

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD

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IN RE: :

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THE FIRE THAT OCCURRED ON : NTSB Accident No.

THE CARIBBEAN FANTASY THAT : DCA16FM052

OCCURRED ON AUGUST 17, 2016 :

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INTERVIEW OF: BM2 [REDACTED]

Monday,

August 22, 2016

Sector San Juan

BEFORE

LARRY BOWLING, NTSB

LT [REDACTED] USCG

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

(TIME NOT GIVEN)

1 MR. BOWLING: This is Larry Bowling. We
2 have the recording going. Larry Bowling with the NTSB.
3 We're at Sector San Juan. It's roughly 11:00, August
4 22nd. We're going to be interviewing BM2 [REDACTED]

5 [REDACTED] And present with me also participating in the
6 interview from the Coast Guard --

7 MS. [REDACTED] Lieutenant [REDACTED]

8 MR. BOWLING: And for the witness, please
9 state your full name and spell your last name for the
10 record please.
11

12 MR. [REDACTED] My name is BM2 [REDACTED] [REDACTED]

13 [REDACTED] Jr. Last name [REDACTED].
14

15 MR. BOWLING: Okay. And for the purposes of
16 the interview, can I call you by your first name?
17 Okay. Thank you. And we talked off record about the
18 flow of the interview and so forth. And you understand
19 that we're being digitally recording, correct?

20 MR. [REDACTED] Yes, sir.

21 MR. BOWLING: And somewhere down the road
22 you'll get a transcript. And we'll ask you to take a
23 look at it and make sure it's accurate for the record.

24 MR. [REDACTED] Correct.

25 MR. BOWLING: And with the Coasties, you

1 were aware that you had the right to an attorney.

2 MR. [REDACTED] Yes.

3 MR. BOWLING: And declined because you're a
4 factual witness?

5 MR. [REDACTED] Yes, sir.

6 MR. BOWLING: And you don't need one here.
7 We just want to know what you saw. Okay. With that
8 said, at the high levels, tell me how you got to from
9 high school to where you're at Coast Guard BM2.

10 MR. [REDACTED] Where I'm at now?

11 MR. BOWLING: And focus on the maritime side
12 of any training and those kind of things.

13 MR. [REDACTED] Right. I graduated high
14 school in 2007. I was interested in going to college.
15 But I went to a college fair at a local college there
16 in Tennessee and I saw some recruiters there. I had no
17 clue what the Coast Guard was so I just went up.

18 It said United States Coast Guard on it. I
19 said oh. Saw U.S., it looks like some kind of armed
20 force because they're in the uniform as well. Thinking
21 maybe like a branch of the Air Force because they were
22 in trops. So they looked like they were part of the
23 Air Force.

24 But they kind of suckered me in. I mean,
25 they did what recruiters did best and they got me to

1 sign. The next month I was signing papers. And from
2 then went to boot camp in September, 2007. Graduated
3 in October, 2007. Actually my first unit was here in
4 Puerto Rico as an aid to navigation team, 19 years old.

5 When I first got there, I qualified as 18
6 boat crewman. And you're a prior Coastie as well so
7 18, work all the aids to navigation around Puerto Rico,
8 St. Thomas, St. John, St. Croix, Mona Island.

9 So I went there and decided I wanted to be a
10 Boatswain's Mate. I went to Boatswain's Mate A School.
11 Got transferred to Station Fortesque which is a SAR
12 detachment of Cape May, Jersey, Station Cape May. So
13 that pretty much our hub.

14 During the summer we would branch off and do
15 either -- there was Station Townsend Inlet and then
16 Station Fortesque. And based on your qualifications --
17 your order could say Station Fortesque and Station
18 Townsend Inlet.

19 But at that time, based on the
20 qualifications, lack of, or even more qualified, then
21 you could be stationed either Townsend Inlet or
22 Fortesque or Cape May no matter what your orders did
23 say. But technically I was part of Station Fortesque.

