

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD

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 IN RE: :  
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 THE EL FARO INCIDENT OFF THE: NTSB Accident No.  
 COAST OF THE BAHAMAS ON : DCA16MM001  
 OCTOBER 1, 2015 :  
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INTERVIEW OF: LUKE LAASKO, BOILER INSPECTOR

Tuesday,  
 October 13, 2015

Via teleconference

BEFORE:

BRIAN YOUNG, NTSB  
 LOUIS O'DONNELL, ABS  
 [REDACTED], U.S. Coast Guard

This transcript was produced from audio  
 provided by the National Transportation Safety Board.

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

2 MR. YOUNG: Good morning, Luke. This is  
3 Brian Young. I'm with the NTSB.

4 MR. LAASKO: Hey, Brian, how you doing?

5 MR. YOUNG: Good. I really appreciate you  
6 giving us some of your time this morning. I know it's  
7 early where you are.

8 I'm with two other people and we're  
9 investigating the El Faro incident. And we have just a  
10 few minutes of just ballpark questions as far as when  
11 you were on the ship doing a boiler inspection.

12 Do you have time to give us a few minutes  
13 for some information?

14 MR. LAASKO: Yeah, definitely.

15 MR. YOUNG: Okay. I'm in the room with an  
16 ABS surveyor. He's one of the parties to this  
17 investigation. His name is Lou O'Donnell.

18 MR. LAASKO: Okay.

19 MR. YOUNG: And another party to my  
20 investigation is the United States Coast Guard and I'm  
21 with [REDACTED]. It's just the three of us. And my  
22 name is Brian Young. I'm the Engineering Group  
23 Chairman for the investigation.

24 And what we're trying to do is try to figure  
25 out what happened to the ship. And we are only doing a

1 safety investigation. It has nothing to do with  
2 liability or blame. So all we want to do is get an  
3 impression of what you saw when you were aboard the  
4 ship for a boiler inspection.

5 MR. LAASKO: Okay.

6 MR. YOUNG: And if it's okay with you, just  
7 so we have this on record we are going to record it.  
8 And a transcript will be available to you if you want  
9 it.

10 MR. LAASKO: Okay, that's fine.

11 MR. YOUNG: Great. So again thanks very  
12 much.

13 Just real briefly, we understand that you  
14 were aboard the ship a few weeks ago. If you could  
15 tell us the date and which boiler you looked at?

16 MR. LAASKO: I boarded the ship on the 11th  
17 of September. And I did the inspections on the  
18 starboard boiler.

19 MR. YOUNG: And --

20 MR. LAASKO: So I rode it from San Juan,  
21 Puerto Rico to Jacksonville, Florida.

22 MR. YOUNG: You rode the ship?

23 MR. LAASKO: Yeah.

24 MR. YOUNG: So the boiler was secured while  
25 you were under way?

1 MR. LAASKO: After we took departure we  
2 secured starboard boiler and did the inspection.

3 MR. YOUNG: Okay. So once the vessel  
4 departed Puerto Rico then they secured the starboard  
5 boiler and you were able to, after cool-down, get  
6 inside the boiler?

7 MR. LAASKO: That's correct.

8 MR. YOUNG: Okay. And the reason for your  
9 attendance there, why did they call you in?

10 MR. LAASKO: Sea Star told maritime it was  
11 getting ready to do a conversion on that ship. They  
12 were moving it to the Alaska run. And they were going  
13 to go into a yard period so they wanted us to do some -  
14 - do an inspection of the boiler to see what needed to  
15 be done as far as routine maintenance, if there were  
16 any things that we could repair during their yard  
17 period while they were doing some conversions to send  
18 it over to Alaska.

19 MR. YOUNG: Okay. And so for your boiler  
20 inspection what did it entail?

21 MR. LAASKO: Basically when I crawled in and  
22 looked at front wall, burner throats. I crawled in  
23 through the submeter cavity, generator cavity to see if  
24 there was any damage to the decking, the walls, if  
25 there was any tubes that looked like they were damaged,

1 any of the gas passes were plugged up on the boilers.  
2 I inspected casing leaks.

