

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD

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 IN RE: :
 :
 THE EL FARO INCIDENT OFF : NTSB Accident No.
 THE COAST OF THE BAHAMAS ON : DCA16MM001
 OCTOBER 1, 2015 :
 :
 ----- :

Interview of: MITCH WALKER

Friday,
 March 25, 2016

TOTE Services
 Jacksonville, Florida

BEFORE:

- *TOM ROTH-ROFFY, Investigator-in-charge, NTSB
- LARRY BOWLING, NTSB
- *DENNIS CRIDER, NTSB
- *MIKE KUCHARSKI, NTSB
- *SEAN PAYNE, NTSB
- *BRIAN YOUNG, NTSB
- LEE PETERSON, TOTE Services
- *CAPT [REDACTED] USCG
- *CDR [REDACTED] USCG
- LT [REDACTED] USCG
- *LCDR [REDACTED] USCG

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

*Present via teleconference

PRESENT ON BEHALF OF THE INTERVIEWEE:

GIL FELTEL, ESQ., Tanner Bishop

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

2 (9:00 a.m.)

3 NTSB INVESTIGATOR BOWLING: All right. For
4 all parties, we are digitally recording this particular
5 interview.

6 This is Larry Bowling with the National
7 Transportation Safety Board, the Office of Marine
8 Safety, out of Washington, D.C. I am at the offices of
9 TOTE Services in Jacksonville, Florida.

10 It is Friday, March 25th at 9:00 o'clock.
11 We'll be performing a digital recording of Mr. Mitch
12 Walker who is the Vice President of Operations here at
13 TOTE Services.

14 And participating in this interview locally
15 to my left --

16 MR. PETERSON: Lee Peterson, TOTE Project
17 Coordinator.

18 MR. FELTEL: Gilbert Filtel, Tanner Bishop
19 Law Firm, Mr. Walker's personal representative for this
20 interview.

21 LT. [REDACTED] Lt. [REDACTED] [REDACTED] Chief of the
22 Investigations Division, Section Jacksonville.

23 NTSB INVESTIGATOR BOWLING: And the witness?

24 MR. WALKER: Mitch Walker, Vice President of
25 Marine Operations, TOTE Services.

1 NTSB INVESTIGATOR BOWLING: Thank you.

2 And participating telephonically starting
3 with the NTSB Investigator in Charge?

4 NTSB INVESTIGATOR-IN-CHARGE ROTH-ROFFY:

5 Yes. Good morning. Tom Roth-Roffy, NTSB Investigator-
6 in-Charge.

7 NTSB INVESTIGATOR YOUNG: This is Brian
8 Young. I'm the Engineering Group Chairman for the
9 NTSB.

10 MR. KUCHARSKI: Good morning, everyone.

11 Mike Kucharski, Nautical Operations Group
12 Chairman at NTSB.

13 MR. CRIDER: Dennis Crider. I'm -- and I
14 guess you (inaudible) NTSB.

15 MR. PAYNE: Sean Payne, Research and
16 Engineering Recorders, VDR. I'll be on the ship this
17 coming month.

18 NTSB INVESTIGATOR BOWLING: All right. And
19 for the Coast Guard from D.C.?

20 CAPT. [REDACTED] Good morning, everybody.
21 This is Captain [REDACTED] [REDACTED] I'm the Chairman of
22 the Coast Guard's Marine Board Investigation.

23 CDR. [REDACTED] Good morning. This is Commander
24 [REDACTED] [REDACTED] I'm assisting NTSB on the Engineering
25 Group.

1 LCDR. [REDACTED] Lieutenant Commander [REDACTED]
2 [REDACTED] from the Coast Guard assisting Nautical
3 (inaudible) Group for the NTSB.

4 NTSB INVESTIGATOR BOWLING: All right. Does
5 that capture everyone, or did I step on somebody there
6 that was trying to communicate?

7 (No audible response.)

8 NTSB INVESTIGATOR BOWLING: Okay. With that
9 said, we'll start the interview.

10 Mr. Walker, off the record, we had talked a
11 little bit about the format of the interview, the
12 process and made you aware that we were going to be
13 digitally recording this interview.

14 Did you understand everything that we talked
15 about?

16 MR. WALKER: Yes, I did.

17 NTSB INVESTIGATOR BOWLING: Okay. All
18 right.

19 And we'll start off, can you tell me a
20 little bit about your maritime training and your
21 educational background, please?

22 MR. WALKER: I graduated out of Maine
23 Maritime in 1971. I went to sea for almost 18 years,
24 most of which was as chief engineer.

25 I started off out with Gulf Oil and then I

1 went to Trinidad. So I was main -- all my sea time was
2 on tankers. I came to this company in 1990 after
3 leaving Trinidad.

4 I have gradually worked my up. I started
5 with this company as a contracted port engineer. I
6 worked up my way through the years to my present
7 position.

8 NTSB INVESTIGATOR BOWLING: Okay. And your
9 present position is?

10 MR. WALKER: I'm Vice President, Marine
11 Operations, Government and Other Commercial Vessels.

12 NTSB INVESTIGATOR BOWLING: Okay.

13 MR. WALKER: Other meaning other than the
14 TOTE maritime vessels.

15 NTSB INVESTIGATOR BOWLING: Okay.

16 MR. WALKER: I take care of the rest of the
17 business.

18 NTSB INVESTIGATOR BOWLING: Okay.

19 Now tell me within your job description
20 basically what does that entail?

21 MR. WALKER: Well, it takes -- it entails
22 taking over all the contracts and managing those
23 contracts and customer relations with those contracts,
24 ship operations, overseeing ship operations. I have
25 directors of engineering under me -- director of

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1 operations for each individual contract that we
2 operate. Those guys report to me and then as a group,
3 we take care of the ships and the customers.

4 NTSB INVESTIGATOR BOWLING: Okay. And your
5 subordinate span of control, how many do you have?
6 What does your subordinate hierarchy look like?