24 MR. BOWLING: Okay.

25 MR. [REDACTED] There I got qualified as a 47

1 Motor Lifeboat Boat Crewman, 24 Shallow Water Boat
2 Crewman, and 25 RBS Coxswain, and all of the 45 as well
3 as Coxswain as well. Not on the 47 because the 47 went
4 away.

5 There was a transition in 2012, 2013 where
6 they were getting rid of the 47s because they saw Cape
7 May, they were a heavy weather unit but only because of
8 wind, not because of seas. So they wanted to take the
9 47 away, replace it with the 45. Because they have the
10 same capability as the 47 when it comes to wind, not
11 with seas. Because we don't get enough seas, then
12 they'll probably call another asset out from Station
13 Atlantic City or --

14 But at that time I didn't get qualified RBM
15 Crewman because I was in the middle of RBS Coxswain at
16 that time. So the Training Petty Officer said you're
17 halfway done, why break away from Coxswain which you
18 need to make Second than to totally start something
19 new? So just finish Coxswain and work on a 45 or 45
20 later.

21 MR. BOWLING: Okay.

22 MR. [REDACTED] So I did get some training
23 there, obviously enough training as breaking Coxswain.
24 Because there they are real strict, especially when it
25 comes to weather, the type of weather we get and we

1 could run into. I got heavy weather training because,
2 obviously, we were a heavy weather unit.

3 Made Coxswain then transitioned here to
4 Station San Juan where, within two weeks, I was back
5 with my Coxswain qualifications on the 45. And then I
6 had to do my additional qualification for 33 because we
7 didn't have 33s in Cape May.

8 But it wasn't difficult because 25s and 33s
9 are roughly the same, same outboard engines,
10 (inaudible) are the same. And just dealing with the
11 throttles are different because they're not electronic
12 on the 25. They're just cables. So it's a little
13 stiffer, it's a little different to maneuver.

14 And plus, the boat itself is almost 40 feet
15 long. So, of course, it was a little different when it
16 comes to pivoting and stuff like that. I had to get
17 used to it, just the length of the boat. But I got it
18 pretty quick.

19 And roughly within three months of being
20 here, I was qualified all the way up to OOD.

21 MR. BOWLING: Okay.

22 MR. [REDACTED] That was back in 2014. So I
23 got here in July, within July, August, September,
24 October, maybe October or November timeframe I was
25 fully qualified up to OOD. I'm there still. And from

1 then on, continued performing missions as qualified
2 Coxswain here.

3 MR. BOWLING: All right. So you came back
4 to the station in 2014. And you used the term OOD,
5 you're referring to Officer of the Deck?

6 MR. [REDACTED] Yes.

7 MR. BOWLING: What about qualifications
8 outside boat driving? What about from the standpoint
9 of first aid, first responder?

10 MR. [REDACTED] First aid, when you're a
11 qualified boat crewman, you are looked at as a first
12 responder. Say you need to administer CPR or first aid
13 on someone that you pick up out of the water. Like
14 we'll get more into detail, I guess, later. But there
15 was a guy convulsing on the 55 that we picked up.

16 MR. BOWLING: Right.

17 MR. [REDACTED] He was actually being
18 performed chest compressions when we got there by a
19 member that was part of the aids to navigation team.
20 He was doing chest compressions. I think he said he
21 did roughly ten. And then that's when he was back
22 responsive again.

23 But seeing as he had a weak pulse and
24 everything, that's something that we do learn as boat
25 crewmen. It doesn't matter what platform. Basic boat

1 crewman, you're learning basic CPR, first aid up until
2 we can get to a pier. And then someone with higher
3 qualification can take over or, you know, deem them
4 clinically dead, I guess you could say, if we were to
5 have to administer first aid or CPR.

6 MR. BOWLING: I just made a note. I'm going
7 to ask this, is the 45 equipped with an AED, an
8 automatic electronic defibrillator?

9 MR. [REDACTED] No.

10 MR. BOWLING: Okay. So what I'm going to do
11 now is I want to hear your story. And I know there's a
12 lot of events. So I'm just going to let you roll. And
13 then the Lieutenant and I will probably do some follow
14 ups.

