

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD

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

INTERVIEW OF: JAMES WINEGEART

Friday,
 October 9, 2015

Jacksonville, Florida

BEFORE:

CARRIE BELL, NTSB
 KENNETH BRAGG, NTSB
 ██████████ ██████████ U.S. Coast Guard
 MELISSA SERRIDGE, TOTE Services
 AL SHEPHERD, ABS

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 3:50 p.m.

3 NTSB INVESTIGATOR BELL: It is 3:50 on
4 October 9th. We are at the Marriott Jacksonville. And
5 we're interviewing Captain James Winegeart.

6 I'm Carrie Bell with the NTSB Human
7 Performance Group Chairman.

8 CG INVESTIGATOR [REDACTED] My name is [REDACTED]
9 [REDACTED] with the United States Coast Guard. I'm a
10 civilian investigator.

11 I'm part of the Human Performance Group, but
12 in the absence of our Nautical Operations Group, I've
13 been asked to ask you a few questions related to
14 general nautical operations related to El Faro and
15 other ships of her type.

16 MS. SERRIDGE: Melissa Serridge with TOTE
17 Services. I'm an HR Manager, part of the Human
18 Performance Investigative Group.

19 NTSB INVESTIGATOR BRAGG: My name is Kenny
20 Bragg. I'm a Human Performance Investigator for the
21 National Transportation Safety Board.

22 MR. WINEGEART: Captain James P. Winegeart.
23 I'm a pilot with the St. John's Bar Pilot Association.

24 And I understand this meeting is being
25 recorded and have no problem with that.

1 NTSB INVESTIGATOR BELL: Thank you.

2 MR. SHEPHERD: My name is Alvin Shepherd.
3 I'm with the American Bureau of Shipping. Particularly
4 working in the corporate office in the (inaudible)
5 systems certifications group.

6 NTSB INVESTIGATOR BELL: Okay.

7 So the first question I have for you is just
8 if you wouldn't mind giving a background about your
9 history -- your sailing history and experience.

10 MR. WINEGEART: Okay.

11 I graduated from SUNY Maritime in 1981.
12 Went to sea as third mate. Worked my way up to Master.
13 Sailed Master for a few years and then got a pilot's
14 job here in Jacksonville 22 years ago.

15 NTSB INVESTIGATOR BELL: So you've been a
16 pilot in Jacksonville for 22 years?

17 MR. WINEGEART: Yes, ma'am.

18 NTSB INVESTIGATOR BELL: Okay.

19 So we understand that you were inbound
20 coming in on the 28th of September with the El Faro.
21 And I'm not sure what time that was.

22 MR. WINEGEART: That's correct. I boarded
23 them at 10:45 which was their scheduled arrival.

24 NTSB INVESTIGATOR BELL: 10:45 a.m.?

25 MR. WINEGEART: Yes, ma'am.

1 NTSB INVESTIGATOR BELL: Okay.

2 And when you boarded the vessel, did you
3 guys have any discussion about the tropical storm that
4 was coming in -- anything about that?

5 MR. WINEGEART: We did not.

6 NTSB INVESTIGATOR BELL: What would you say
7 was the demeanor of the crew when you got on board?

8 MR. WINEGEART: It was typical --
9 professional, very competent. No, I didn't notice
10 anything different than other voyages.

11 NTSB INVESTIGATOR BELL: So you've worked
12 with this crew on a number of occasions?

13 MR. WINEGEART: Yes, ma'am.

14 NTSB INVESTIGATOR BELL: How often do you
15 transit on this voyage with this crew?

16 MR. WINEGEART: I don't know the answer to
17 that. They come in weekly, as you know. And
18 obviously, I don't bring them in every week.

19 But I've been on those vessels a lot of
20 times. And that particular crew, I don't know that
21 number.

22 NTSB INVESTIGATOR BELL: But you were
23 familiar with them?

24 MR. WINEGEART: Yes.

25 NTSB INVESTIGATOR BELL: Okay.

1 Did they appear rested and ready? I know
2 they're coming in from the trip, but it's morning. Do
3 they seem rested?

4 MR. WINEGEART: Yes, ma'am.

5 NTSB INVESTIGATOR BELL: Did anyone voice
6 any concerns about the incoming storm and going back
7 out the next day?

8 MR. WINEGEART: I don't recall any
9 discussions about the weather other than the weather
10 that was affecting us for the inbound transit.

