

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD

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IN RE: :

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THE EL FARO INCIDENT OFF : NTSB Accident No.

THE COAST OF THE BAHAMAS ON : DCA16MM001

OCTOBER 1, 2015 :

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Interview of: FRANK PUSATERE

Tuesday,

January 5, 2016

U.S. Coast Guard Office

Portland, Maine

BEFORE:

BRIAN YOUNG, NTSB

MIKE KUCHARSKI, NTSB

This transcript was produced from audio

provided by the National Transportation Safety Board.

APPEARANCES:

On Behalf of the U.S. Coast Guard:

██████████ ██████████
U.S. Coast Guard

P-R-O-C-E-E-D-I-N-G-S

(Time not given)

1
2
3 INVESTIGATOR YOUNG: This is Brian again from
4 Maine up here. And on behalf of the whole NTSB, you know,
5 we appreciate you taking the time to talk to us. I know
6 it's, you know, difficult to talk to us and everything.
7 But on behalf of all of us we truly express our
8 condolences for the tragedy you and your family are going
9 through especially this time of year.

10 But again we appreciate you taking this time
11 out of your schedule to at least, you know, share any,
12 shed any light on what you've experienced or heard through
13 your son, you know.

14 MR. PUSATERE: Okay. Well unless you have any
15 specific questions.

16 INVESTIGATOR YOUNG: The only thing I just
17 wanted to let you know is so that we can all listen and
18 not write and have our heads buried in the pen we're going
19 to record the conversation so that we can --

20 MR. PUSATERE: Okay. I was going ask that,
21 yes, okay.

22 INVESTIGATOR YOUNG: Yes, please. And then
23 what happens then after it's recorded what we do is we
24 send it to a transcriptionist and they put it out in

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1 writing and then it would become part of the public docket
2 down the road. So everything, anything personal,
3 identifiable information will be redacted.

4 But again we appreciate you being part of this.
5 And like we had talked before, Mike on the phone we don't
6 have very specific questions other than we'd like to just
7 listen to hear what had been discussed between Richard and
8 his dad pertaining to the engineering functions and the
9 power plant of the El Faro, you know, over the last
10 especially the few weeks prior to the accident voyage if
11 there was anything, especially in particular that may have
12 been brought up that he, Richard may have brought up, you
13 know, any concerns that the ship wasn't in the best of
14 shape or whatever condition it may have been.

15 MR. PUSATERE: Okay. Well, you know, the thing
16 is that Richard and I unfortunately did not speak. The
17 last time we spoke was prior to the last voyage with his
18 last visit home and that was around the last time we
19 actually face to face and spoke was in July of 2015 at my
20 sister's funeral, Richard's aunt.

21 So, you know, the, but, you know, so we were
22 distracted sit down talking. Prior to that though Richard
23 and I never went into specifics like, you know, well the
24 ship this or the ship that. It was very general
25 statements.

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1 As I mentioned, I come from, I retired from an
2 LNG facility and we had instruments and controls there
3 that literally are running the turban and the processing
4 equipment that are pneumatic still. And, you know, one
5 of the things that I asked Richard is that how did he
6 become well versed, you know, working on all these old
7 steam ships and they're still using, you know, outdated
8 or antiqued equipment.

9 And Richard says that, he says he learned a lot
10 from the old timers, you know. He says it's, you may have
11 seen, may have heard other people mentioned but I will
12 definitely mention it that from the day that Richard went
13 out sailing from, during Christmas break on his sophomore
14 year I told him if you're not doing anything make sure
15 you're wiping down the tools cleaning it and nobody has
16 to see it but they'll know and respect the senior guys no
17 matter if they're licensed or unlicensed.

18 So apparently Richard, and so several years
19 later when I asked him that question pertaining to the
20 instrument controls Richard said that, yes, the men showed
21 me. I said are there any training records or are there
22 any training books, any documentation that you have to
23 become competent on these particular pieces of, you know,
24 for calibration let's say on the pneumatics, the
25 pneumatics you know with millivolts.

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1 So when you do calibrations on them I know that
2 it's very technical and if you don't have the training
3 and/or you have to hopefully know that, yes, this is the
4 way it should be done. So I think that was probably one
5 of the biggest things that I was very concerned with when
6 we spoke about, you know, sailing the steam ships, you
7 know, especially that have been used to keep the systems
8 going as much as possible.

9 The other things that Richard and I would speak
10 about again, not on this particular voyage but within the
11 last year or two and I really don't remember when he went
12 onto the El Faro because he retired the El Morro and it
13 seems like Richard was getting a knack for putting ships
14 to sleep because he's done that to Wilson, I think SS
15 Wilson and the USS, the SS Cleveland.

16 So he's done three in his career and he has a
17 systematic way of doing things. So Richard was detail
18 oriented and very anal in that regard. But the other
19 thing that I could just bring to light also would be
20 Richard did, you know, when I talked, when we talked about
21 the ship, not necessarily the El Far, it could be the El
22 Morro.