15 So walk me into when you took duty, you're
16 first walking into the station. And lead up through
17 the chain of events.

18 MR. [REDACTED] Well Wednesday morning, it was
19 August 17th I believe. August 17th, walked in,
20 regular, normal day for me. In my mind it was just a
21 normal day. Petty Officer [REDACTED] (phonetic), he was
22 the other BM2 also qualified, same qualifications as I
23 have. He had OOD last duty period. So you know, we
24 alternate.

25 MR. BOWLING: Okay.

1 MR. [REDACTED] So I come in, I take the OOD.
2 I get the pass down from the previous BM2 that was
3 onboard. It was actually a sports day. We were
4 supposed to go up and play frisbee with the whole crew,
5 the whole unit up at Amora (phonetic) but it started
6 raining.

7 I wasn't going to participate. I forgot the
8 reason why. I think I just wanted to stay there. You
9 know, I was staying back. I didn't want to go up and
10 play frisbee that day.

11 MR. BOWLING: Okay.

12 MR. [REDACTED] So I stayed back. You know, I
13 was in uniform. I had the OOD phone. And then
14 Lieutenant Commander [REDACTED] (phonetic) from the
15 command center -- don't exactly remember exactly around
16 what time. It was between 7:30 and 7:50 maybe. That's
17 when I got the call saying -- she sounded frantic on
18 the phone. Like you guys need to get out there like
19 right now, ASAP because the Caribbean Fantasy is on
20 fire and there's possible evacuation.

21 In the middle of her speaking, I was trying
22 to get bits and pieces, more information. And at the
23 same time, I was directing people like get a crew
24 together. I don't care if you're on duty, off duty,
25 off going, whoever, we need people right now.

1 I actually had to call some people. They
2 went to the exchange to buy some things. I had to
3 recall them to get back underway so we could get out
4 there as quick as possible.

5 And with me on the boat was Seaman [REDACTED]
6 (phonetic). I can't remember his first name. He just
7 reported here about a month ago. MK2 [REDACTED]
8 (phonetic), he was the Engineer onboard. He was one of
9 them that I had to recall from the exchange. There was
10 BM2 [REDACTED] (phonetic) and BM2 [REDACTED]
11 (phonetic) that was onboard with me.

12 Both BM3 [REDACTED] and [REDACTED] are both
13 Coxswains on the RBM qualified. But I was the one that
14 actually took -- you can put in the block, you can be
15 all Coxswains. But the CXC, the Coxswain certified was
16 me. I was actually the one that signed out and took
17 overall responsibility for that mission.

18 MR. BOWLING: Okay.

19 MR. [REDACTED] So we got underway. I kind of
20 didn't really think that much of it because sometimes,
21 a lot of times we get underway, get around to say Buoy
22 11 here in the harbor and sector will call stand down,
23 it was just a false alarm or something along those
24 lines. For some reason they'll say stand down and
25 we'll come back.

1 So in my mind, I was like it's probably not
2 -- I treated it as a real life situation. But at the
3 same time I still had in my mind I wonder if it's real,
4 I wonder how big the situation is it. Is it small?
5 You know, I didn't think of it as anything as huge as I
6 saw.

7 But I got the middle of the harbor and
8 that's when I saw the Caribbean Fantasy just black
9 smoke coming out of the stacks. And that's when I
10 called back to the station on my personal cell phone.
11 I called BM2 [REDACTED] (phonetic). I told him get
12 everyone you can underway, get me another boat underway
13 right now because the boat's on fire. He said all
14 right and we hung up.

15 Got back underway. And then that's when he
16 called me again on my OOD phone. And he said you have
17 BMC underway, he's going to be underway to respond.
18 And that's BMC Chief [REDACTED] (phonetic), [REDACTED] is his
19 first name.

20 So we arrived on scene. And I did like
21 around a horseshoe of the boat. And also like I lit up
22 the siren just to kind of assure the people that we are
23 here, that they kind of have somebody here.