7 MR. WALKER: Well, including all the port
8 engineers, there's one, two, three, four, five, six,
9 seven, eight, nine, ten, 11, 12, 14 guys -- 12, 14
10 people.

11 NTSB INVESTIGATOR BOWLING: Okay. And
12 they're here locally or elsewhere?

13 MR. WALKER: They're all over. They're --
14 some of them are here local in this office and the
15 others are in remote locations.

16 NTSB INVESTIGATOR BOWLING: Okay.

17 MR. WALKER: Those locations are Baltimore -
18 - let's see -- Baltimore, New Orleans, Beaumont, Texas,
19 San Francisco, Portland, Oregon and Seattle,
20 Washington, they're in.

21 NTSB INVESTIGATOR BOWLING: Okay. And how
22 much time do you spend on the road versus in the office
23 here? Can you kind of break me down say a weekly
24 routine?

25 MR. WALKER: I'm mainly in the office most

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1 of the time. The other guys do all the traveling. I -
2 - I stay here most of the time. But probably during
3 the course of the year, I'll make three or four trips
4 to -- to different customer locations.

5 NTSB INVESTIGATOR BOWLING: Okay. And you
6 report directly to who?

7 MR. WALKER: Phil Greene.

8 NTSB INVESTIGATOR BOWLING: Phil Greene?

9 MR. WALKER: Yes.

10 NTSB INVESTIGATOR BOWLING: All right.

11 Now your relationship with John Lawrence in
12 the corporate hierarchy, how is your job tied to John
13 Lawrence?

14 MR. WALKER: Well, John oversees the
15 corporate programs in ISM and Safety.

16 NTSB INVESTIGATOR BOWLING: Okay.

17 MR. WALKER: And so, obviously we apply that
18 to all the contracts across the board. So I deal with
19 him a lot in those -- issues involving those topics.

20 NTSB INVESTIGATOR BOWLING: Okay. All
21 right.

22 And the reason we asked to speak to you
23 today is I'm going to refer to an email dated the 1st
24 of October 2015 at 8:52 a.m. from yourself to Mr. Phil
25 Greene, Anthony Chirello (phonetic) and Tim Noland

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1 (phonetic) with several copied on it.

2 I'm going to let you take a quick look at
3 this.

4 And for those on the phone, the witness is
5 looking at a hard copy of his email.

6 And Mitch, if you don't mind for the record,
7 can you read the content of that email on the record
8 for me, please?

9 MR. WALKER: Sure.

10 "Just got off the phone with John Lawrence.
11 He is in communication with the USCG Miami and Norfolk
12 directly. Neither John nor Coast Guard have been able
13 to contact the ship since 0720. The phone rings about
14 three times and then disconnects. Our salvage service
15 is TNT Salvage. John has contacted them and they are
16 checking for available assets in the area. Nearest
17 safe harbor is Turks and Caicos Islands. Last known
18 location was about 49 miles east of San Salvador
19 Island. Experiencing heavy winds and 15-foot seas,
20 ship had 15-degree list. They were without main
21 engines." And in parentheses, I wrote "Trip on low
22 lube oil. But have electrical power and were pumping
23 water out of three hold. Water ingress apparently from
24 open manhole scuttle not properly secured. Coast Guard
25 has advised if communications are not re-established

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1 soon, they will send an aircraft to find the ship."

2 NTSB INVESTIGATOR BOWLING: Okay. Thank
3 you.

4 Now Mitch, I'm just going to give you an
5 open-ended question here.

6 MR. WALKER: Sure.

7 NTSB INVESTIGATOR BOWLING: Tell me about
8 the source of this email and how this email came about.

9 MR. WALKER: Well, the source was I wrote it
10 from my computer.

11 NTSB INVESTIGATOR BOWLING: Right.

12 MR. WALKER: So it was after talking to John
13 and -- and getting an idea of what had happened -- an
14 idea of his conversation with the Captain and -- and
15 the conditions that were on the ship.

16 NTSB INVESTIGATOR BOWLING: Okay. And when
17 you say after talking with John, you're referring to
18 Mr. John Lawrence?

19 MR. WALKER: Yes.

20 NTSB INVESTIGATOR BOWLING: Tell me about
21 that call to the best of your recollection.

22 MR. WALKER: He basically told me that --
23 that he had talked the Captain. The Captain and him
24 had talked directly on the phone, that the Captain had
25 told him there was a 15-degree list on the ship. They

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1 were in heavy seas, and I think he said 15 foot which
2 is what I wrote there.

3 He said some other things, too, like the
4 Captain had said that no one was panicking at this
5 point. John said he sounded very calm on the phone.
6 But he said the Captain said they had lost propulsion
7 but they were pumping -- pumping out the water in three
8 hold, that the scuttle had blown open and he had gotten
9 water down in the manhole scuttle. But that was
10 secured now and they were pumping it out.

11 Basically, that's the info he gave us.

12 NTSB INVESTIGATOR BOWLING: Okay. And that
13 information that you just conveyed came from John
14 Lawrence?

15 MR. WALKER: Yes. To me. Yes.

16 NTSB INVESTIGATOR BOWLING: Tell me where
17 you were at when that call came in from John.

18 MR. WALKER: I was right here in the office.

19 NTSB INVESTIGATOR BOWLING: Okay. And
20 approximately do you know what time it was?

21 MR. WALKER: Somewhere -- well, somewhere
22 between -- John probably called me around 7:25 shortly
23 after he had got off the phone with the Captain.

24 NTSB INVESTIGATOR BOWLING: Okay.

25 MR. WALKER: So I'm really not sure what the

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1 exact time is. But he called me right after he got off
2 the phone with the Captain.

3 NTSB INVESTIGATOR BOWLING: All right.

4 And would you have happened to had a note
5 pad on your desk at the time? Did you recall taking
6 notes from the conversation from John?