23 But there would always be and based on the fact
24 of your careers of the three gentlemen I'm speaking to you
25 know that the port engineers are always putting pressure

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1 on the chief engineers aboard ship to make sure the ship
2 gets out and the work gets done, put to the side or just
3 patched over let's say. Bad choice of words patched over,
4 but, you know, just to make sure it gets going.

5 Ultimately it is still up to the chief engineer
6 to make that decision if it's worthy to sail. But, you
7 know, you hear about so those are about the only specific
8 things that I could think of right now.

9 In general statements though pertaining to
10 those issues Richard was looking to, you know, there was
11 that carrot on the stick for the new fuel LNG powered
12 ship. Richard knew he wasn't getting the first cruise,
13 the chief on the first ship but he was being courted for
14 the second ship.

15 And he was content with that because he
16 realized that, you know, it's the first engine of this
17 particular type and it's a learning curve and he would
18 feel more comfortable knowing that even though he was
19 disappointed at first he rationalized it saying that, you
20 know, I'm happier not being the first over something in
21 a new system where I could be held liable, responsible for
22 any serious injuries, deaths or even damage to the ship.

23 So that's probably the only thing I could say
24 that Richard and I actually spoke about, you know,
25 pertaining to El Faro and/or TOTE experiences. I tried

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1 to write down things that I could think of. Those are the
2 things that I could say that Richard and I spoke about.
3 You know, he always spoke to me, not particular this
4 captain, but just captains in general that as you guys
5 know and as we all read in the media that they are under
6 extreme pressure.

7 Family members, friends of ours, family friends
8 their son was a master on ocean (inaudible) oil tankers
9 and foreign flag ships and he always, whenever he went to
10 go get paid it was like going into a mafia movie and you
11 go into this high end hotel and you see these big goons
12 body guards and they're giving him cash, you know, to run
13 the ship.

14 I mean it was all legit operations but it's
15 just talking about the difference, you know, between
16 American flag ships and foreign flag ships. I don't know
17 what else to say pertaining to that though. I apologize
18 it seems to be more of a problem that the three or four
19 of us got together just to make a statement such as those.
20 And I wish that I could give you more for everyone's sake.

21 INVESTIGATOR YOUNG: No. This is Brian Young.
22 No, we definitely appreciate your insight. When you said
23 maybe just a few follow up questions that there was, the
24 port engineers putting pressures on the chiefs and sailing
25 chief before I know what you mean, did it sound like there

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1 was a lot of pressure put on Richard to make schedules and
2 keep his plant running from TOTE?

3 MR. PUSATERE: No. Nobody was putting, it
4 didn't appear that somebody was putting the screws to
5 them. Richard and I spoke to them about this many times
6 that the bean counters, the people that have money are
7 running the world.

8 So we understood. So, you know, and Richard
9 was such a focused, I know I'm speaking as the father so
10 I have a vested interest and I'm a little biased, but
11 Richard was detail oriented. I mean the kid at 16, 17
12 years old at a part-time job was closing up the registers
13 at a supermarket at night and with detail accuracy that
14 everyone was, you know, amazed at.

15 So I mean that's the character of our son. He
16 just delved into everything 100 percent. So I mean if he
17 internalized things like me and you put internal pressures
18 on yourself, yes, you're going to make things sound a lot
19 worse than what it is. So I took that as, you know, I
20 took that with a grain of salt not thinking that my God,
21 what's happening to my little boy.

22 You know, it's like hey, it's the real world.
23 You know, put your pants on and let's go, you know.

24 INVESTIGATOR YOUNG: And when it came to the
25 LNG and the decision for Richard not to go to the first

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1 ship was there any reason that was given to him as to why
2 he wasn't chosen?

3 MR. PUSATERE: Yes, yes, and Richard did not
4 have enough diesel time. He didn't have enough motor time
5 under his belt. Richard's whole career other than maybe
6 one ship was and he didn't that was a MIRSK (phonetic)
7 ship for three months was all diesel.

8 INVESTIGATOR YOUNG: So he spent most of the
9 career on steam ships?

10 MR. PUSATERE: Yes, he had to go take the class
11 for motor to upgrade every license that he needed.

12 INVESTIGATOR YOUNG: Okay, yes. And did TOTE
13 send him to any training for the LNG, do you know?

14 MR. PUSATERE: Yes, there was very brief
15 training on that, not as detailed because he was going to
16 be coming back, they put the ship in the water I think
17 around September or October of this year, the ship he was
18 going to take over and so right after this cruise Richard
19 was going to come home, say hello to everyone and then go
20 ship out to San Diego.

21 INVESTIGATOR YOUNG: For the second ship.

22 MR. PUSATERE: Get trained. So he was going
23 to be the chief onboard the ship, the first chief onboard
24 the ship, plank holder.

25 INVESTIGATOR YOUNG: Yes, I got you. And the

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1 question I had too, does it seem like Richard worked
2 exclusively with Captain Davidson or was it varying how
3 he worked with the captains?