24 So I see people waving. And you know, I
25 need to assess the situation first. I don't know if

1 there's line in the water, I don't know if they're
2 going to drop anchor, you know, what was going on. You
3 know, because that's what you get taught. When you
4 first come along scene on a SAR case, you want to do a
5 horseshoe of the boat and see if there's any potential
6 hazards in the water that you need to stay away from.

7 Also when coming on scene, of course you
8 start on the starboard side. And then I went back
9 around the stern. I went along the port side. Also
10 that was on scene was the pilot, the San Juan Bay
11 pilots. I don't remember anybody's name on that boat.
12 I just remember he was there.

13 And shortly after another 33 came out and a
14 tugboat came out as well.

15 MR. BOWLING: Okay.

16 MR. [REDACTED] And from there that's when
17 we're talking to Sector. And Sector was talking to --
18 there was a lot of communicating when it came to
19 Sector, tugboats, pilots, the Carribean Fantasy. That
20 day was like, that was the most I actually had to deal
21 with communicating with so many people at one time.

22 So I can't really say how, everything was
23 happening so quick where a lot of time went by. And
24 that's when we went back onto the starboard side, our
25 backtrack. We were there, we were just listening to

1 communication between the pilot and the Caribbean
2 Fantasy captain and talking back and forth.

3 I was still calling people on the phone and
4 talking to Sector. And that's when we saw, we noticed,
5 we heard like a deploying sound. That's when we looked
6 back and they're deploying the slide.

7 And kind of looking there, it's kind of like
8 -- in my mind I see on like movies and stuff like that,
9 the slide is supposed to come out perfect. Well it
10 kind of like looked like a spaghetti string. Because
11 it was drifting west, the boat was drifting west. And
12 the slide, the boat was drifting onto the slide.

13 So I called a pilot like, hey talk to --
14 Santander she was pretty talking to the comms on 16.
15 Because on the 45, the secondary radio which is 16, we
16 use, it's on the port side.

17 MR. BOWLING: Okay.

18 MR. [REDACTED] And I was driving on the
19 starboard side. So I was like hey, contact the
20 Caribbean Fantasy and see if they can deploy ones on
21 the starboard side. Because you know, it's getting
22 drifted onto the slide.

23 I guess they already thought about that.
24 Because when I came along to the starboard side --
25 because I wanted to make sure there was nobody jumping

1 off. Because like, all right, the slide's not working.
2 So let me just go to the starboard side because I don't
3 want people jumping off or anything like that.

4 So I went to the starboard side. That's
5 when I saw that the slide was extinguished or deployed,
6 sorry. Like I said, the whole timeframe at this point
7 is kind of just all over the place. Because I wasn't
8 keeping track of time. I was just looking at what was
9 going on, listening.

10 MR. BOWLING: Okay.

11 MR. [REDACTED] That's when, a little bit
12 later, that's when the Captain of the boat I heard over
13 the radio the boat is on fire, the fire is out of
14 control, we're going to abandon ship.

15 That's when my adrenaline started rushing
16 even more. Because I envisioned the worst. I
17 envisioned people just jumping off the top deck. And
18 we were going to have to just fish for people out of
19 the water because they decided to jump because they
20 panicked and stuff.

21 So then that's when I saw the first life
22 raft being deployed. It says it can carry 150 people.
23 I'm not sure if there 150 people, more, or less. But
24 it got to the water line. And that's when there was a
25 guy in like a white jumpsuit or coveralls and he looked

1 like he was the captain of the boat, probably one of
2 the mates or something that worked on the boat.

3 And he was having trouble, what do you call
4 it, taking the life boat off of the --

5 MR. BOWLING: The releasing mechanism?

6 MR. [REDACTED] Yes. It looked like either it
7 didn't work or he didn't know what he was doing. One
8 of the two but he was just having problems. And with
9 the boat, it was still drifting but it was down in the
10 water. And the current and the wind and stuff like,
11 like the boat was banging up against the cruise ship.

12 And then at one point -- I was looking
13 around at this point making sure, you know, I wanted to
14 get my head around just because there was a lot of
15 boats coming out at this point. So I wanted to keep my
16 head.