11 NTSB INVESTIGATOR BELL: Was there any
12 weather affecting you at that time?

13 MR. WINEGEART: Not so much weather. Just
14 we discussed the current and the tidal conditions and
15 things like that.

16 NTSB INVESTIGATOR BELL: Okay. Okay.
17 So did everything appear normal?

18 MR. WINEGEART: Yes, ma'am.

19 NTSB INVESTIGATOR BELL: Okay.

20 What would you say is your personal opinion
21 of the El Faro personnel?

22 MR. WINEGEART: Very competent.

23 NTSB INVESTIGATOR BELL: Anything in terms
24 of attention to detail? Anything with safety that is
25 noticeable compared to other vessels you've worked on?

1 MR. WINEGEART: I'd say they were clued in
2 to safety and details as much if not more than the
3 (inaudible) foreign and U.S., that come into the Port
4 of Jacksonville.

5 NTSB INVESTIGATOR BELL: Is there anything
6 in particular that makes them stand out in your
7 opinion? You said more than some.

8 MR. WINEGEART: Not so much than the fact
9 that -- you know -- you go on board some ships and the
10 master says okay, you've got it, and that's it. But
11 Captain Davidson always wanted to discuss the traffic
12 and he's very meticulous about the transit. And
13 sometimes, that doesn't always happen.

14 NTSB INVESTIGATOR BELL: So he stays
15 involved?

16 MR. WINEGEART: Yes.

17 NTSB INVESTIGATOR BELL: Okay.

18 Were there any issues that you felt when you
19 were giving steering commands or anything like that --
20 anything that seemed out of the ordinary in terms of
21 maneuvering?

22 MR. WINEGEART: No, ma'am.

23 NTSB INVESTIGATOR BELL: Any health issues
24 or anything that you noticed with the crew? Any
25 illness or anything like that that you recognized?

1 MR. WINEGEART: No, ma'am.

2 NTSB INVESTIGATOR BELL: And what about the
3 bridge equipment? Was that all working properly as far
4 as you know?

5 MR. WINEGEART: Yes, ma'am.

6 NTSB INVESTIGATOR BELL: Okay.

7 That's all I've got for now. I'll pass it
8 around the room.

9 CG INVESTIGATOR [REDACTED] I'll circle back
10 on the operations when we get to that. Thank you.

11 MS. SERRIDGE: No questions.

12 MR. SHEPHERD: No questions.

13 NTSB INVESTIGATOR BRAGG: No questions at
14 this time.

15 NTSB INVESTIGATOR BELL: I'll let you go for
16 the operations.

17 CG INVESTIGATOR [REDACTED] Okay. We went
18 aboard the sister ship or the similar ship today. So
19 we have a pretty good idea of sort of comparatives
20 against other ships for small minor attention to
21 details and stuff.

22 So the questions I'm going to ask you don't
23 focus on you. They focus on how we can gauge that ship
24 and those shipboard operations.

25 So if you could describe as you best recall

1 when you boarded the vessel, the pilot master exchange
2 -- from them delivering it to you.

3 MR. WINEGEART: Well, there's an information
4 card that they give to me. And I have discussions with
5 the master regarding the traffic, tidal conditions,
6 what -- what to expect. And he informs me if there's
7 any deficiencies. And there were none that I recall.

8 CG INVESTIGATOR [REDACTED] And compared to
9 other ships in general, would you say that -- and I
10 know that these ships routinely call into port -- not a
11 first call or second call -- would you say that from
12 the ship side delivering to you more attention to
13 detail or less than the other ships on average?

14 MR. WINEGEART: I would say it would be
15 average if not more maybe -- a little more.

16 And when I say that, it's what I discussed
17 about before that Captain Davidson was a little more
18 attentive than some masters that come in.

19 CG INVESTIGATOR [REDACTED] How about relief
20 captains of the El Faro? Would you say he was more
21 attentive to detail and thorough than other captains?
22 Or how would you describe that?

23 MR. WINEGEART: I would say he was -- he was
24 as -- as attentive. There -- all the crews are very
25 competent on there.

1 CG INVESTIGATOR [REDACTED] Are you aware,
2 either having personally experienced them or just from
3 second-hand knowledge, of the El Faro having any
4 propulsion or steering casualties or similar type
5 casualties?