4 MR. PUSATERE: He never mentioned the captains
5 by name, no. I mean I know that he had sailed with this
6 particular captain and I think captain was going to be
7 going to the next ship also, my understanding. I don't
8 know for a fact.

9 Richard didn't tell me. I don't even know
10 where, I might have read it. But then again it's not
11 fact. I read it because it's in the media.

12 INVESTIGATOR YOUNG: Right, right. And whether
13 or not he mentioned captains by name, did he ever mention
14 about how he either did or did not work well or not so
15 well with these captains?

16 MR. PUSATERE: There were some captains, well
17 obviously there's always the personality conflict and
18 Richard, I'll say this much though to answer the question,
19 no, he didn't say anything specific. It was just many
20 general statements of the captain is under pressure, you
21 know. He's an a-hole and I could understand it.

22 And not Davidson. I'm talking about just in
23 general. But the one thing I'll say this much Richard had
24 confidence is the licensing abilities because prior to
25 this ship sailing, you know, we were talking and Emily or

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1 Lillian, I forgot who it was specifically. One of, either
2 my wife or Richard's wife and they said are you, what
3 happens when you go into these hurricanes?

4 He said I'm not worried about going and sailing
5 a hurricane. I'm qualified in my job and I know what to
6 do. The guys up on the deck, on the bridge they know what
7 to do and I have full trust and confidence in them. So
8 I don't think that he had any questions in regards to the
9 abilities of Captain Davidson.

10 INVESTIGATOR YOUNG: Okay.

11 MR. PUSATERE: But Richard never was a master.
12 So he could get by probably. He has the wheel down in the
13 boiler room at docking and that's about the only extent
14 of control of sailing.

15 INVESTIGATOR YOUNG: From one engineer to
16 another engineer and I know we have a captain listening,
17 we do know who runs that ship. You know, we always know,
18 us guys down below.

19 MR. PUSATERE: Right.

20 INVESTIGATOR YOUNG: Exactly. So I hear the
21 language you're speaking.

22 MR. PUSATERE: Yes, okay.

23 INVESTIGATOR YOUNG: And was Richard on a
24 pretty steady rotation like a few weeks on a few weeks
25 off?

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1 MR. PUSATERE: Yes, I mean we all, Lillian, my
2 wife Lillian and I constantly said Richard was on break
3 bulk freighters third world, delivering food to third
4 world countries with Sealift, Inc. And he would be
5 traveling into these horrible locations.

6 And every, you know, you were always nervous.
7 And then when we found out that he was on this regular
8 route and, you know, from TOTE and going Puerto Rico to
9 Florida and when he first got on it was Baltimore, Florida
10 and Puerto Rico it was like holy cow this is like, he's
11 in the back yard. We don't have to worry about anything.
12 So but he was on a regular rotation, yes.

13 INVESTIGATOR YOUNG: And do you recall at any
14 time if there were any incidents of rough weather while
15 he was on these runs? Did he ever let you know that the
16 ship had been in rough weather?

17 MR. PUSATERE: Well not necessarily El Faro.
18 I know that he has been in rough waters and he says going
19 to deep sea is a lot safer than going, staying in brown
20 water because it's, you don't have the momentum. So he
21 says, but he never said I love sailing into a hurricane.

22 You know, they skirted. He said, yes, the
23 captains know how to skirt the hurricanes. You know,
24 again he had full confidence, you know, in the process,
25 the licensing process and the respect of the position.

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1 I don't him, a personality conflict did occur and I'm not
2 saying there was between Richard and Davidson. I'm just
3 saying in general he respected the position of the master
4 and he expected that same respect on his end.

5 INVESTIGATOR YOUNG: Understood, yes,
6 understood. All right. I'm going to turn the questions
7 over to [REDACTED] [REDACTED] from the Coast Guard. Thank you for
8 your time, Mr. Pusatere.

9 MR. PUSATERE: Okay. Thank you, Brian.

10 MR. [REDACTED] Can I call you Frank?

11 MR. PUSATERE: Yes, it's a lot easier please.

12 MR. [REDACTED] Thanks, Frank. My name is [REDACTED]
13 [REDACTED] I'm a civilian Marine casualty investigator for
14 the US Coast Guard. I'm also a licensed merchant mariner
15 and I'm working on the human performance group for the
16 NTSB.

17 MR. PUSATERE: Yes.

18 MR. [REDACTED] So we're trying to figure out,
19 you know, how decisions were made and, you know, we've got
20 Mike Kucharski doing the nautical ops and then we have
21 Brian doing the engineering. So I just want to make sure
22 I cover a few things with you, Frank, just to make sure
23 that we don't miss anything.

24 MR. PUSATERE: Sure.

25 MR. [REDACTED] And one of the things did Rich

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1 ever talk about evaluations that might have been performed
2 on him by TOTE?

3 MR. PUSATERE: No, none whatsoever that he
4 spoke to me about, no.

5 MR. [REDACTED] Okay. Did he ever talk about any
6 stress or strain or interpersonal working relationship
7 problems onboard that might have affected operations?