17 And then I hear man overboard, man
18 overboard. So I looked and then there's a guy in the
19 water. And as Coxswain, man in the water, I sounded my
20 horn just to alert all the other boat that there's
21 someone in the water now. And I did what I had to do.

22 I quickly got up a little closer. One of
23 the crewmen threw over the rescue heaving line bag and
24 pulled that person to safety. And the other 33 went
25 around and retrieved the other person. Because there

1 was two people that fell off.

2 One of them fell off. And the other maybe
3 had jumped off or fell off at the same time too. I'm
4 not completely sure. But like I said, I had my head
5 turned. I didn't really see it happen.

6 MR. BOWLING: Okay.

7 MR. [REDACTED] But as soon as I turned, there
8 was a person in the water. And then there was another
9 one. But I do not recall how they got in the water.
10 They just either fell or they jumped.

11 So I had to retrieve that person. There's a
12 lady -- they're still having trouble getting it off.
13 And he's yelling at the people to sit down, stay in the
14 thing. Because there was more people that looked like
15 they wanted to jump. There was this lady that was
16 really committed. She kind of looked at him like I
17 don't care what you say, I'm getting off this lifeboat
18 because you can't get it off.

19 So she jumped. And again, did five or more
20 short to alert the other boats. And I went ahead and
21 did the same exact thing, threw her a line and pulled
22 her in. And then that's when we got on the
23 (inaudible). We told people look, do not jump, you
24 will be fine.

25 But eventually they ended up getting it off.

1 They got the lifeboat released from the mechanism. And
2 it seemed like -- the guy was telling me that the
3 propulsion is not working again. I don't know if it
4 was lack of knowledge of knowing how to actually
5 operate it.

6 MR. BOWLING: Okay.

7 MR. [REDACTED] Or he just didn't, maybe it
8 didn't work. I'm not sure. So that's when I tried to
9 -- since the boat is drifting, the boat was slowly was
10 gaining distance away from the Caribbean Fantasy.

11 And between that point too, over the
12 lifeboat being deployed and me trying to go alongside
13 to see if I could maybe tow it or, you know, get it to
14 safe water. And that's when we kind of assessed the
15 situation to see what's going to really go to on.

16 Because at that point, like I said, there's
17 so much going on. There's probably going to be more
18 lifeboats coming down. So I wanted to get that boat
19 out of the way. So see if I can be able to maybe
20 transfer some people or put them in tow to take them
21 back into San Juan Harbor to get them back to the pier.

22 But when we got back on scene, not on scene,
23 when we got alongside, that's when we noticed that
24 there was no -- I was kind of hoping for like side
25 cleats or something. But there was like two little J

1 hooks that we can't really -- we can put a line on.

2 But it was going to slip off.

3 MR. BOWLING: Right.

4 MR. [REDACTED] It would come off on the top.

5 But there are like, I guess where the releasing

6 mechanism was, I guess you could put a line on top of

7 there. There was a time where we put it on there too.

8 But with the waves, it was hitting the boat.

9 So I was just like, all right, you know
10 what, we're just going to try to start to tow this.

11 MR. BOWLING: Okay.

12 MR. [REDACTED] And then that's when people
13 started yelling and saying hey, the boat is taking on
14 water, my feet are wet. So I quickly to that boat.

15 Because if a boat's taking on water, I'm going to try
16 to take off the people on the boat.

17 Obviously I can't take off 150 people onto
18 the 45. I took as many as I can, like roughly 21 or 22
19 maybe. I didn't really count. At that point I was
20 just trying to take people off.

21 And at the same time there were people still
22 jumping off because they're nervous still. They're
23 trying to jump off onto the 45 as well. So I was like,
24 look -- I hailed over to the 33 over the radio. I was
25 like hey, can you go onto the other side of the

1 lifeboat and pull people off? And then they did.

2 And then that's when I -- oh sorry. The
3 Sector got the Coast Guard Cutter Tezanos underway
4 between that time. And they got underway and they
5 assumed on scene Commander. So of course, they said
6 the people that we pulled off the lifeboat, they wanted
7 them onboard the Tezanos so we could go back and pick
8 people up.