6 MR. WINEGEART: I can't recall any.

7 CG INVESTIGATOR [REDACTED] Are you aware --
8 or the same question -- but for the El Yunque?

9 MR. WINEGEART: El Yunque? I -- I can't
10 recall any. No.

11 CG INVESTIGATOR [REDACTED] In my previous
12 industry life, the mooring masters that I worked with
13 thoroughly documented the history of the ships. When
14 they came in, they had any discrepancies or
15 deficiencies as you mentioned, whether they're good
16 handlers or bad handlers or anything like that. Do you
17 personally do that?

18 MR. WINEGEART: No. Our -- our
19 recordkeeping is -- is somewhat computer-based.

20 But as far as noting deficiencies on ships,
21 we don't have a formal method of doing that.
22 Typically, we rely on the Coast Guard to inform us if
23 there's a deficiency on a ship.

24 CG INVESTIGATOR [REDACTED] And I'm just
25 looking for practices in general. If you had a new

1 ship coming to the port that hadn't called into the
2 port before -- just came up on the board new -- how
3 would you determine if it had problems or didn't have
4 problems or what?

5 MR. WINEGEART: Well, we would assume that
6 it did not have any problems to start with. If it was
7 an unusual design or an unusual ship, there would have
8 been previous meetings regarding that.

9 In other words, if it was exceptionally
10 large or an exceptionally beamy (phonetic) ship or a
11 special-purpose ship, there would typically be meetings
12 with the operators prior to it entering the port.

13 But if it was just a typical tanker or a
14 typical container ship, the assumption is that
15 everything is working. And if there is a deficiency,
16 then typically you would find out after going on board
17 and discussing it with the master.

18 CG INVESTIGATOR [REDACTED] And the reason I
19 ask these questions slightly different from the
20 previous Captain Bryson is just because I've talked to
21 Captain Bryson. And so it's causing me to think more
22 things.

23 But how do you know that there hasn't been a
24 problem on like say the El Faro on the last outbound
25 trip? In other words, you're going to pilot this ship

1 in and you care about the history, you care about the
2 reliability of the propulsion and steering systems. So
3 how would you know if like outbound on the last trip
4 out the St. John's River, they had a momentary loss of
5 steering as a pilot in this trip?

6 MR. WINEGEART: Well, I mean, if it -- it's
7 something that needed -- was supposed to be reported,
8 you assume that if something goes wrong that is
9 supposed to be reported to the Coast Guard that it gets
10 reported. If you don't hear of anything, then you
11 assume there's been no deficiency.

12 CG INVESTIGATOR [REDACTED] Okay.

13 So if you recall, how long was the transit
14 inbound from the sea buoy?

15 MR. WINEGEART: From boarding the ship to
16 when I turned it over to the docking master, it was
17 approximately an hour and 15 minutes.

18 CG INVESTIGATOR [REDACTED] So you do use a
19 docking master?

20 MR. WINEGEART: Yes, they do.

21 CG INVESTIGATOR [REDACTED] The conversation
22 that took place on the bridge -- I know it's only an
23 hour and 15 and there's ship business and steering
24 commands and all that -- do you recall just the general
25 characteristics of conversation -- any subjects or

1 conversation?

2 MR. WINEGEART: Yes, I thought about that
3 last night anticipating this question.

4 And like I said, we discussed the transit,
5 the fact that there's no outbound traffic. We did
6 briefly have a conversation about the fact that the
7 ship was scheduled to change service to the Alaska
8 Service when the new ship that they're building came
9 out. And -- you know -- we discussed that that was
10 good -- that they would continue to have a job on -- on
11 board the vessel -- that type of stuff.

12 And he also mentioned he had a Polish
13 writing (phonetic) gang. And -- you know -- I talked
14 to him about when I was sailing, we would use writing
15 gangs also. And he talked about how hard they worked.

16 Other than that, I don't recall anything
17 other than pleasantries.

18 CG INVESTIGATOR [REDACTED] With regard to
19 that Polish writing gang, did he mention anything about
20 safety concerns -- anything like that? They were hard
21 working. Did he say anything else?

22 MR. WINEGEART: No. You know, he didn't
23 even tell me what they were doing, you know? Just the
24 fact that they were on board and that they worked hard.

