A. I don't really recall what exactly was said because of the
21 emotions when all that took place, it was just every thing just
22 happened so fast then. I know he called me up. I told him try
23 putting it in reverse. He said, well, I'm going to bring it back
24 to the dock. I said that's fine. I'll meet you down there. I
25 got on the road --

1 Q. Okay. Was Captain Mike instructed to leave the engine
2 running, put it in neutral, or to turn the engine off?

3 A. I don't need to instruct Mike on that. My captains are very
4 good captains. They know what to do in a situation.

5 Q. How does the exhaust system work on that vessel; do you know?

6 A. Start the motors up and it blows smoke out the back.

7 Q. Okay. So --

8 A. I'm not sure what you're asking.

9 Q. Well, inside you've got the engine room.

10 A. Uh-huh.

11 Q. And then behind the engine room there's -- and I haven't been
12 on your --

13 A. I got turbo. I think the turbo comes into play there
14 somehow, you know. Right? To cool it?

15 Q. Uh-huh. So I haven't been on your vessel, but from what I
16 understand is, there's a bulkhead in the back of the engine room.
17 Then you have got the lazaret back there. So inside the lazaret,
18 you know, the exhaust will have to go from the engine through that
19 bulkhead and then through the transom of the vessel.

20 A. Right.

21 Q. So that means that there's some components of that exhaust
22 system inside of the lazaret. Do you know the components that are
23 in the lazaret or how that system works? Is it a wet exhaust, a
24 dry exhaust?

25 A. I couldn't tell you.

1 Q. Okay.

2 A. I know Craig's got a lot of pictures. I would think it's a
3 wet exhaust, because I think it blows the water out with the
4 exhaust. So I would think that would be a wet exhaust.

5 Q. And who is [REDACTED]

6 A. [REDACTED] is your Coast Guard guy. He took a lot of pictures and
7 all that.

8 Q. Oh, [REDACTED] [REDACTED]

9 A. Yeah -- oh, [REDACTED] I'm sorry. So I'm not sure as far as how
10 that all -- I know it went through the lazaret. The pipe went
11 through and out the back, out to the boat.

12 Q. Okay. Captain Mike said that there was a camera that he was
13 able to see the engine up in the wheelhouse. Did that camera have
14 any photos from the lazaret that you know of, or was there any
15 cameras in the lazaret?

16 A. It was a 16-camera system, so we put them everywhere we could
17 put them. Mostly to see the other boats coming at you when
18 they're trying to push you out the channel, was one of the main
19 reasons, because of the accusations and all. So I had put a 16-
20 camera system on the boat.

21 In doing so, we put them on the motors. Of course, over your
22 bar you would keep an eye on your cashiers, you know. And the
23 lazaret, there was one in there, I believe. Yeah. So you could
24 see -- there was even one in the tank room so you could see your
25 tanks, you could see your engine room, and you could see your

1 lazaret. I think there was one -- I don't know if it was still in
2 there, I believe in the front -- the department in the front as
3 well.

4 So we had a lot of cameras. We just put them everywhere for
5 our protection, you know, and to keep an eye -- you can see what's
6 going on in your engine room, you know, if you had a problem.

7 So --

8 Q. Okay. So I've seen all different types of camera systems.
9 Was this one that was just locally archived or would that -- those
10 videos get archived for company protection purposes when --

11 A. It didn't have any network where it could get out.

12 Q. Okay.

13 A. But it would constantly 24-hour record and you could get
14 probably a couple weeks up on it.

15 Q. Okay. So nothing external to the vessel to archive any
16 recordings?

17 A. No. I wish I did. It would answer a lot of our questions
18 today, right? I was thinking maybe they should make that
19 something you have to put on these vessels.

20 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: Larger ships they do.

21 MR. FALCONE: Probably in the future maybe, to have something
22 where it records out and that works out and it records.