3 Just general from top to bottom during the  
4 time it was down I inspected the boiler to see if there  
5 was anything that, you know, stood out to me that was,  
6 you know, a definite issue.

7 MR. YOUNG: And was that inspection limited  
8 to the starboard boiler only?

9 MR. LAASKO: Yeah.

10 MR. YOUNG: Okay. And we did see the price  
11 quote and scope of work and we see that there were some  
12 burner throats that required replacement and some slag  
13 to be cleaned off the tubes.

14 Was there anything else that you noticed  
15 that was out of the ordinary or deficient in the  
16 boiler?

17 MR. LAASKO: You know, I would just say the  
18 boiler's age. I mean, you know, the boilers are in  
19 good shape. Every, you know, three or four years we'd  
20 do work when they went into the yard period on these  
21 boilers, and they were in pretty good shape. The  
22 engineers, you know, kept the boilers clean.

23 So as far as the cleanliness of the boiler  
24 on the inside and the gas passes, everything was in  
25 good shape.

1 MR. YOUNG: Okay.

2 MR. LAASKO: Burner throats needed to be  
3 worked on. Just basic wear and tear of the burner  
4 throats. They, they only last so long. And but they  
5 were still there. There was no, you know, there was no  
6 indications on the burner throats that they were  
7 falling apart. You know, they definitely needed to be  
8 repaired when we went into the yard period.

9 MR. YOUNG: Okay. So does it appear that it  
10 was somewhat normal for the age of the boiler? This is  
11 normal? Normal?

12 MR. LAASKO: Yes, sir. Definitely.

13 MR. YOUNG: Okay. Did you happen to take an  
14 pictures inside the boiler while you were doing your  
15 inspection?

16 MR. LAASKO: I did.

17 MR. YOUNG: Okay. Is there any chance we  
18 can send in a request that you might be able to forward  
19 them to us?

20 MR. LAASKO: Yeah. That, I could or Jim  
21 Dowd(phonetic), our operations manager, has a copy of  
22 that just as well.

23 MR. YOUNG: Okay. We'll speak to your  
24 supervisor and go through the proper process to request  
25 documents. But we'd be very interested in just to get

1 some visual on the inside of the boiler.

2 MR. LAASKO: Yeah.

3 MR. YOUNG: Okay. And the other last  
4 question I have is was there any indication from the  
5 crew while you were interacting with them that they had  
6 any concerns with any sort of deficiencies throughout  
7 the entire plant while you were aboard the ship?

8 MR. LAASKO: No. Just, you know, they said  
9 that the inside of the starboard boiler was pretty  
10 similar to the inside of the port boiler. The port  
11 boiler was a little -- had a little more wear and tear,  
12 you know. But that was just the opinion of the  
13 engineers.

14 They've got highly skilled engineers on  
15 these ships. Sea Star definitely keeps a good crew of  
16 guys. So, you know, they kept everything in tip-top  
17 shape down there, you know. So the boilers, you know,  
18 when they said that the port boiler looked a little  
19 worse but was still operational as the starboard boiler  
20 that was basically what I had to go off of because we  
21 weren't shutting down the other plant.

22 MR. YOUNG: Okay, sounds good.

23 I'm just going to pass around to my other  
24 two team members and if they have any questions then.

25 MR. O'DONNELL: Luke, Lou O'Donnell:, Assist

1 Chief Surveyor with ABS, maritime division.

2 So you didn't do anything with the port  
3 boiler. Was there also similar planned work to be done  
4 during the yard period for boiler pot and burner  
5 throats, things like that, cleaning?

6 MR. LAASKO: Yeah. The yard period was  
7 limited amount of time. So during that time we only  
8 have a -- you know, we can only do so much to the  
9 boilers. But the plan was to do the burner throats on  
10 both boilers. And then inspector work needed to be  
11 done to clean the gas passes on both boilers during our  
12 yard period.

13 MR. O'DONNELL: Yeah. Okay, so to get the  
14 big stuff first and then pop to the other stuff later  
15 when they got around to the West Coast and maybe during  
16 lay periods?