7 MR. WALKER: Not sure if I did or not. I
8 don't think so.

9 NTSB INVESTIGATOR BOWLING: Okay.

10 For the team, this is Larry Bowling. Mitch,
11 I'm going to turn the floor over to Mr. Brian Young --

12 MR. WALKER: Yes.

13 NTSB INVESTIGATOR BOWLING: -- whose the
14 group chairman for Engineering.

15 MR. WALKER: Okay.

16 NTSB INVESTIGATOR BOWLING: Mr. Young?

17 NTSB INVESTIGATOR YOUNG: Thanks, Larry.

18 Thanks, Mr. Walker. I appreciate your time
19 today.

20 As an engineer -- (inaudible) engineer -- I
21 was just wondering how it was determined in the email
22 that the loss of the main engine may have been
23 attributed to a tripped low lube oil?

24 MR. WALKER: Well --

25 NTSB INVESTIGATOR YOUNG: Is that something

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1 you heard directly from John Lawrence or something you
2 surmised? Or had you been in communication with the
3 ship other than your discussion with John Lawrence?

4 MR. WALKER: No. That's something I
5 surmised. And reading this email, I realize I probably
6 left a question mark off on that.

7 It was just my guess based on the
8 information that I had been given. Looking at that
9 ship having a 15-degree list and then imagining it
10 rolling back and forth on top of that for every wave
11 that came told me that it would be quite a bit more
12 than 15 degrees at some point as the waves tilt the
13 ship.

14 At those kinds of angles -- you know -- I
15 envisioned that the lube oil pump would be stopped for
16 suction at some point at -- at some degree of list, and
17 that a minute interruption in pressure could have
18 possibly tripped the throttle.

19 That -- that's all I was thinking. And that
20 was strictly my conjecture.

21 NTSB INVESTIGATOR YOUNG: Based on your
22 previous seagoing experience, had you ever experienced
23 anything like that?

24 MR. WALKER: I have years ago. I was in a
25 real, real bad hurricane. And we took a severe list

1 that took water down the stack, put all the fires out
2 in the boilers, tipped the ship way over. Pumps
3 dripped, throttles dripped. All the fires were out.
4 And I was very fortunate to manage to get that plant
5 back on line. So yes, I have seen it before.

6 NTSB INVESTIGATOR YOUNG: And are you
7 familiar with the plant of the El Morro? Have you ever
8 sailed on it?

9 MR. WALKER: I'm very -- I'm very familiar
10 with those ships. The El Morro and the El Yunque, I
11 modernized those out on the West Coast. We took them
12 from Matson (phonetic) in 1998, and I was in charge of
13 the program to convert those ships for use in the -- in
14 the Puerto Rico trade.

15 NTSB INVESTIGATOR YOUNG: Okay.

16 And when we are speaking of lube oil
17 suction, we had talked to one of the chiefs and it
18 seemed like the lube oil suction was taken from the
19 center of the reduction gear at the bottom. And there
20 was a pretty good head of lube oil above it.

21 Are you aware of any issues possibly that
22 would prevent suction from happening properly, whether
23 it be debris in the oil or a block of air or actually
24 the location of the suction within the reduction gear?

25 MR. WALKER: No, I -- I can honestly say I'm

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1 not familiar with how that is set up.

2 NTSB INVESTIGATOR YOUNG: Okay.

3 And then how were the pumps set up? Is it
4 true that there is a running pump -- a stand-by pump?

5 MR. WALKER: I'm sorry. I didn't hear the
6 question.

7 NTSB INVESTIGATOR YOUNG: The lube oil pump,
8 there's a main running pump and a back-up or a stand-
9 by.

10 MR. WALKER: You know, I don't recall at
11 this time. I'm sorry. It's been many years since I
12 was involved with them. But I -- I don't recall.

13 NTSB INVESTIGATOR YOUNG: Okay.

14 And just to confirm, was there any
15 communication between the ship and yourself directly
16 that day?

17 MR. WALKER: No, there was not.

18 NTSB INVESTIGATOR YOUNG: And I understand
19 too with your position, you are VP of Ops of Government
20 and Other Commercial Vessels. How does that relate to
21 the El Faro?

22 MR. WALKER: Well, it really doesn't. I
23 mean, the El Faro is under my command. That's under
24 Phil Morrell (phonetic).

25 NTSB INVESTIGATOR YOUNG: Okay. So you

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1 didn't really have any specific duties overseeing that
2 vessel?

3 MR. WALKER: No, I do not.

4 I'm occasionally just asked the questions
5 now and then in regards to general operations. But not
6 very often. There's some good guys over there.

7 NTSB INVESTIGATOR YOUNG: Yes.

8 And also, regarding this email, the ability
9 for the vessel to be pumping out water from the three
10 hold, was that an assumption that they still had power
11 based on the electrical power provided from the bilge
12 and ballast pump system?

13 MR. WALKER: Yes. That -- that's what we
14 all assumed. At least I assumed and John assumed that
15 they -- they had electrical power because they were
16 pumping out.

17 NTSB INVESTIGATOR YOUNG: Okay.

18 And then the water ingress from the open
19 manhole scuttle -- the scuttles are connecting between
20 two hold and three hold and not open communication to
21 the outside (inaudible). Do you know if there was any
22 further description as to how the manhole was actually
23 allowing water to come into the hold?

24 MR. WALKER: That -- if I recall correctly,
25 that manhole is on the second deck down which is rather

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1 an open deck. But it's a watertight deck. The second
2 deck down is a watertight deck.

3 The top deck is just a weather deck. The
4 manhole scuttle I believe opens up in the watertight
5 deck.

6 NTSB INVESTIGATOR YOUNG: Okay. So between
7 decks, that scuttle is open?

8 MR. WALKER: That's my understanding. Yes.
9 That -- that would be the hatch which -- and the second
10 deck is actually -- has many openings in the side of
11 the ship where water can come in.

12 NTSB INVESTIGATOR YOUNG: Okay. And then if
13 the scuttle is open, then water can flow down each of
14 the watertight deck?