8 MR. PUSATERE: Not with any particular ones.
9 But I was always hearing, I've heard people write to me
10 based on the disappearance and sinking of the El Faro and
11 I've also heard Richard say, you know, some stories about
12 how, you know, and again I mentioned, [REDACTED] that I always
13 told him, you know, I didn't mention this but I told him
14 before he even graduated and said make sure you're going
15 to be dealing with older men, 40, 30, 50 year old men and
16 they're going to be taking orders from you.

17 Unfortunately you have to respect them. You
18 earn their respect. You don't, the typical cliché. And
19 what I found out is that he knew how to deal with people.
20 There was, Israel, there was a fatality onboard ship. One
21 of, I think he was the third engineer December two years
22 ago. I think it was on the El Morro.

23 It could have been the El Faro or even the El
24 Yunque. But don't know which one it was but Richard was
25 the chief then and, you know, he wrote a letter to the

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1 family regarding, you know, so he had a personal touch
2 with people. He communicated well with people. His
3 expectations were fully expressed and he knew exactly what
4 to ask back from people.

5 One guy jokingly around said to us that Richard
6 was probably one of the hardest chiefs that he worked with
7 but he was always there working with them. And when it
8 was miserable and hard and they had to push to get
9 something done he said Richard came back and tapped them
10 on the back and said hey, you're going to have to step up
11 your game.

12 You know, and the man jokingly said I was ready
13 to strangle him but he says I had to take light because
14 he was right next to me. So, you know, Richard earned,
15 I truly believe Richard had the full respect of his
16 subordinates and the licensed end of the ship and also the
17 unlicensed Marine, correction, the engine room personnel.

18 MR. [REDACTED] Did Richard ever talk about the
19 safety culture of the ship and characterize the safety
20 culture in any way? For example, you know, safety
21 meetings or drills or anything like that.

22 MR. PUSATERE: Okay. I'm trying to think now.
23 I know exactly what you mean. I cannot say anything was
24 ever, I know for a fact nothing was ever discussed about
25 safety meetings. The culture as far as the company not

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1 supporting I would say, no. We never spoke about that nor
2 was that ever an issue.

3 The biggest thing that he was concerned with
4 was the environmental impact that the ship could present,
5 you know, out at sea or in port primarily, you know. He
6 jokingly pointed out to me onboard the training ship when
7 teaching there he said that's the lose your license valve
8 over there, dad.

9 He says that's the one where if you open it up
10 it's going to dump all of the sludge from the separator
11 out into the water. So I said, okay. Richard was very
12 cognizant of the environment and the procedures. But he,
13 Richard, knew that safety takes paramount over equipment
14 and the ship.

15 Case in point, I was an environmental health
16 and safety officer for about three years in Con Edison.
17 So the safety culture was embedded into me. It was beat
18 into him probably just by virtue of just, you know,
19 osmosis, you know. He sees it. He lives it.

20 I mean I have a picture and I think I posted
21 it of Richard working inside of a boiler and it looks, you
22 know, it was shut down and he's using the old Chicago
23 pneumatic impact on the components of it. You know, and
24 I had to look at it closer because I wanted to make sure
25 that he had ear plugs and safety glasses on and sure

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1 enough they were.

2 You know, I mean it's just like simple things
3 like that, you know. So safety was not being compromised
4 that I am aware of, you know, nor did Richard bring it to
5 light on our end.

6 MR. [REDACTED] In any of your conversations with
7 Richard did he ever discuss any issues that arose? I
8 realize you spoke to him probably back in July at this
9 funeral, family funeral.

10 At any time before that did he discuss any
11 issues that arose on El Faro voyages of any kind like
12 damaged cargo or ships, you know, damage to the propulsion
13 system or leaks or anything like that?

14 MR. PUSATERE: Nothing to the propulsion
15 systems. He said that cargo, you know, lashings of the
16 vehicles were always a potential problem everywhere just
17 in heavy seas. But it wasn't a specific incident or an
18 event.

19 It was just a general statement because, you
20 know, I've seen a show of mighty ships talking about the
21 cargos and the containers, how they get loose. He says
22 yes, he says that's not uncommon, dad. Heavy seas, you
23 know, lashing is very, it's dynamic.

24 You know, if the ship is moving, it's creaking
25 and everything (inaudible) he says. But there was nothing

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1 about company's concern with the propulsion or about the
2 cargo containers and/or the cargo, the aircraft, the
3 automobiles and trucks, no.

4 MR. [REDACTED] Okay. So, just to make sure
5 because this is kind of a key point if you just take a
6 minute to think about it. Did he ever say that they did
7 have vehicles break lose or did he say it was a potential
8 for this to occur?

9 MR. PUSATERE: He did not, I do not remember
10 ever saying, dad, I have one specific incident where cargo
11 did break lose in our ship. So I can't say that I heard
12 him say that at all.