25 CG INVESTIGATOR [REDACTED] Do you recall who

1 was on the bridge for that transit?

2 MR. WINEGEART: Other than Captain Davidson.
3 I remember Danielle, the second mate, was up there for
4 a period of time. And there was another mate. I -- I
5 can't really recall. And I -- I do not recall who the
6 helmsman was either.

7 CG INVESTIGATOR [REDACTED] If I gave you a
8 name, the third mate Himes, would that ring a bell? Or
9 Schultz?

10 MR. WINEGEART: No. A picture would
11 probably ring a bell.

12 CG INVESTIGATOR [REDACTED] I can't help you
13 there. I'm sorry.

14 MR. WINEGEART: I -- you know -- I have a
15 working relationship with those people. And --

16 MS. SERRIDGE: Was the individual -- this is
17 Melissa with TOTE Services. Was the individual an
18 older gentleman or a younger gentleman?

19 MR. WINEGEART: Which --

20 MS. SERRIDGE: The helmsman.

21 MR. WINEGEART: The quarter master? I don't
22 recall.

23 CG INVESTIGATOR [REDACTED] Do you recall any
24 TOTE ships that you piloted having propulsion or
25 steering casualties or other similar mechanical

1 deficiencies?

2 MR. WINEGEART: Not that I recall. I -- if
3 I remember correctly, years ago, I think I brought one
4 in and one boiler was down for -- they were cooling it
5 down so they could do some routine maintenance, from
6 what I understand.

7 But I -- I -- I never had anything go out as
8 we were making a transit.

9 CG INVESTIGATOR [REDACTED] Did one boiler
10 down affect ship-handling characteristics?

11 MR. WINEGEART: No, sir.

12 CG INVESTIGATOR [REDACTED] I think that ship
13 just in general hooked up can do like 19 knots.

14 MR. WINEGEART: I don't know what it does at
15 sea. But that sounds correct.

16 CG INVESTIGATOR [REDACTED] We were out at the
17 ship today. And like I said, it's a pretty good gauge
18 of looking around and trying to figure out the
19 attention to detail, trying to find out if the ship was
20 well maintained for its age, the port and critical
21 components well taken care of. So we pretty much from
22 stem to stern looked at the ship.

23 But what we're trying to get at is kind of
24 gauge of safety culture. So to gauge that for me, what
25 I'd like you to do is recollect the day you were

1 inbound. And if you would describe to me the pilot
2 boarding procedure and your view of how it all took
3 place on the El Faro.

4 MR. WINEGEART: My view is that it was
5 typical. It was safe. They -- they had two -- they
6 actually had three men standing by the pilot ladder
7 when I came on board. One of them escorted me up to
8 the bridge. We had the typical master pilot exchange.

9 In my opinion, it was as safe as any vessel
10 I go on.

11 CG INVESTIGATOR [REDACTED] Okay.

12 Who tells them to make a lee?

13 MR. WINEGEART: We typically tell them which
14 side to put the pilot ladder on. And the pilot boat
15 will give them a course to steer to make the lee.

16 CG INVESTIGATOR [REDACTED] Could you describe
17 in detail the condition of the pilot ladder?

18 MR. WINEGEART: It was in good condition. I
19 didn't notice any problems with it.

20 CG INVESTIGATOR [REDACTED] The mate that was
21 supervising the pilot boarding, do you recall if he had
22 a review?

23 MR. WINEGEART: Yes.

24 CG INVESTIGATOR [REDACTED] How far do you
25 climb to go up? How many steps?

1 MR. WINEGEART: Yes. It's not -- it's not
2 so high on that ship because they have a -- a side
3 port. I'm going to say maybe three or four steps.

4 CG INVESTIGATOR [REDACTED] I'll just take a
5 quick look here at my notes.

6 This is a unique investigation in that we
7 have a ship that's lost and we have seafarers that are
8 lost, most likely. And so, we are kind of looking at
9 all kinds of things -- I would say, well-thought out
10 rumor or speculation as to what might happen.

11 And I'm not trying to put you on the spot.
12 But you have an opportunity to share with us anything
13 you'd like to help us with this investigation. So if
14 you feel like you'd like to do that, that may be
15 helpful. If not, that's perfectly understandable.