9 But when I did take people off -- I
10 maneuvered away. I had to leave. And I told people --
11 they're looking at me like where are you going? You
12 know, I was like look, I can't take all of you on my
13 boat. You know, we have regulations too. I can't do
14 it.

15 So they were like -- we went away. And then
16 I pulled up to the Tezanos. And that's when I saw that
17 the seas were way too rough. We had women and children
18 onboard. That was our main focus as well, we wanted to
19 get all the elderly people off and all the women and
20 children off.

21 That was the first ones that we took off.
22 If you were elderly or a person that has children
23 and/or children and/or their parents or whoever they're
24 with, go them off first. So like I said, roughly
25 around 20 people.

1 So we proceeded to the Tezanos to do what
2 they wanted us to do. I looked down below, I see
3 people that they're getting sick, they're throwing up
4 in the sink of the 45. They're just looking bad. And
5 then there's one lady that got my attention. They were
6 like hey look, she looks like she's passing out
7 because, you know, she's out of it. And then I had
8 people on my back deck.

9 So it was just a lot going on in my mind. I
10 was just like honestly, I do not want to risk people,
11 you know, falling off of my boat trying to get up to
12 the Jacob's Ladder. Because these people are, they
13 just want to get back to land.

14 So I was like, I just made the decision, I
15 was like, you know what, I'm just going to take them
16 back. And at that moment, at that time that's when we
17 were told earlier before, maybe like a half hour
18 before, that we're taking them to Pier 6. That's just
19 something I heard. I didn't ask where we were taking
20 them.

21 Because at first, I did coordinate before
22 the Tezanos got on scene. I did coordinate with the
23 command center. I called them via telephone. And I
24 asked them like hey, if we get some people off this
25 lifeboat, are we going to take them to Pier 15? And

1 then they said yes -- oh no, the Pan American Pier.
2 There's ambulances there waiting already on scene. All
3 right, roger that.

4 And then, that's when again, I heard over
5 the radio we're taking them to Pier 6. Roger. So I
6 proceed onto Pier 6. And I went to Pier 6, got them
7 off and quickly went back out.

8 Oh we also did, we called back to the
9 station after we dropped them off. We called back to
10 the station like hey, do you have any water for us and
11 for the people that we get off. Because we knew it was
12 going to be a long day.

13 So we pulled up to Echo Pier right here.
14 And there was some people from the station. They just
15 brought out jugs of water that they had probably like
16 laying around or probably ran to the exchange and got.
17 Because at Pier 6 they were going to get water for us.
18 But at that time, the Red Cross hasn't gotten there yet
19 with the water.

20 So that's what I say, whenever you guys come
21 back. Because I knew we were going to come back
22 because I knew we were going to make transfers back and
23 forth. So we got the water and we went back out there.

24 We went back out there and we saw, the boat
25 drifted further. And we saw that there was even more

1 boats out there now. It was probably, every boat you
2 can probably imagine we had, I think there was seven
3 Coast Guard assets out there. There was four from the
4 station, the 45, three 33s. And eventually there was
5 three cutter small boats. And then there was multiple
6 tugboats out there, pilots, you name it, they were out
7 there.

8 So we went back out. And I think the second
9 time we went out there, that's when we received, got a
10 call from the 55 to say we got a pregnant lady onboard.
11 Because we were going to go back to the original life
12 raft we were going to go to to still take people off.

13 But there was so many boats out there around
14 that boat taking care. We were like all right, we'll
15 call the Tezanos to see what's, how can we help? So we
16 heard over the radio that the 55 is calling the Tezanos
17 and saying we have a pregnant lady onboard, she needs
18 EMS right away.

19 So the Tezanos isn't answering them because
20 there's so many people talking. So I answered the 55.
21 And I was like hey, you said you guys have the pregnant
22 lady onboard. Yes we do. So we got her onboard. She
23 was, she looked like she could barely even walk. Got
24 her onboard.