17 MR. LAASKO: Yeah. More, more time. I mean  
18 there was nothing there that indicated it was going to  
19 create a problem. It was just the amount of time. You  
20 don't want to get into something and then not have  
21 enough time to finish it on our side. So burner  
22 throats was ideal, you know.

23 MR. O'DONNELL: Understood. Understood. I  
24 know you open up one little thing you can open up a big  
25 can of worms in the boiler. Understood.



1 MR. LAASKO: Yeah.

2 MR. O'DONNELL: Okay, thank you. That's all  
3 the questions I have.

4 [REDACTED]  
5 [REDACTED]: Good morning. [REDACTED] with  
6 U.S. Coast Guard.

7 Just one question. And I think you were  
8 kind of already asked this already but I'd like you to  
9 think about it. And outside of the boilers, anything  
10 else in the engineering plant that you observed or saw  
11 that would have, you would consider an issue? Or  
12 anything during your time under way did you observe  
13 that was of concern to you --

14 MR. LAASKO: No.

15 [REDACTED]: -- with proficiency of the crew  
16 or anything?

17 MR. LAASKO: No. You know, the crew was  
18 hands-on. And, you know, I've dealt with these guys,  
19 you know, since I was working for another company when  
20 I was -- when they were still in Seattle and Takoma.  
21 And so as far as the crew, they're on top of it.  
22 They're point on, you know.

23 They, they, each one of them that's down  
24 there they really care about what their engine room  
25 looks like. So I didn't notice anything out of the

1 ordinary about the engine room at all, you know. Other  
2 than the fact that, you know, it was that time of year  
3 and it's extremely hot coming from Puerto Rico to  
4 Jacksonville. And, you know, there's nothing you can  
5 do about it; it is what it is, bringing that hot air  
6 into that engine room. But other than it's, it's -- it  
7 was, the engine was clean and in good shape.

8 MR. YOUNG: Oh, and just two follow-ups.  
9 This is Brian Young again with the NTSB.

10 Do you happen to remember -- and I know it's  
11 a tough question -- what sort of speed you were making  
12 from San Juan to Jacksonville while you were running on  
13 one boiler or how many turns they were doing on the  
14 shaft? Do you remember at all?

15 MR. LAASKO: I don't really. I, I think --  
16 and this is just, I think I had them mention while we  
17 were coming up we had been doing 12 to 15 knots. But,  
18 you know, I, I really can't answer that because I, it's  
19 not something that I really look at. All I know is  
20 that when I get done with my work I go outside and look  
21 out at a blank ocean for a couple of days until I get  
22 back, so. I wouldn't --

23 MR. YOUNG: We figured that too. But I  
24 just, we're just trying to see the difference in speed  
25 between, you know, both boilers online and possibly

1 one. So that was that.

2 MR. LAASKO: Yeah.

3 MR. YOUNG: And the other question --

4 MR. LAASKO: Yeah, I never, I never really  
5 looked at it.

6 MR. YOUNG: Okay. And we can try to find  
7 that out. But with all the log books on the ship right  
8 now it's some of the challenges we're facing.

9 The last question I have to you is, did you  
10 remember or notice with the engine room being hot if  
11 any of the watertight doors remained open throughout  
12 the voyage from the cargo hold into the engine room due  
13 to the heat?

14 MR. LAASKO: No, I don't remember any  
15 watertight doors being open. I always had to go  
16 through a door if I needed to get into a cargo hold. I  
17 always had to unlatch it and step into the cargo hold.  
18 But I usually went up through the top, so I didn't go  
19 out into the cargo hold any other time. One time I  
20 went through and I had to go through a watertight door  
21 and actually unlatch it, latch it back up.

22 MR. YOUNG: Okay.

23 MR. LAASKO: So I always, I always came from  
24 the top.

25 MR. YOUNG: Okay.

1 MR. LAASKO: Through the house down, so.

2 MR. YOUNG: Great. And did you experience  
3 any rough weather out there or was the weather calm?

4 MR. LAASKO: No, it was really calm.

5 MR. YOUNG: Okay, great.

6 [REDACTED] [REDACTED] with the Coast Guard  
7 again.