15 MR. WALKER: Correct. Down -- down into the
16 cargo hold.

17 NTSB INVESTIGATOR YOUNG: Right. Which is
18 watertight.

19 MR. WALKER: Right.

20 NTSB INVESTIGATOR YOUNG: Okay.

21 Since the accident, you guys have probably
22 looked at it a lot, has there been any discussion as to
23 how the propulsion system could have been lost? I know
24 there's a lot of speculation but without a lot of
25 details or facts, but other than lube oil trip, is

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1 there anything else that you have seen in your past
2 with these ships that could have contributed to the
3 loss of propulsion?

4 MR. WALKER: Well, nothing that really comes
5 to mind -- you know -- without -- I mean, obviously,
6 there's hundreds of things that could go wrong. But --

7 NTSB INVESTIGATOR YOUNG: Yes.

8 MR. WALKER: -- to me, the most logical
9 scenario is something on that effect -- the tripping of
10 the main engines.

11 NTSB INVESTIGATOR YOUNG: And I know you're
12 not involved in the day-to-day operations, but do you
13 know if it was a policy once the ship was out and
14 cleared out in the open water for them to switch from
15 high- to low-sea suction on the main (inaudible) pumps?

16 MR. WALKER: That is usually done in port
17 when you're loading. I mean --

18 NTSB INVESTIGATOR YOUNG: And then once
19 you're out to sea to go to low suction.

20 MR. WALKER: Sometimes, yes. Sometimes, no.
21 But basically, if -- if you're loading in port, as your
22 -- as your low suction gets down close to the bottom,
23 you switch to high suction so that you don't suck mud.

24 NTSB INVESTIGATOR YOUNG: And then once you
25 get out, I didn't know if you were aware of a policy or

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1 a directive or SOP that directed the crew to go back to
2 low suction once they were out.

3 MR. WALKER: No. No policy that I'm aware
4 of.

5 NTSB INVESTIGATOR YOUNG: Okay.

6 And do you know if there was any sort of
7 policies or anything for heavy weather -- any guidance
8 for the engineers?

9 MR. WALKER: There are heavy weather
10 instructions in our operations manual and -- and I
11 believe in our emergency response manual.

12 NTSB INVESTIGATOR YOUNG: Is that fleet-wide
13 or just for the government vessels?

14 MR. WALKER: I'm sorry?

15 NTSB INVESTIGATOR YOUNG: Is that for all
16 the vessels or just the government vessels?

17 MR. WALKER: No, that's all vessels.

18 NTSB INVESTIGATOR YOUNG: All the TOTE
19 vessels?

20 MR. WALKER: Yes.

21 NTSB INVESTIGATOR YOUNG: Okay.

22 Well, thank you for your time. I'm going to
23 pass it off to the next --

24 NTSB INVESTIGATOR BOWLING: Thank you, Mr.
25 Young.

1 This is Larry Bowling here locally in
2 Jacksonville.

3 While we have the engineer communicating
4 with engineers, let's slip over to Commander [REDACTED] [REDACTED]

5 Commander, any engineering or any other
6 questions from your standpoint for the witness?

7 CDR. [REDACTED] Yes, sir. Just one question
8 with how familiar you are with the vessel.

9 If it would have been the lube oil problem,
10 how difficult in your opinion would it have been for
11 them to get the plant back on line and how much time
12 would that have taken them to get it back on line?

13 MR. WALKER: Well, to me that's the baffling
14 part of it. It shouldn't -- it should not have taken
15 that long to re-set the throttle. However, if you are
16 continually bouncing back and forth, perhaps you can't
17 keep the throttle in open position because of all the -
18 - all the rolling, especially if it's really severe.

19 CDR. [REDACTED] For an experienced chief
20 engineer, it shouldn't have been that difficult to get
21 the plant back on line if it had just been a lube oil
22 trip that would have taken the plant down.

23 MR. WALKER: In -- in my experience, it
24 shouldn't have taken a lot of time. No.

25 CDR. [REDACTED] Would that lead you to believe

1 that they were having problems that were probably more
2 serious than a low lube oil trip?

3 MR. WALKER: I would hate to speculate, to
4 tell you the truth. But there had to be something
5 going on.

6 CDR. [REDACTED] All right. Thank you. That's
7 all I have.

8 NTSB INVESTIGATOR BOWLING: Thank you,
9 Commander.

10 Now back to the NTSB. Any of the NTSB team
11 up in D.C. have questions for the witness?

12
13 NTSB INVESTIGATOR-IN-CHARGE ROTH-ROFFY:
14 Yes, Larry. It's Roth-Roffy. I just have a couple.

15 NTSB INVESTIGATOR BOWLING: Yes, Mr. Roth-
16 Roffy. Go ahead.

17 NTSB INVESTIGATOR-IN-CHARGE ROTH-ROFFY:
18 Yes. Good afternoon, sir. Tom Roth-Roffy, NTSB.

19 MR. WALKER: Good afternoon. Good morning.

20 NTSB INVESTIGATOR-IN-CHARGE ROTH-ROFFY:
21 Good morning.

22 You mentioned that you had I believe 18
23 years sea time including some time as chief. And I
24 missed how long you sailed as chief.

25 MR. WALKER: I started sailing my first

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1 chief's job when I was 26 years old. And s
2 o, that would have been five years into my
3 career.

4 So most of the years after that, I was as
5 chief engineer. I did have a couple stints relieving
6 on new ships and then moving up to chief.

7 I also changed companies. So when I changed
8 companies, I did one trip as a first and then went up
9 to chief.

10 So I -- I had -- I had 12 years as chief
11 engineer -- close to that.

12 NTSB INVESTIGATOR-IN-CHARGE ROTH-ROFFY: And
13 what time of vessels did you sail on?

14 MR. WALKER: All the vessels I --

15 NTSB INVESTIGATOR-IN-CHARGE ROTH-ROFFY:
16 Mainly -- and I'm sorry. I hate to keep the focus.
17 Was it steam vessels or motor vessels or both?

