

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: JACK WELBORO
Deckhand

Tuesday,
January 23, 2018

APPEARANCES:

CWO [REDACTED]
U.S. Coast Guard

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

BETH FIFER, Company Representative
Tropical Breeze Casino

STACY FALCONE, Company Representative
Tropical Breeze Casino

JAMES CARLSON, Attorney
Hamilton, Miller & Birthisel

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I N T E R V I E W

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2 CWO [REDACTED] -- Coast Guard. This is [REDACTED], who's also
3 with the U.S. Coast Guard. And we're here to interview regarding
4 the 14th of January, the vessel fire.

5 MR. WELBORO: Okay.

6 CWO [REDACTED] We're going to tape record this,

7 MR. WELBORO: Um-hum.

8 CWO [REDACTED] -- just so we can listen to your answers and
9 don't have to sit here and write everything down, but --

INTERVIEW OF JACK WELBORO

10
11 BY CWO [REDACTED]

12 Q. So I just want to verify, do you still live on [REDACTED]?

13 A. Yes, sir.

14 Q. All right, sir. Can you give me a little bit of -- a little
15 bit of background, your education and work experience?

16 A. Did a lot of construction. I'm a heavy operator, heavy
17 equipment. I had worked boats here and there, just like a crab
18 boat, shrimp boats. But pretty much just construction mostly.

19 Q. Okay. And can you tell me what was your position with
20 SunCruz Casino?

21 A. Right. That day I was a pre-hire. I never been on that
22 shuttle boat. That's the first time I ever been on the shuttle,
23 that day. Maybe 10 minutes before it happened. So --

24 Q. Walk me through your day at -- your first day.

25 A. My first day? I -- well I applied here. They told me to

1 come in, you know, to get on the 3:00 -- I believe it was the
2 3:00, to go out, you know, to the ship my first time. I get
3 there, met the senior mate.

4 Q. Do you recall his name?

5 A. I think Jon, I believe.

6 Q. Yes, sir.

7 A. I jumped on the shuttle. We was heading out. That's pretty
8 much -- that's it. And then about maybe 10, 15 minutes later,
9 that's when the fire started. That -- we ended up on the beach,
10 and that was it. Never even made it out there.

11 Q. Okay. So we'll back up a little bit. You boarded the
12 vessel.

13 A Um-hum.

14 Q. Was the vessel already at the *Tropic Breeze* dock or did you
15 pick it up at the -- they call it the sticks?

16 A. I was at the dock. I got onto it at the dock.

17 Q. What did you do in the meantime, before the vessel got
18 underway?

19 A. Pretty much just hung out on the dock, inside. I waited with
20 the passengers. Because the senior mate wasn't there at the time
21 when I arrived, so I was waiting for him to show up.

22 Q. And then, so he must have took you on board?

23 A. Um-hum.

24 Q. Okay. Did he describe your duties, your responsibilities?
25 Did he go over equipment? Did he show you where the safety

1 equipment is? I mean, just explain to me what you did.

2 A. He pretty much told me to shadow him. And he walked, you
3 know, walked the boat, showed me the exits and took me up on the
4 top deck, showed me around, showed me the life vests. And by the
5 time we did all that, then it was, you know, it was pretty much
6 time go to. So about 5 minutes, you know, give or take.

7 Q. So then where did you go? Because I'm assuming he was a
8 deckhand, and you guys had deckhand responsibilities. What did
9 the deckhands do? What did you do?

10 A. I just followed him around. He was checking -- doing things
11 for the captain, walking around checking the passengers, greeting
12 them. Pretty much it.

13 Q. Were you on a bow line? Were you on a line at all?

14 A. No, sir. No.

15 Q. To cast off the vessel?

16 A. No. He was on the the bow. Yes. I had to stand inside of
17 the door just so I could see him, but I wasn't allowed outside the
18 -- where he was there.

19 Q. Okay. Okay, good. And then you were transiting out --

20 A. Um-hum.

21 Q. -- right? What did you guys do to -- you know, during that
22 10, 15 minutes?

23 A. Pretty much just walked around, talking to passengers.

24 Q. Like small talk or --

25 A. Pretty much. I guess he knows the regulars that were -- that

1 go out there, so --

2 Q. Yes, sir. And then when did you notice there was an issue?
3 When did you notice that there was a problem on board?

4 A. Well, pretty much when he came -- when he went up there, I,
5 you know, I thought it was kind of weird that the captain called
6 him. He goes up to the bridge, and 5 minutes goes by. And then I
7 started to see him -- him coming down. And that's when they
8 started to go up to the top, top deck. And that was pretty much
9 when I kind of figured something was going on at the time, when
10 they started having us go up to the top. That was -- by the time
11 I got to the top, I started to see the smoke. And that's when I
12 first realized that there was smoke.