13 MR. [REDACTED] And you may not know the answer
14 to this, Frank. But, you know, part of, you know, he had
15 faith and confidence in the officers top side to do their
16 job. Did he ever discuss anything where the deck officers
17 and the engineering gang would get together and talk about
18 shipward operations so that they were sort operating
19 cohesively instead of having the bridge do one thing and
20 the engine room kind of separated in its own world?

21 MR. PUSATERE: No, I understand what you're
22 saying. You're a team at this point. So I'm trying to
23 remember where I heard it and when I heard it. But
24 Richard said that the captain and him would always be
25 discussing what's going on. And again I don't know what

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1 cruise that was on when he sailed and who that was with.

2 MR. [REDACTED] And then did you ever track
3 using, you know, there's a lot of online services where
4 you can track the movement of ships.

5 MR. PUSATERE: Yes, the El Faro, no, I never
6 not until the moment I got that phone call, you know, from
7 my daughter in law. That was the only time I looked up
8 the El Faro and I went online and, you know, and, you
9 know, wasn't good.

10 MR. [REDACTED] Right. In August, in late August
11 the El Faro took a deviation from her normal route
12 straight to San Juan and they went down between Florida
13 and the Bahamas and north of Cuba. Prior to the accident
14 voyage did you hear about that from anybody like a family
15 member or friend somebody just happened to mention it?

16 MR. PUSATERE: No, no.

17 MR. [REDACTED] Okay. And I thank you very much.
18 Your answers have been very helpful and I appreciate your
19 time.

20 MR. PUSATERE: I hope they are because to me
21 it's like nothing much. And I'm not just trying to answer
22 a question that I don't know the answer to. I'll tell you
23 when I don't.

24 MR. [REDACTED] I understand. I'll pass it over
25 to Mike Kucharski. Mike.

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1 INVESTIGATOR KUCHARSKI: Can you hear me okay?

2 MR. [REDACTED] Now I hear you.

3 INVESTIGATOR YOUNG: You were a little broken
4 up in the beginning.

5 MR. PUSATERE: It's Alaska.

6 INVESTIGATOR KUCHARSKI: Frank.

7 MR. PUSATERE: Mike, I'm here again.

8 INVESTIGATOR KUCHARSKI: I need you to put your
9 thinking cap on just for a brief second. You mentioned
10 that he had some, Richard had some controls on the
11 instrumentation maybe, boiler controls that type. Did he
12 ever give you a (inaudible) type situation?

13 MR. PUSATERE: I'm just going to speculate as
14 far as finishing your question. Richard did not come up
15 with any specific instances or events that took place
16 regarding instrument controls.

17 It was like, my question to him at the time was
18 like hey, Richard, we have pneumatic controls at the LNG
19 plant and we described them and, you know, what is the
20 standard and how do you get trained? And that was the
21 extent of it. So there was not one particular incident
22 or specific question regarding the El Faro.

23 INVESTIGATOR KUCHARSKI: Okay. And --

24 MR. PUSATERE: That was under instruments and
25 controls. I'm sorry to interrupt you, Mike. That was for

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1 the INC. But the relief valves, you know, at plants we
2 would always do our own internal testing against a
3 calibrated system.

4 And I asked how did you do that. And again
5 it's not with TOTE. This was several years ago and he
6 said typically, you know, they would just build up the
7 pressure until it reached a point on the gauge and if it
8 went off within the tolerances that was acceptable by the
9 industry.

10 INVESTIGATOR KUCHARSKI: Okay. The same thing
11 that you mentioned about general pressure that's used to
12 get underway. He never gave you a for instance or
13 anything that you can call to mind?

14 MR. PUSATERE: No, no. I know that as I
15 mentioned Richard, his attention to detail is very good.
16 Work orders I know as in every industry are written. So
17 I'm assuming that TOTE has an electronic system of
18 maintenance and any communication that needs to be done.

19 INVESTIGATOR KUCHARSKI: Okay. In conversation
20 sometimes with my son he'll say like such and such or,
21 well if you think of any of those you get that aha moment
22 I would appreciate if you could reach out to us.

23 MR. PUSATERE: I will. Believe me I'm looking
24 for aha moments.

25 INVESTIGATOR KUCHARSKI: Sometimes they come

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1 in darndest place and every, you know, we look at every
2 thread and you just never know when it's going to be an
3 important piece of information.

4 MR. PUSATERE: Right.

5 INVESTIGATOR KUCHARSKI: How about himself did
6 he call you from the ship ever --

7 MR. PUSATERE: Never.

8 INVESTIGATOR KUCHARSKI: -- or text you from
9 the --

10 MR. PUSATERE: Never, never. Richard like me,
11 like my mother, like my wife, you know, when we're at work
12 we're at work. This isn't, you know, and even if he was
13 in port and we knew the date Tuesdays and Fridays that
14 they would be pulling in so we knew that if we needed to
15 reach out to him in any way, you know, at least we could
16 do it that way.