18 MR. WALKER: Steam vessels. All steam
19 vessels.

20 NTSB INVESTIGATOR-IN-CHARGE ROTH-ROFFY: All
21 steamers?

22 MR. WALKER: Yes.

23 NTSB INVESTIGATOR-IN-CHARGE ROTH-ROFFY: And
24 I'd like to return to your response had you experienced
25 a similar situation on a previous ship. And I believe

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1 you described an instance where you had rough water and
2 lost the main -- the main propulsion turbines. Is that
3 correct?

4 MR. WALKER: Yes.

5 NTSB INVESTIGATOR-IN-CHARGE ROTH-ROFFY: And
6 I believe you also said you lost the boilers. Could
7 you describe that?

8 MR. WALKER: We took severe seas to the
9 point where the seas came directly down the stack of
10 the ship. The ship was totally engulfed with a
11 tremendous wave. I couldn't even guess to tell you how
12 big it was.

13 The seas came down the stack. They put all
14 the fires out because when the slug of water was coming
15 down the stack, the exhaust gases had no place to go.
16 So it smothered all the fires.

17 That immediately tripped the boilers. We --
18 we lost seven motors in the engine room that burnt out
19 because seas came down every ventilator. At the
20 maneuvering level which is the second deck up, we were
21 standing in about three inches of water. Totally
22 filled the bilges down below when it was over.

23 It was a harrowing experience.

24 So everything tripped. The entire plant
25 tripped out. We were rolling so bad -- we were rolling

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1 so bad you could hardly stand up.

2 I had the entire engine gang down below
3 anticipating problems. And we took about ten minutes
4 and we had the boilers back on line. And I was putting
5 steam back on the main engine.

6 NTSB INVESTIGATOR-IN-CHARGE ROTH-ROFFY:
7 Wow, that's an amazing story.

8 MR. WALKER: Yes, you should have been
9 there.

10 And I was in -- that was one hurricane. I
11 was in another but it wasn't -- we didn't have as much
12 trouble. We certainly had a lot of alarms and a few
13 things tripped out, but nothing real serious.

14 NTSB INVESTIGATOR-IN-CHARGE ROTH-ROFFY: And
15 sir, in that case, did the main turbine trip before the
16 boilers or as a result of the boiler?

17 MR. WALKER: I believe it was as a result of
18 losing the boilers and everything else. They -- they
19 -- they tripped. They tripped on low steam -- lost
20 steam.

21 NTSB INVESTIGATOR-IN-CHARGE ROTH-ROFFY:
22 Okay. So they did not actually trip on low lube oil?

23 MR. WALKER: I don't think so. It was very
24 confusing at the moment. But every alarm on the panel
25 was going off.

1 NTSB INVESTIGATOR-IN-CHARGE ROTH-ROFFY:
2 Understood.

3 And do you have any other experiences where
4 the main propulsion turbine had tripped as a result of
5 rolling or listing causing the throttle to trip as you
6 described?

7 MR. WALKER: I had -- I had one other time
8 when the main throttle tripped. But that was -- and
9 that was in rough weather. But that was due to
10 actually a -- there was a fault with the trip mechanism
11 itself.

12 Other than that, no other instance --
13 incident.

14 NTSB INVESTIGATOR-IN-CHARGE ROTH-ROFFY:
15 Okay.

16 And sir, on the morning of October 1st, why
17 did John Lawrence call you?

18 MR. WALKER: When did he call you?

19 NTSB INVESTIGATOR-IN-CHARGE ROTH-ROFFY: No,
20 I'm sorry. Why did he call you?

21 MR. WALKER: Oh. He -- he called me because
22 -- in any emergency -- I'm part of the emergency
23 response team. And so, he called me as -- as part of
24 the team knowing that I have to make notifications to
25 the president and others.

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1 NTSB INVESTIGATOR-IN-CHARGE ROTH-ROFFY:

2 Okay.

3 And my next question is why did you send the
4 email? Was that part of your responsibilities to make
5 the notification?

6 MR. WALKER: Yes. That was part of my
7 notifying the -- the boss. And he -- unfortunately, he
8 was traveling at the time. I believe he was in Houston
9 or Washington, or between Houston and Washington. But
10 he was traveling. So.

11 NTSB INVESTIGATOR-IN-CHARGE ROTH-ROFFY: And
12 sir, did you send any other emails besides the one that
13 we were referring to earlier regarding this instance?

14 MR. WALKER: He -- not that I recall. I may
15 have but I really do not remember if I did or not.

16 NTSB INVESTIGATOR-IN-CHARGE ROTH-ROFFY: And
17 if you could just quickly summarize what you did after
18 you sent the email and your activities in regards to
19 your response team.

20 MR. WALKER: Well, generally, we were
21 setting up the emergency response center here to start
22 handling the situation and get everybody on the
23 response team gathered together, making sure that the
24 required duties and notifications were being made.

25 NTSB INVESTIGATOR-IN-CHARGE ROTH-ROFFY: And

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1 do you have additional specific duties as part of that
2 team? Or they had just assigned that as needed as the
3 event unfolds?

4 MR. WALKER: Basically, assign as events
5 unfold. I -- I do have a set notification requirement.
6 And of course, that starts with the president of the
7 company.