23 BY CWO [REDACTED]

24 Q. Captain you said you had a 100 ton credential?

25 A. Still do, yes, sir.

1 Q. Still do. And what type of vessels did you operate to get
2 your sea time to get your 100 ton credential?

3 A. I operate -- I'm family, so I operated them all, you know.
4 I've been on all the vessels. So, I mean, as a family member
5 you're in there all the time, you know, operating whatever vessel
6 it is. So, you know --

7 Q. Okay. So you -- did you start off with an operator of
8 uninspected passenger vessel or you just go straight and get the
9 100 ton?

10 A. I started out when I was about probably 12 years old. I had
11 boats my whole life.

12 Q. Okay.

13 A. In New Jersey I started. I had my own personal boats, and
14 when I came to work here, I met my wife on Mr. Lucky boat down in
15 Tarpon Springs, that's where we met. So I have been around boats
16 for a long, long time.

17 Q. Okay. So when you started being a Coast Guard credentialed
18 mariner, the lowest entry level credential is called an operator
19 of uninspected passenger vessels. Sometimes mariners start with
20 those. Did you hold one of those?

21 A. I had to get my six pack.

22 Q. That's a six pack. That's what I'm looking for.

23 A. Six pack, that's what you're looking for?

24 Q. Yeah.

25 A. So I took my six pack and upgrade right to 100 ton because I

1 had the hours and everything I needed, so -- where we going with
2 this one?

3 Q. I'm just trying to -- this is probably the third time I've
4 ever met you. I'm just trying to figure out --

5 A. No, I just -- you know, I'm a very good captain. They'll
6 tell you I'm a naturalist when it comes to a boat. I just don't
7 need the drama of these other boaters. I'm actually a licensed
8 realtor. I'm an NRA instructor, licensed to go ahead and give the
9 gun permits and all that. I got six of the, what do they call
10 that, credentials with the firearms. I just went and took a
11 course for -- to get licensed in pesticides. So, you know, I go
12 to school for a lot of things.

13 Q. So my only thing is I'm just trying to --

14 A. I'm a very educated man.

15 Q. I'm just -- I'm not denying that.

16 A. So, you know ---

17 Q. I'm just trying to find out where -- different people get
18 different experiences to get a Coast Guard credential and you have
19 to have documented sea time. And what I'm trying to find out is
20 -- you need to have sea time on a like vessel --

21 A. Oh, absolutely.

22 Q. -- to get a credential. So when you tested for -- did you
23 test by yourself to get your 100 ton or did you go to a sea
24 school?

25 A. Actually -- I went to sea school and I actually went with

1 another captain I know.

2 Q. Okay. And what type of vessels did you use to document your
3 sea time to upgrade from six pack to 100 ton?

4 A. Probably these vessels right here that we work on. I still
5 don't understand where we're going with this.

6 MR. [REDACTED] Okay. That's all I got, sir.

7 MR. FALCONE: I mean, I'm qualified and I've put the time in.

8 MR. [REDACTED] You got a valid Coast Guard credential.

9 MR. FALCONE: I do.

10 MR. [REDACTED] I'm not saying you're not -- I'm not saying that
11 at all. I'm just trying to find out, substantiate --

12 MR. FALCONE: I worked hard to get there too.

13 MR. [REDACTED] And I'm not denying that, sir.

14 MR. FALCONE: Any questions for me?

15 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: No, sir. I'm good.

16 MR. FALCONE: Anybody else?

17 CWO [REDACTED] Yes, Mark, I got a couple follow-ups.

18 BY CWO [REDACTED]

19 Q. Okay. So Coast Guard inspections. Are you the point of
20 contact for the company or is there someone else at the company?

21 A. No. I'm the point of contact. Yes, sir.

22 Q. Okay. Can you explain that process to me, because I've never
23 been on an inspection on one of your vessels, so just walk me on a
24 normal annual or even a COI on board the *Island Lady* with the
25 Coast Guard.

1 A. They would come on and inspect the whole vessel and just the
2 normal -- usually you got the T book, the book for the T-boats.
3 They go through that checklist on everything that's got to be done
4 as far as your fire extinguishers, of course. They check your
5 engine room. They check your bilges, you know. They check for
6 any -- daisy change is a big one. They don't want to see a bunch
7 of extension cords plugged in. And we usually do the man
8 overboard drill. They take you out and do a man overboard drill,
9 and all that good stuff. You break out the fire hoses make sure
10 they're all working. I mean, they've always been very impressed.