13 Q. What color smoke did you see?

14 A. It was like a grayish, like a light gray.

15 Q. Okay. Could you tell where it was coming from?

16 A. The -- this side of the boat, right side of the boat.

17 Q. Could you see -- was it coming from the exhaust?

18 A. I couldn't really know. It was just coming from that side of
19 the boat, back towards the back.

20 Q. Okay. Did you ever go to the transom or the back of the
21 boat?

22 A. No.

23 Q. No?

24 A. No.

25 Q. Okay. So after you see the smoke, what do you do?

1 A. Like I say, I didn't know -- I didn't really know it was
2 smoke, at first, until it started turning gray, and that's when I
3 saw it. By that time, they were already gathering the passengers.
4 So I just followed the passengers. He told me to stay right here
5 with the passengers, not move. That's what I did.

6 Q. And then what happens?

7 A. Pretty much like, maybe 20 seconds, 30 seconds, give or take,
8 we were jumping off. The captain had to turn it back around and
9 took it to the shore. We were jumping off.

10 Q. Where did you jump off from?

11 A. The left side where the door -- I guess where they got on
12 there. They opened that door and we jumped off.

13 Q. So the portside transfer port?

14 A. Yes, sir. Where they had the ramp at.

15 Q. And how deep was the water?

16 A. Maybe -- a little above my knee, maybe. Till I sunk in the
17 mud, then little bit above more. So --

18 Q. Did you suffer any injuries?

19 A. No, sir.

20 Q. No?

21 A. No.

22 Q. Okay. Did you get any -- did you have any training,
23 firefighting, abandon ship, or flooding training?

24 A. Not for, like, maybe 9, 10 years. That was it. Because it's
25 been a while since I've even been on a vessel. It's been like

1 almost 10 years.

2 Q. Okay. And what was the previous vessel you were on?

3 A. The *RC I*. That was 9 -- maybe 9, 10 years ago. Yeah.

4 Q. The previous casino boat here?

5 A. (No audible response.)

6 Q. Okay. And what was your position there?

7 A. I was a deckhands, started out a deckhand 3, worked my way up
8 to deckhand 1, became senior mate, and then I went to engineering,
9 on the overnight, you know.

10 Q. And what were some of the duties and responsibilities that
11 you had on the *RC I*?

12 A. I was basically maintenance. I was on the overnight. So we
13 basically cleaned, painted, you know, took up garbage, cleaned
14 slot machines, pretty much.

15 Q. So what's probably the most difficult task you would do?
16 Would you guys do a tune-up?

17 A. No. I never touched any engine. Just maybe like a pipe
18 break, you fix the pipe. You know, paint, grind, stuff like that.
19 But never any, like, engine building. No.

20 Q. Did you take any -- I don't remember if I -- did you suffer
21 any injuries?

22 A. No.

23 Q. Okay. Did you take any photographs or video?

24 A. No. My phone was lost.

25 Q. It was gone?

1 A. Yeah.

2 Q. And this is your first time on the *Island Lady*?

3 A. On that ship. Yes.

4 CWO [REDACTED] Okay. I don't have anything else.

5 BY MR. [REDACTED]

6 Q. So how long were you senior deckhand, your entire time on the

7 *RC I*?

8 A. Maybe 8 months, maybe, give or take.

9 Q. So during your prior employment, I'm sure you had the
10 opportunity to have man overboard drills and --

11 A. Oh, yeah.

12 Q. -- and stuff like that --

13 A. Oh, yeah.

14 Q. -- being a deckhand. I guess my question is -- you kind of
15 understand how the boats operate, so I would assume you know where
16 the engine room is on the *Island Lady*?

17 A. No, not on that one, no. I was on there maybe like 10, 15
18 minutes on the boat. I didn't get a chance to really look around
19 or nothing.

20 Q. Did any -- at any time did any of the mates, did you follow
21 any of the mates to the engine room?

22 A. No. No.

23 Q. When you got underway was there a passenger brief?

24 A. Yes. They did like a little safety drill thing, you know, in
25 case of this, in case of that.

1 MR. CARLSON: No, sir. I'm good.

2 CWO [REDACTED] Thanks for your time, Jack. Appreciate it.

3 MR. WELBORO: Thank you.

4 MR. [REDACTED] Thank you, sir.

5 MR. WELBORO: You all have a good day.

6 CWO [REDACTED] Take care.

7 MR. WELBORO: Have a great day.

8 (Whereupon, the interview was concluded.)

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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 Jack Welboro

ACCIDENT NO.: DCA18FM010

PLACE:

DATE: January 23, 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.



Karen Coen Brooks
Transcriber