8 And if it involves a customer, then it
9 starts getting into customer notifications as well.

10 NTSB INVESTIGATOR-IN-CHARGE ROTH-ROFFY:
11 Okay.

12 Well, sir, thank you very much. That's all
13 I have for now.

14 MR. WALKER: You're welcome.

15 NTSB INVESTIGATOR-IN-CHARGE ROTH-ROFFY: Mr.
16 Bowling?

17 NTSB INVESTIGATOR BOWLING: Thank you, Mr.
18 Roth-Roffy.

19 NTSB participants from the research
20 engineering department, any questions from you all?

21 PARTICIPANT: I don't have any.

22 NTSB INVESTIGATOR BOWLING: Thank you.
23 Sean?

24 MR. PAYNE: No, sir.

25 NTSB INVESTIGATOR BOWLING: Roger that.

1 What about Mr. Mike Kucharski -- another
2 marine investigation with OMS?

3 MR. KUCHARSKI: Good morning, Larry. Good
4 morning, Mr. Walker.

5 MR. WALKER: Good morning.

6 MR. KUCHARSKI: Good morning.

7 A couple quick questions. You said you were
8 involved with the modification of the vessels --
9 getting them ready after they were taken over from
10 Matson. Is that correct?

11 MR. WALKER: Yes.

12 MR. KUCHARSKI: Was there any modification
13 made to the lube oil system on the vessel at that time?

14 MR. WALKER: I'm sorry. To the what system?

15 MR. KUCHARSKI: The lube oil system that
16 we're --

17 MR. WALKER: No.

18 MR. KUCHARSKI: -- talking about.

19 Was there any modification made?

20 MR. WALKER: No. We mainly were doing steel
21 modifications and converting the ship's main deck from
22 railroad to container decks.

23 MR. KUCHARSKI: Great. And during your
24 employ at TOTE or its predecessor, was that InterOcean
25 that you were working for previous?

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1 MR. WALKER: I'm sorry. I did not hear
2 that, Mike.

3 MR. KUCHARSKI: The predecessor to TOTE, was
4 that Interocean that you were working for?

5 MR. WALKER: No. It's the same company.
6 Interocean and TOTE are the same company. We just --

7 MR. KUCHARSKI: Okay. All right.

8 MR. WALKER: -- we just changed names.

9 Now the predecessor just before I came here
10 was Trinidad Corporation. And that was owned by Apex
11 Oil in St. Louis, Missouri.

12 Prior to that, I was at the Gulf Oil
13 Corporation until T. Boone Pickens raided it and they
14 folded.

15 MR. KUCHARSKI: Okay. So in 1990 when you
16 came to TOTE, were you aware of any other vessel either
17 in TOTE operated/owned fleet that lost propulsion due
18 to lack of lube oil?

19 MR. WALKER: In this company?

20 MR. KUCHARSKI: Yes.

21 MR. WALKER: No.

22 MR. KUCHARSKI: And after the accident, were
23 you aware of any -- or did TOTE hire any outside
24 company to discuss possible losses of propulsion?

25 MR. WALKER: Not to my knowledge. I'm not

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1 aware of that. No.

2 MR. KUCHARSKI: Okay. That's it for now.

3 Thank you.

4 MR. WALKER: Okay.

5 NTSB INVESTIGATOR BOWLING: Thank you, Mike.

6 Captain [REDACTED]

7 CAPT. [REDACTED] Good morning. I'm going to
8 defer to Lt. [REDACTED] Do you have any questions at this
9 time?

10 LT. [REDACTED] I do not, Captain. I don't
11 have any questions.

12 NTSB INVESTIGATOR BOWLING: All right.

13 Commander [REDACTED]

14 LCDR. [REDACTED] Yes, sir. Just a couple
15 questions. This is Lieutenant Commander [REDACTED]

16 Sir, we understood from your email and from
17 other testimony that the scuttle blew open. And I
18 think you said something similar. Is that correct?

19 MR. WALKER: Yes. The word that John gave
20 me in the phone call was that the Captain said to him
21 that the -- the scuttle blew open or the scuttle came
22 open -- something like that.

23 LCDR. [REDACTED] When you heard that, sir,
24 what did you envision actually happened? How would
25 that occur?

1 MR. WALKER: Well, honestly, I -- I -- I
2 thought it was a little odd. I could not imagine the
3 situation where the scuttle would blow open if it had
4 been secured properly.

5 LCDR. [REDACTED] Was it discussed at all
6 some unusual types of ways that it may have blew open,
7 like for instance, rather than water coming in from the
8 top side, actually water blowing it upwards from within
9 or the possibility that the scuttle was tied open --
10 things like that?

11 MR. WALKER: No. The -- the only discussion
12 I had with John was how does that happen. I don't
13 understand how that can happen. That's what I said to
14 John. So it was just perplexing. That's all.

15 The only possible scenario that I could see
16 was that if gasket material is -- is really, really
17 soft, sometimes a heavy weight on top can compress the
18 cover down to the point where the mechanism might
19 loosen. But other than that, I just couldn't imagine
20 how it could happen.

21 LCDR. [REDACTED] All right. Thank you.

22 And just one more question along that line.

23 You mentioned that the opened second deck
24 has several openings on the side. There's also some
25 openings slightly above the second deck on the side.

1 What openings did you talk about as this went on that
2 may have been possible flood points?

3 MR. WALKER: Well, I'm talking about the
4 ramp deck where the ramp's attached to the ship. You
5 have the ramp openings and then there are various
6 openings along the side of the ship on -- on that same
7 deck level.

8 LCDR. [REDACTED] Did you ever discuss the
9 ventilation trunks for the holds?

10 MR. WALKER: No. Did not.

11 LCDR. [REDACTED] In your experience, would
12 TOTE need ventilation trunks for those holds? Were
13 they regularly inspected and in good condition?

14 MR. WALKER: Yes, they were. They were
15 inspected. As far as I know, they were inspected every
16 -- every time we have an ABS or a CIO inspection.

17 LCDR. [REDACTED] Okay. No further
18 questions. Thank you.

19 MR. WALKER: Okay.

20 NTSB INVESTIGATOR BOWLING: Thank you.

21 Larry Bowling here in Jacksonville.

22 For the folks attending telephonically, have
23 I missed anyone who would like to ask the witness a
24 question?

25 CAPT. [REDACTED] Mr. Bowling, this is

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1 Captain [REDACTED] again. I just have a couple follow-
2 ups if you don't mind.