11 I mean, at one time we had inspections, they was so well we
12 didn't have one 835; we took the whole crew out to Hooter's. We
13 had Hooter -- and fried fish sandwiches, all that happy stuff,
14 because we had such a good inspection. Because, you know, we keep
15 up on the vessels and -- and I tell you, I love the T-boats
16 because the K-boat was a nightmare. So if I can stay in the T-
17 boats, that's where I'm going to stay as far as vessels.

18 Q. Did they check, let's say, crew training requirements and
19 conduct drills and interview your crew?

20 A. Oh, absolutely. They want you to have the CPR and all that
21 stuff, and it's really not required. It's a, what do they say,
22 not a requirement it's a suggestion, which -- you know, you learn
23 a lot of that stuff in school, but they want you to have it. So
24 we always send out guys anyway. So we made sure they had their
25 CPR and they got trained on the ADEs and all, which we don't have

1 the ADE, but they got trained on all that stuff. So --

2 Q. And who was in charge of training at Sun cruise?

3 A. As far as?

4 Q. At *Island* -- on board the *Island Lady*.

5 A. As far as for CPR and all that?

6 Q. Crew training, yes, sir. CPR, I believe it's like 50 percent
7 recommended. So CPR, vessel familiarity, flooding, fire, man
8 overboard, abandon ship, all the general emergencies.

9 A. Usually the captains would go over a lot of that with the
10 crew. And then we would have our senior mates would go over a lot
11 of that as well. They would go through their drills and teach
12 them the training and all that as, you know, you get your new ones
13 on board.

14 Q. Uh-huh.

15 A. As far as CPR and all that, that would be right in this room
16 right here. They would come in here and we would have someone
17 come in certified. The last time we had to send a couple out to
18 the Red Cross to get it done because they wanted -- now they want
19 both certificates on one certificate. Can't be one first aid, one
20 CPR; they want them combined. So --

21 Q. Okay. Does anyone at the company track your drills and
22 training that the captains provide?

23 A. They usually keep track on the vessels, you know, of all the
24 drills. A lot of times you'll get -- they were all very good at
25 it. Captain Willy, he's my oldest captain.

1 Q. Uh-huh.

2 A. He would do these called man overboard drills. And I've done
3 them myself actually with Lisa. She had a -- this is funny. She
4 had a birthday party for her kid and they sent balloons up. Well,
5 we're out there on the water and we see these balloons in the
6 water. We don't know that they're hers, you know. So we do our
7 man overboard drills with the balloons and stuff you see out
8 there. You know, and that's how we conduct some of the man
9 overboard, you know. And we'll go ahead and just get that up on
10 board. Our guys will pull it up and all. It was her balloons
11 from the kid's birthday party, you know.

12 And Willy is real good. He used to do a lot of bird rescue.
13 Man, he'd come back with the damndest bird. But there must be
14 like a -- you know, he would consider -- a man overboard drill, he
15 would use that, a bird or a balloon or something, you know.

16 Q. To maneuver --

17 A. They'd throw the life jackets, you know. They'd throw life
18 rings over. So they do them. Mike was good at, very good at it,
19 you know, so --

20 Q. Okay. Going back to the vessel, the exhaust system. Do you
21 recall what the material -- what was the pipe made out of that ran
22 from the transition between the haul, you know, the transom of the
23 vessel through the lazaret and then through the engine room
24 bulkhead and to basically your exhaust manifold? Do you remember
25 what the pipe was made out of, the exhaust pipe?