17 But speaking via phone, no. Richard was a, he
18 went to work and he stayed at work.

19 INVESTIGATOR KUCHARSKI: Got you. That's all
20 I have. Thank you very much.

21 MR. PUSATERE: You're welcome.

22 INVESTIGATOR YOUNG: And this is Brian Young.
23 One last question, Frank. Did you ever hear anything
24 about the guys that were working for Rich, the junior
25 engineers, if you will if he had anything to say about

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1 their caliber or experience?

2 MR. PUSATERE: Not this particular crew. I
3 mean I really feel bad. I mean, you know, the age and the
4 experience that these men had I know that Richard was the
5 chief. So to answer the question, no, he never mentioned
6 anything about this particular crew and these men.

7 There would always be the rivalry between, you
8 know, SUNY Maritime and Maine and King's Point and every
9 other one. But, you know, no. These guys were a non
10 issue other than the fact of you and I knowing how many
11 years they sailed and, you know, you don't know how much
12 steam that they had underneath their belt either.

13 INVESTIGATOR YOUNG: Exactly.

14 MR. PUSATERE: You know, and that's, you know,
15 I mean that's an issue. The good thing is that there was
16 Mathias, Jeff Mathias was another chief engineer who knew
17 that ship well. I found out afterwards by thirdhand
18 information that, you know, it's interesting how everybody
19 starts conducting their own investigation on stuff like
20 this just to give themselves some relief.

21 But, you know, and the fact is that when
22 somebody found, you know, I thought that Jeff was there
23 as the chief because Richard was leaving and this guy was
24 getting familiarized with the ship. Then I found out that
25 he was, you know, working with the contractors and I said,

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1 okay, well that's understandable. This way you don't
2 distract the chief engineer, you know, and you have
3 somebody that's responsible and it's going to be taken
4 over so it makes sense.

5 But speaking to other chiefs, chief engineers
6 in the industry that knew both of them they said, you
7 know, with those two guys that are onboard that ship knew
8 steam like the back of their hands. So I mean, I think
9 that's probably why there was three, I found it very odd
10 that there were three third engineers I think and one
11 second and two chief engineers onboard that ship, very
12 strange.

13 You know, but I can understand there was work
14 being done so what their tasks were, I don't know what
15 their assignments were.

16 INVESTIGATOR YOUNG: Understood. And speaking
17 of that did you have any indication as to what the Polish
18 crew members or supernumeraries were working on?

19 MR. PUSATERE: No, other than what we're
20 hearing in the media.

21 INVESTIGATOR YOUNG: Okay. I'm going to pass
22 it over to [REDACTED] Thank you.

23 MR. PUSATERE: All right.

24 MR. [REDACTED] [REDACTED] [REDACTED] again for the
25 transcriptionist. Frank, do you have any photos or texts

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1 or documents relating to the El Faro that may help this
2 investigation?

3 MR. PUSATERE: No, no. I thought about that
4 too and I said to myself the photos that we do have of
5 Richard were from ships that have been put to sleep.
6 There was nothing that I have, no text information, you
7 know.

8 We even, and here's another reason why we knew
9 that whatever texting, correction not texting, e-mails
10 that went to chief engineer El Faro was public knowledge
11 onboard with the, you know, with the captain. And so
12 it's, you know, there's no reason to have unless there was
13 an emergency, a family emergency and there was none in
14 between this time. So, no.

15 MR. [REDACTED] And did, at any point did Richard
16 show any apprehensive, apprehension about his job in any
17 way like either, you already mentioned the hurricane
18 season and his faith in his officers. Was there any --

19 MR. PUSATERE: Right.

20 MR. [REDACTED] -- you know, what you've told us
21 basically someone who was detail oriented who was very
22 satisfied about his job and looked forward to the
23 challenges. But did you sense at any time that you had
24 a conversation about El Faro that there was any kind of
25 apprehension at all?

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1 MR. PUSATERE: No, no, no. He didn't discuss
2 that with me, didn't get any indications of it, no. I
3 would be able to say no.

4 MR. [REDACTED] Okay. Thank you very much, sir.

5 MR. PUSATERE: Yes, no problem [REDACTED]

6 INVESTIGATOR YOUNG: Mike, do you have anything
7 else out there?

8 INVESTIGATOR KUCHARSKI: No, not for me. Thank
9 you.

10 INVESTIGATOR YOUNG: So typically at the end
11 of the discussion, Frank, we always say well we've asked
12 you all the questions we have do you have any questions
13 for us. Is there anything that you feel we haven't asked
14 or if you had any, I know you gave us a bunch of
15 information at the beginning which was kind of the intent
16 of this.

17 But is there anything that maybe has come up
18 and raised its head during this conversation or if there's
19 any questions you had for us?

20 MR. PUSATERE: You know the thing is that
21 safety, I don't know, you know, obviously you're looking
22 into previous drills I'm assuming that the ship has had,
23 what the critique of those drills were as far as, you
24 know, mayday drills, security breach drills. I'm under
25 the impression that when there was a security drill at one

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1 of the ships that TOTE manages that just recently that
2 the, they, TOTE was aware of it. Officers were aware of
3 it.