3 NTSB INVESTIGATOR BOWLING: Captain
4 [REDACTED] the floor is yours, sir.

5 CAPT. [REDACTED] Thank you.

6 Good morning, sir. I appreciate your time.

7 I just have a quick question in regards to
8 the morning of the phone call with Mr. Lawrence.

9 Before the phone call, do you remember being
10 aware of Hurricane Joaquin?

11 MR. WALKER: Yes, I do remember seeing that.
12 It was a tropical storm the day before. And I wasn't
13 sure when it became hurricane status. But I was aware
14 roughly that the storm was out there.

15 CAPT. [REDACTED] Yes, sir.

16 And when you talked with Mr. Lawrence, was
17 that tropical storm or hurricane discussed at all in
18 relation to the conditions that the El Faro was
19 experiencing?

20 MR. WALKER: No, not at that point. No.

21 CAPT. [REDACTED] How about after the call as
22 you prepared with the emergency response team, was
23 there any dialogue at TOTE in regards to the hurricane?

24 MR. WALKER: Well, there was dialogue in the
25 -- in the sense that we were collecting information on

1 the storm to see where it was and what it was doing and
2 how severe it was and tracking it, starting to look at
3 the track and that kind of thing. But that was after
4 the fact.

5 CAPT. [REDACTED] So that conversation wasn't
6 linked to the El Faro's condition, is that correct? Or
7 the storm wasn't linked to the conditions the El Faro
8 was experiencing?

9 MR. WALKER: Only in the sense that we were
10 taking in the info that the Captain had told John on
11 the telephone.

12 CAPT. [REDACTED] Okay. Understand. But did
13 TOTE realize that the El Faro was experiencing the
14 hurricane conditions? Or was that known?

15 MR. WALKER: At that point, it was known
16 because of the conversation with the Captain. Yes.

17 CAPT. [REDACTED] Okay. Just wanted to make
18 sure that the conditions that they were experiencing
19 had been tied to Hurricane Joaquin.

20 MR. WALKER: Yes. Yes.

21 CAPT. [REDACTED] That's my question.
22 Okay.

23 MR. WALKER: Yes.

24 CAPT. [REDACTED] And then sir, you said you
25 were involved with the conversion to LOLO for the El

1 Faro?

2 MR. WALKER: Yes. No. I'm sorry. I'm
3 sorry. Not the El Faro. I'm sorry.

4 CAPT. [REDACTED] Okay.

5 MR. WALKER: Only the El Yunque and the El
6 Morro.

7 CAPT. [REDACTED] Okay. Thank you for that
8 clarification.

9 MR. WALKER: Yes.

10 CAPT. [REDACTED] Those are the only
11 questions I have. Thank you.

12 MR. WALKER: You're welcome.

13 NTSB INVESTIGATOR BOWLING: All right.

14 Thank you, Captain [REDACTED]

15 Larry Bowling here in Jacksonville.

16 Again, for the telephonic attendees, any
17 final questions from you all at this time?

18 PARTICIPANT: Nothing from John (inaudible).

19 NTSB INVESTIGATOR YOUNG: This is Brian
20 Young from NTSB. I have one more question.

21 Mr. Walker, I understand you wrote this
22 email as a result of the conversation with John
23 Lawrence. In addition to the phone call that the
24 Captain made to John Lawrence, he also called the
25 Emergency Call Center and left a message with the

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1 operator saying a lot of the same information that was
2 transmitted to John Lawrence.

3 In addition to that, he said he had a hull
4 breach. Was there any discussion between you, the
5 company and/or John Lawrence about a possible breach of
6 the hull?

7 MR. WALKER: I -- I assume that that
8 statement was made in regards to scuttle being open.

9 NTSB INVESTIGATOR YOUNG: When we were
10 aboard the El Yunque, the scuttle, when opened, would
11 allow access between one hold and the other, but not
12 necessarily between a hold and the open ocean. Would
13 you think that the hull breach was separate from a
14 scuttle?

15 MR. WALKER: No. I -- I did not -- for
16 whatever reason, I did not assume that there was any
17 other breach other than the scuttle.

18 NTSB INVESTIGATOR YOUNG: Okay. Thank you.
19 That's all I have.

20 NTSB INVESTIGATOR BOWLING: Right. Thank
21 you, Mr. Young.

22 Locally here, Mr. Lee Peterson with TOTE,
23 any questions for the witness?

24 MR. PETERSON: No questions from Lee.

25 NTSB INVESTIGATOR BOWLING: Lieutenant ████████

1 from the Coast Guard?

2 LT. [REDACTED] No questions.

3 NTSB INVESTIGATOR BOWLING: Counsel for the
4 witness, any follow-up?

5 MR. FELTEL: None, thank you.

6 MR. KUCHARSKI: Larry, I'd like to ask a
7 couple questions.

8 NTSB INVESTIGATOR BOWLING: Yes. And this
9 Mike Kurcharski?

10 MR. KUCHARSKI: Yes. Yes, please.

11 NTSB INVESTIGATOR BOWLING: All right. Mike
12 Kurcharski, you have the floor.

13 MR. KUCHARSKI: Thank you.

14 Mr. Walker, you said that you were involved
15 in the El Yunque and the El Morro conversions then that
16 came over from Matson, is that correct?

17 MR. WALKER: Yes.

18 MR. KUCHARSKI: Who was in charge of then
19 the conversion of the El Faro to ROLOs?

20 MR. WALKER: I'm really not sure who was in
21 charge of the El Faro. That was handled by the Phil
22 Morrell group of people.

23 MR. KUCHARSKI: Okay.

24 And to the El Yunque and the El Morro, were
25 any changes made to the cargo securing system on the

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1 railroad decks on those ships at conversion?

2 MR. WALKER: I do not recall, Mike, if we
3 did anything like that.

4 I -- I do know that we did the cargo
5 securing up on the open weather deck. But I don't
6 recall if we did anything down on the railroad decks.