8 So you said that you had to unlatch the  
9 water, watertight door. What purpose did you have for  
10 going up into the number 3 cargo hold?

11 MR. LAASKO: Well, when you come out the  
12 engine room on the main deck you can kind of walk out  
13 and you can go out through a watertight door right  
14 there and then walk the ramp. And when we're in the  
15 yard they're usually, whatever, either at the dock or  
16 whatever, that's the easiest access. You don't have to  
17 go down stairs, you can just walk up the ramp. So I  
18 went out the watertight door to walk up the ramp.

19 And then there's another watertight door on  
20 the main -- I don't know what you would call that main  
21 door where they can lower the trailers down there --  
22 but there's a watertight door standing right there.  
23 And then you open up that and then you're right on the  
24 main deck where you can look out at the ocean.

25 So one of the times I came out of the engine

1 room I went up the rampway as opposed to going straight  
2 up the stairs into the house. Both doors were shut.

3 [REDACTED]: So when you would close it and  
4 lock it down, they've got multiple dogs on it, was it  
5 routine practice just to dog one dog on it just so  
6 people could get in and out of it easy?

7 MR. LAASKO: No. I mean the -- when I went  
8 out through these doors they were all dogged down. It  
9 wasn't, it wasn't an often-traveled pass, you know. So  
10 for me if there's a, if there's one dog on the door  
11 I'll dog it down if we're sitting pierside or something  
12 like that. But these were all dogged down so I dogged  
13 them back the same way when I went up.

14 [REDACTED] Thank you.

15 MR. YOUNG: Great. I know that was the last  
16 question three questions ago. But when you did --

17 MR. LAASKO: Oh.

18 MR. YOUNG: -- go to sea on this ship, did  
19 the crew conduct a familiarization walk-around with you  
20 so you were familiar with your lifeboat station and  
21 abandon ship drill?

22 MR. LAASKO: Yeah.

23 MR. YOUNG: You did. And was there  
24 something --

25 MR. LAASKO: I sat with, I sat with the

1 captain at the beginning when I got to San Juan and we  
2 talked about it. We talked where the lifeboats were at  
3 and discussed the, the suit that I'm supposed to don if  
4 something, there's an emergency and my route opened,  
5 stuff like that. They went through all that to let me  
6 know that we have an alarm. I mean I don't remember  
7 all the alarms that we're supposed to have, you know,  
8 but I -- they just went through exactly what I was  
9 supposed to deal with, which boat that I was supposed  
10 to be on.

11 MR. YOUNG: Okay. So there was a  
12 familiarization when you boarded the ship?

13 MR. LAASKO: Yeah.

14 MR. YOUNG: And did you partake in any  
15 abandon ship lifeboat drills?

16 MR. LAASKO: I didn't. I didn't partake in  
17 anything.

18 MR. YOUNG: Okay. Okay. I don't have any  
19 more questions.

20 I, is this a cell phone? I can text you or  
21 email you some information on our contact info if you  
22 did want to contact us for anything? Or is that --  
23 what's the best way to forward this information to you?

24 MR. LAASKO: Yeah. You can -- this is a  
25 cell phone so you can text me information.

1 MR. YOUNG: Okay. I'll give you my name, my  
2 phone number and my email address. Then if you do have  
3 any other things you can remember or any other issues,  
4 please feel free to contact us.

5 And, again, we're just trying to figure out  
6 what happened. And our ultimate goal is to make sure  
7 this doesn't happen again.

8 MR. LAASKO: Yeah, definitely.

9 MR. YOUNG: So we really, really appreciate  
10 your letting us call you this morning, Luke. I know  
11 it's early over there.

12 MR. LAASKO: Nah, it's I've been up since,  
13 you know, about 4:30.

14 (Whereupon, the interview was concluded.)  
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C E R T I F I C A T E

MATTER: El Faro Incident  
Accident No. DCA16MM001  
Interview of Luke Laasko  
teleconference

DATE: 10-13-15

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