4 And yet when they made the phone call that this
5 is an emergency drill, drill, drill the phone wasn't, they
6 were connected to a different switchboard at the office,
7 the main office for safety officer.

8 INVESTIGATOR YOUNG: Was this on a different
9 ship than El Faro, another TOTE ship?

10 MR. PUSATERE: Yes, this was not the El Faro
11 but it was TOTE and this was just within the last six
12 months.

13 INVESTIGATOR YOUNG: Okay. And that --

14 MR. PUSATERE: The, you know, and I mentioned
15 it was typical that the port engineers were always
16 recommending, you know, minimal repairs and that was
17 always a hot topic of discussion, you know. But I think
18 I discussed that.

19 The drills and things. The other thing is that
20 someone, one of the family members contacted me from the
21 Seafarer's Union and we had a discussion. And she in the
22 incipient stages of this particular investigation they
23 said that the relief crew members and I could understand
24 why, they said that the relief crew members were in the,
25 questioned whether it be by the Coast Guard or the

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1 National Transportation Safety Board that there were
2 representatives of TOTE there for technical background.

3 Are those individuals going to be reinterviewed
4 again in the privacy of a phone call that you and I are
5 having right now because I know that these people depend
6 on jobs and they don't want to compromise their, you know,
7 livelihood, you know and I don't know if they were
8 speaking forward. So that would be a question that I'm
9 going to ask and I don't expect an answer.

10 But if you guys didn't think of it I would
11 appreciate it you do thinking of it.

12 INVESTIGATOR YOUNG: And it was definitely
13 considered on a lot of the interviews down in Jacksonville
14 on scene. There was a number of participants and the way
15 that the interviews are conducted is that the parties are
16 allowed to be there and if any of the interviewees had a
17 problem with any of the people in the room they typically
18 could ask to have them excused.

19 But I know exactly what you're saying. And
20 obviously if the company is in the room and you have a lot
21 of bad things to say about that company and you have a job
22 to hold you're going to watch what you say.

23 MR. PUSATERE: Exactly.

24 INVESTIGATOR YOUNG: But the NTSB does have a
25 witness, I think it's witness@NTSB.gov that people can e-

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1 mail directly to us if they do have any information and
2 that would be treated confidentially. And, you know, and
3 anybody can contact us at any time and we will look into
4 it.

5 But if we do a formal interview we are
6 obligated to invite the parties. But if anyone is
7 uncomfortable with the parties then, you know, like even
8 for these discussions today I contacted my party members
9 which was TOTE, ABS and the Coast Guard and they said I
10 don't have any questions. We trust that you're going to
11 ask the right questions.

12 MR. PUSATERE: Okay.

13 INVESTIGATOR YOUNG: Yes, if anyone does have
14 and I'll find the exact e-mail address and I'll e-mail to
15 you since I have your contact.

16 MR. PUSATERE: That would be great, Brian. I'd
17 appreciate it because, you know, the thing is that it's
18 still, it's common sense, you know, when you start, you
19 know, you explained it so I can just babble on. I
20 apologize. Yes, okay.

21 INVESTIGATOR YOUNG: Okay. I'll definitely,
22 in fact I was --

23 MR. PUSATERE: The other question that I would
24 have is that look at the work orders. I know that we, the
25 data recorder and I knew based on the photos, file photos

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1 of where it was installed that there, from what I
2 understand there's a backup, there's a control panel
3 backup that would typically be in the bridge.

4 And the fact that the bridge is, well it's in
5 the upright position but it went through a catastrophic
6 event having the windows and doors blown out, I mean I
7 know that I just read about it in the media today that
8 they're considering, you know, another search for it.

9 But has that, was that even considered that
10 they knew that, you know, there is another backup, the
11 original one not the one that's supposed to take the abuse
12 of the voice data recorder box should, the black box
13 should take? But there are ways to, data, you know could
14 possibly be salvaged.

15 I don't know. That was just thrown out there.

16 INVESTIGATOR YOUNG: We are aware that the
17 computer itself is located on the bridge. But accessing
18 that bridge I think is going to be extremely challenging
19 because the vehicle I think it was eight foot wide.

20 MR. PUSATERE: Right.

21 INVESTIGATOR YOUNG: And it's manipulators, you
22 know, obviously can't fit through to reach it and then
23 they did have a smaller unit which only had video
24 capability. So I, and just from what I am assuming, this
25 is speculation is that they would have cut a hole in the

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1 side of that bulkhead to get in and still it would be a
2 challenge to access it.

3 And Mike may be more familiar with the actual
4 location of it on the bridge. But I think it would be
5 extremely challenging.

6 MR. PUSATERE: Logistics I could understand
7 being challenging. I was just curious if, you know, that
8 was even considered. That's all.

9 INVESTIGATOR YOUNG: And I don't know what kind
10 of shape it would be in. I know the --

11 MR. PUSATERE: Right.

12 INVESTIGATOR YOUNG: -- one on the capsule is
13 protected in, you know, a pressure capsule almost, yes.
14 But I know it was discussed.