1 A. No.

2 Q. Fiberglass?

3 A. Looked like it.

4 Q. Did it?

5 A. Looked like a fiberglass material.

6 Q. I think generally, they are fiberglass. But this one -- you
7 would have known if it was stainless steel?

8 A. No.

9 Q. It was not stainless steel?

10 A. No. It looked like fiberglass.

11 Q. Was it black iron?

12 A. No.

13 Q. Steel pipe?

14 A. Didn't look like it.

15 Q. Galvanized? Nothing like -- it looked like fiberglass
16 wrapped?

17 A. Fiberglass, absolutely. I believe it was fiberglass and then
18 it had sections of your wet tube, your wet exhaust.

19 Q. Yes, sir. Can you -- because I've never been on the boat,
20 can you describe the -- like the insulation, turbo, turbo and
21 exhaust exits, you know, to the manifold, was the manifold
22 wrapped?

23 A. I believe it was.

24 Q. Do you recall what --

25 A. I don't recall, but I believe -- I think it's got the regular

1 wrapping, you know.

2 Q. The white fiberglass?

3 A. You know who would be good with that? That guy, what's his
4 name, [REDACTED] or --

5 MR. [REDACTED] [REDACTED]

6 MR. FALCONE: [REDACTED] I got to remember. I keep calling him
7 Craig. I think he's got pictures of all that.

8 BY CWO [REDACTED]

9 Q. But I bet you have way more experience on board this specific
10 vessel.

11 A. Oh, yeah, but I never recall, you know, looking --

12 Q. Was it gray? Was it white? Look like a bandage or did it
13 look like an actual thermal wrap?

14 A. I think it was one of them thermal. I'm not sure. To tell
15 you the truth, I don't really recall because --

16 Q. Okay.

17 A. But I can tell you the exhaust wasn't iron. It wasn't
18 stainless, that I know. It was fiberglass.

19 Q. Yes, sir. Okay. And do you recall, was anything ever
20 superhot back there or maybe not insulated properly?

21 A. No.

22 Q. No?

23 A. That boat was very -- that's why, you know, it's a shock to
24 all of us. That boat was very well-maintained and was nothing hot
25 going on in there.

1 CWO [REDACTED] I think that was it.

2 MR. [REDACTED] The government had a shutdown recently, so we
3 lost another member of our team that came here.

4 MR. FALCONE: Damn Democrats.

5 MR. [REDACTED] So this is Brian Young.

6 MR. YOUNG: How are you?

7 MR. [REDACTED] He's from the NTSB.

8 MR. FALCONE: You ain't with the Democrats, are you?

9 MR. [REDACTED] He's from the government. We're both here to
10 help.

11 MR. FALCONE: All right.

12 MR. [REDACTED] But, Brian, this is Mark Falcone and we were
13 talking to Mr. Falcone about maintenance of the vessels. He's
14 part of the company and has many responsibilities, from
15 maintenance of the vessel to slots to --

16 MR. FALCONE: Slot machines.

17 MR. [REDACTED] Driving the boat. He has a 100-ton credential.

18 MR. FALCONE: Driving the boat. A little bit of everything.
19 Realtor, real estate license, right?

20 MR. [REDACTED] So I didn't know if you wanted to ask him
21 anything that we -- that you may think of. I know you just walked
22 in. I didn't want to exclude you from the opportunity to ask any
23 questions.

24 MR. YOUNG: Have you discussed preventative maintenance or
25 records of engine maintenance, probably have already?

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MR. [REDACTED] Yes.

MR. YOUNG: Okay. We're all set.

MR. FALCONE: We're good?

MR. YOUNG: Thanks.

CWO [REDACTED] Thank you, Mark.

MR. [REDACTED] Thank you, Mark.

CWO [REDACTED] Thanks you for your time, Mark.

(Whereupon, the interview was concluded.)

CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the attached proceeding before the

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD


IN THE MATTER OF: FIRE ON BOARD THE *ISLAND LADY*
 PORT RICHEY, FLORIDA
 JANUARY 14, 2018
 Interview of Mark Falcone

ACCIDENT NO.: DCA18FM010

PLACE:

DATE: January 24, 2018

was held according to the record, and that this is the original,
complete, true and accurate transcript which has been transcribed
to the best of my skill and ability.



Letha Wheeler
Transcriber