16 MR. WINEGEART: I don't quite understand the
17 question.

18 CG INVESTIGATOR [REDACTED] In other words,
19 for me as an investigator, I pursue any lead to find
20 out what happened to the ship and its crew.

21 MR. WINEGEART: Right.

22 CG INVESTIGATOR [REDACTED] A lot of it is
23 nothing.

24 So if there's anything that you could help
25 us, if you know about, that would be very helpful. If

1 not, that's perfectly fine.

2 MR. WINEGEART: I -- I have -- I understand
3 your position. You have a tremendously important job
4 here.

5 I have nothing but good things to say about
6 the master and -- and -- and the ship in general. I --
7 you know -- as far as you're talking about this voyage
8 down south into the storm, I -- I have no -- nothing to
9 say about that because I have too much respect for
10 their abilities to even question what was going on.

11 CG INVESTIGATOR [REDACTED] Thank you very
12 much. It's understandable. Thank you.

13 NTSB INVESTIGATOR BELL: Anything else?
14 Anybody else have any questions?

15 NTSB INVESTIGATOR BRAGG: I do. And if
16 you've already asked this, if I was taking notes and
17 missed this, if you asked this, please stop me.

18 On the day you were on board bringing it in,
19 was the steering responsive as normal?

20 MR. WINEGEART: Yes.

21 NTSB INVESTIGATOR BRAGG: Commands --
22 everything was good?

23 MR. WINEGEART: Yes.

24 NTSB INVESTIGATOR BRAGG: Also the
25 propulsion was responsive?

1 MR. WINEGEART: Yes, sir.

2 NTSB INVESTIGATOR BRAGG: Normal? Okay.

3 Thank you.

4 NTSB INVESTIGATOR BELL: I have another
5 question.

6 Did you have any other transits that day or
7 the next day?

8 MR. WINEGEART: My next job after that one
9 was 2200 that evening.

10 NTSB INVESTIGATOR BELL: Okay. And you were
11 outbound?

12 MR. WINEGEART: On the 2200 job?

13 NTSB INVESTIGATOR BELL: Yes.

14 MR. WINEGEART: I was outbound from the
15 Toyota Berth -- Talleyrand Avenue.

16 NTSB INVESTIGATOR BELL: And what was the
17 ship you were on?

18 MR. WINEGEART: It was the Century Highway
19 No. 2.

20 NTSB INVESTIGATOR BELL: Any discussion or
21 talk about weather during that --

22 MR. WINEGEART: No. Typically, the -- it
23 was a foreign-flagged ship. And --

24 NTSB INVESTIGATOR BELL: Okay.

25 MR. WINEGEART: Actually -- and they were

1 heading up to Newark is their next port of call. So
2 they were going the opposite direction.

3 NTSB INVESTIGATOR BELL: Were there any
4 trips that were canceled?

5 MR. WINEGEART: Not that I know of.

6 NTSB INVESTIGATOR BELL: Okay.

7 MR. WINEGEART: And you're talking about out
8 of the Port of Jacksonville?

9 NTSB INVESTIGATOR BELL: Yes. Well, if you
10 were planning on going and then that got canceled.

11 MR. WINEGEART: Right. No, not that I know
12 of that I'm aware of.

13 NTSB INVESTIGATOR BELL: Okay.

14 Any other questions from around the room?

15 MR. SHEPHERD: Not from me. Thank you.

16 NTSB INVESTIGATOR BELL: Okay.

17 That concludes our interview.

18 It's 4:12.

19 (Whereupon, at 4:12 p.m., the hearing was
20 adjourned.)

21

22

23

24

25

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C E R T I F I C A T E

MATTER: El Faro Incident
Accident No. DCA16MM001
Interview of James Winegeart
Jacksonville, FL

DATE: 10-09-15

I hereby certify that the attached transcription of page 1 to 23 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.



NEAL R. GROSS

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Office of Marine Safety
Transcript Errata

Matter: EL FARO Investigation/Interview
Ref Nbr: DCA16MM001

Dear Mr. Winegeart:

Enclosed with this letter is a copy of the two transcripts of interview for **James Winegeart** taken on **Oct 9 and Oct 12, 2015**. 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.

11/4/15

Date

Carrie Bell

Major Marine Accident Investigator

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

Printed Name of Person providing the above information

Signature of Person providing the above information

Date