7 MR. KUCHARSKI: Okay. Thank you.

8 And those vessels -- the Yunque, the El
9 Morro -- and if you know, on the El Faro -- were any
10 openings closed up on the skin of the vessel from the
11 second deck to the main deck?

12 MR. WALKER: I'm not familiar with -- with
13 what they did after I left that program. But I do know
14 that the El Yunque and the El Morro had channels welded
15 on the side of those openings. And they had at that
16 time large wooden -- probably two by sixes or three by
17 sixes. And you can slide those down in the channel to
18 cover up the openings.

19 MR. KUCHARSKI: Okay. And you'd be talking
20 about the large cargo openings in the sides of the hull
21 --

22 MR. WALKER: Yes.

23 MR. KUCHARSKI: -- with ramps attached?

24 MR. WALKER: Yes. You could not do that to
25 the ramp openings. But all the other openings had

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1 those channels welded on them.

2 MR. KUCHARSKI: Okay. So you're not aware
3 of any closing of any of the large ramp openings on the
4 side of the vessel?

5 MR. WALKER: I'm really not. No.

6 MR. KUCHARSKI: Okay. Thank you. And one
7 last general question.

8 Do you know if there's a shore-side
9 operations manual that's part of the safety management
10 system?

11 MR. WALKER: We have the operations manuals
12 for the vessels that -- that we all go by. And we
13 have, of course --

14 MR. KUCHARSKI: Right.

15 MR. WALKER: -- right. And we have the
16 emergency response manuals.

17 MR. KUCHARSKI: Okay. So you're not aware
18 of any manual -- a shore-side component operations
19 manual?

20 MR. WALKER: Here -- here in the office, we
21 have electronic files that we all refer to.

22 MR. KUCHARSKI: Okay. Thank you.

23 No further questions.

24 NTSB INVESTIGATOR BOWLING: All right, Mike.
25 Thank you much.

1 Larry Bowling here with the team in
2 Jacksonville.

3 Mr. Walker, you've been asked questions by
4 myself and several other individuals telephonically.
5 Is there anything that we didn't ask you or that you'd
6 like to get on the record that may help us develop a
7 cause or causes for the sinking of the El Faro?

8 MR. WALKER: No, sir. That's about all I
9 could come up with.

10 NTSB INVESTIGATOR BOWLING: Okay. Well,
11 thank you for your cooperation.

12 I would ask before we close out the
13 interview that I wrote that there may be some potential
14 other emails, and I'd ask you to check your server and
15 see if there are any other emails that may be of
16 interest to the investigative team, and also any desk
17 blotters or notes that you may have jotted down when
18 John Lawrence gave you a call. That's be very helpful.

19 If you have or find something, obviously
20 coordinate with Counsel and Lee Peterson and let our
21 Investigator-in-Charge, Mr. Tom Roth-Roffy, know about
22 it. Okay?

23 MR. WALKER: I will do that.

24 NTSB INVESTIGATOR BOWLING: All right. For
25 the team telephonically, before we secure, any final

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1 questions for the witness?

2 CAPT. [REDACTED] Larry, I do have one. This
3 is Captain [REDACTED]

4 NTSB INVESTIGATOR BOWLING: Captain
5 [REDACTED] the floor is yours.

6 CAPT. [REDACTED] Mr. Walker, sir, I have a
7 question in regards to the Coast Guard response on the
8 morning that you were preparing with the emergency
9 response team at TOTE.

10 MR. WALKER: Right.

11 CAPT. [REDACTED] Are you aware of any
12 concerns with the Coast Guard's level of response from
13 a TOTE perspective on that morning, either with the
14 conversation with Mr. Lawrence or with any other TOTE
15 officials that you had?

16 MR. WALKER: In one of the very first
17 conversations -- and I believe that was relayed to me
18 by John -- someone -- and I don't know who -- but
19 someone at the Coast Guard had told John that they
20 would not fly in the hurricane. And that was basically
21 the only thing that I thought was a little bit odd.
22 But then I realized how -- how much force the hurricane
23 had and I understood why you would say that.

24 But other than that, I had no problem with their
25 response.

1 CAPT. [REDACTED] Okay. Thank you, sir.

2 That's all I had.

3 NTSB INVESTIGATOR BOWLING: All right.

4 Thank you, Captain [REDACTED]

5 Any other final questions from the
6 telephonic attendees?

7 (No audible response.)

8 NTSB INVESTIGATOR BOWLING: All right. At
9 this point, Mr. Walker, we'll secure the interview.

10 (Whereupon, at 9:45 a.m, the interview was
11 concluded.)

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C E R T I F I C A T E

MATTER: El Faro Incident
October 1, 2015
Accident No. DCA16MM001
Interview of Mitch Walker

DATE: 03-25-16

I hereby certify that the attached transcription of page 1 to 43 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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Office of Marine Safety
Transcript Errata

Matter: El Faro
Ref Nbr: DCA16MM001

Dear Sir:

Enclosed with this letter is a copy of the transcript of interview for Mitch Walker taken on 3/25/2016. Kindly review this transcript for accuracy and provide corrections, if any, in the attached table.

Thank you in advance for your attention to this matter.

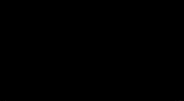
4/12/2016

Brian Young
Major Marine Accident Investigator

TABLE OF CORRECTIONS TO TRANSCRIPT OF INTERVIEW FOR

Interview of Mitch Walker
TAKEN ON

3/25/2016

PAGE NUMBER	LINE NUMBER	CURRENT WORDING	CORRECTED WORDING
		<i>See 'Draft Errata' attached.</i>	

If, to the best of your knowledge, no corrections are needed kindly circle the statement "no corrections needed" and initial in the space provided.

NO CORRECTIONS NEED. _____
Initials

__ Mitchell D. Walker _____
Printed Name of Person providing the above information



Signature of Person providing the above information

__ April 25, 2016 ____
Date