15 MR. PUSATERE: Okay, good. I get that warm
16 fuzzy feeling at least not that I had an aha moment but
17 the thing is that I wanted to, gives me some reassurance.
18 Yes, okay, thank you.

19 INVESTIGATOR YOUNG: And when I do talk to my
20 supervisors later today I'll make sure that, you know,
21 they are aware we had this discussion too.

22 MR. PUSATERE: Okay.

23 INVESTIGATOR YOUNG: And if I do get any
24 further information then I'll pass it on to you.

25 MR. PUSATERE: Right. The other thing and this

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1 will be the last subject. So I don't know who it's going
2 to be addressed to. Most likely it's under the unit
3 performance element and so that would be Brian or [REDACTED]

4 INVESTIGATOR YOUNG: [REDACTED] probably.

5 MR. [REDACTED] Yes, [REDACTED]

6 MR. PUSATERE: Hey, [REDACTED] [REDACTED] you know,
7 I know that, you know, risk management is a many and it's,
8 you know, when you start going following x and y curves,
9 you know, you're dealing with starting out low frequency,
10 low consequences, you know. Don't do it that much there's
11 no consequences.

12 Then there's the low frequency high
13 consequences, you know. Well I've sailed into hurricanes
14 ten times before and out of 30 years that's nothing, you
15 know. But the consequences are high and so that's where
16 the human performance indicator comes in and it starts to
17 gnaw at you.

18 Yes, I've done this before. I could do it
19 again. I'm assuming that your end of it and I just need
20 reassurances whether yes or no, is that this is something
21 that's under consideration that you're, with your
22 expertise.

23 MR. [REDACTED] Yes, sir. The ship is, the
24 company has a safety management system. And the safety
25 management system evaluates the risk to the operations,

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1 the vessel and personnel. And it's designed to mitigate
2 those risks.

3 So we'll be evaluating as part of our
4 investigation, you know, the NTSB investigation whether
5 the safety management system was adequate and whether it
6 was being properly used. And that's an ongoing facet of
7 this investigation.

8 MR. PUSATERE: Because I know that the company
9 in the past has had, faced financial problems and I'm
10 under the impression that their safety officers
11 experience, had experienced a brain drain (phonetic). So
12 I don't know if, you know, if that is also part of it.
13 You know, you can't teach experience.

14 MR. [REDACTED] Right. And I, just to let you
15 know, Frank, I am also jotting down these notes and I will
16 share my notes with my group chairman, Ms. Bell, the
17 factual elements of my notes and she will, you know,
18 communicate that up to NTSB leadership.

19 MR. PUSATERE: Okay, okay, because obviously,
20 you know, it's just, hopefully I could come up with
21 something that you guys just might have started reaching
22 an opening know that my brain will register or maybe and
23 that's the reason why I'm throwing these out there is just
24 as the father of one of the crew members is that, one
25 second. I was compelled to at least make sure that these

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1 are the things that I thought of and I want to make sure
2 you're aware of them. That's it.

3 INVESTIGATOR YOUNG: We appreciate that. We
4 appreciate all your time today and what I'll do too is
5 I'll send you an e-mail either later today or tomorrow
6 with all of our contact information for all three of us.

7 MR. PUSATERE: Excellent.

8 INVESTIGATOR YOUNG: And I know you have mine
9 but I'll send [REDACTED] and Mike's as well and I'll get the
10 witness@NTSB.gov and I'll include that in the same e-mail.

11 MR. PUSATERE: That would be great, Brian. I
12 do appreciate it. And, gentlemen, I want to thank you for
13 your dedication. When people start investigating, you
14 know, walls go up, resistance is put in and sometimes
15 you're steered in a different direction that taking back
16 is time consuming.

17 But I know you guys, you know, have sailed,
18 have people in the industry and you do care. So thank
19 you.

20 INVESTIGATOR YOUNG: We really do and we really
21 appreciate you giving us your time and your insight and
22 people like you really help us with our investigation.
23 So thank you so much.

24 MR. PUSATERE: All right, guys. You have a
25 great day.

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1 INVESTIGATOR YOUNG: Thank you again.

2 MR. PUSATERE: Safe trip, gentlemen, and
3 behave.

4 INVESTIGATOR YOUNG: We'll try. Yes, thank
5 you, Frank.

6 MR. PUSATERE: All right. Be good. Thank you.
7 Bye now.

8 (Whereupon, the above-entitled matter went off
9 the record.)

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C E R T I F I C A T E

MATTER: El Faro Incident
Accident No. DCA16MM001
Interview of: Frank Pusatere
Portland, Maine

DATE: 01-05-16

I hereby certify that the attached transcription of page 1 to 37 inclusive are to the best of my professional ability a true, accurate, and complete record of the above referenced proceedings as contained on the provided audio recording; further that I am neither counsel for, nor related to, nor employed by any of the parties to this action in which this proceeding has taken place; and further that I am not financially nor otherwise interested in the outcome of the action.



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