25 And that's when we saw another life raft.

1 They said that there was too many people onboard the
2 life raft and it was going down. But it looked stable.
3 So we were trying to take people off there as well.
4 But we just couldn't get alongside because our docking
5 mode feature, if we try to go starboard, if there's a
6 boat on the starboard side, it's going to push it away.

7 So again I made the call saying hey, let's
8 just go take this pregnant lady to the pier and come
9 right back out here. Because it was right here so we
10 could make it back pretty quick. And there's enough
11 assets out here that we can, they can be able to help
12 no matter what.

13 So we brought the pregnant woman back to the
14 pier and went back out there. At that time we went up
15 to the 55 again. The Tezanos asked us, they were like
16 hey, just go to the 55 again.

17 And we took about maybe another 20 onboard.
18 Because our capacity of the 45 is not as great as the
19 55. So the 55 was starting to reach their limit. So
20 we went ahead and pulled people off of their boat. And
21 again, we took them back to the pier as well.

22 Went back out. We took them back because
23 there was a guy on with a broken leg, not a broken leg,
24 but a hurt knee. And we wanted to take him off. No,
25 it was a lady with a hurt knee.

1 MR. BOWLING: Okay.

2 MR. [REDACTED] So we wanted to get her back
3 as soon as possible. Like I said, we didn't want to
4 transfer over to the Tezanos because of that problem.
5 So we were like, you know what, we're just going to go
6 ahead.

7 I told the Tezanos we're going to go ahead
8 and take back these people to the pier because we have
9 a lady with a hurt knee. And there was another person
10 on there maybe with like a hurt arm or something. The
11 lady was our main concern at that point. And also
12 everybody was fatigued and everything.

13 So we got back there, another load of people
14 back to Pier 6. And when we got back out there again
15 the Tezanos tasked us with, there was a yellow sport
16 fisher out there with some ICE, or HSI agents. They
17 tasked us to take those people off and that's it, take
18 those people off.

19 And then at first we were going to say the
20 55 is taking on more people than they can. Let's just
21 try to go get them off the 55 as many people as we can
22 and take them back. But the Tezanos didn't, they
23 didn't agree with that. So they were like hey, go take
24 the sport fishing boat.

25 And then after we did that, that's when they

1 called back and said hey, go ahead and take people off
2 the 55. So we were like so our original plan is what
3 you want us to do? So that's what we did.

4 When we were on there, that's when the 55
5 got on the radio and said hey, they called 45751, can
6 you come, we have a guy on here convulsing, can you
7 come pick him up? Right away, roger.

8 So we went on scene. When we were pulling
9 up, that's when we saw one of the BM3s performing chest
10 compressions on him. And at that point, that's when
11 actually BM2 [REDACTED] was driving. Because you know,
12 obviously taking turns driving just so we're not
13 getting fatigued or anything.

14 So I was out on deck to try to help get this
15 guy onboard. One of the guys from the 55 stayed
16 onboard because he had him in his hands already to
17 transfer him over. And I was like, don't try to risk
18 dropping him or anything because it was right passing
19 between the 55 and the 45. I was like you already have
20 ahold of his whole body, so just keep on coming on to
21 the 55 and just come back with us. We'll bring you
22 back to the 55 later on.

23 So that's what we did. We got him onboard.
24 We kept him a recovery position the whole time. And
25 that's when I called back to one of the Chiefs here at

1 Pier 6. He was running the whole pier.

2 And I said Chief, we have a guy we were
3 performing chest compressions, we need pier space right
4 when we get there. Because the time before that we
5 actually had to wait because there was, I think DRSC, I
6 think that's what you call, DRSC boat had a boat full
7 of people. And the 33 had to drop off people. And
8 there was only two cleats on that little small pier, on
9 the floating pier that we could actually moor up to.
10 So we waited.

11 But that time the piers were empty to hurry
12 up and get that guy off. Then that's when made, I
13 think, two more trips. We went back out there. The
14 Tezanos, it was starting to get closer to all the
15 people, the rest of the survivors were still on the
16 Tezanos. They had about 36 I recall, had 36.

17 So we went to, we got back out there. They
18 said hey 45751, can you come pick up some guys and take
19 them back to the pier? So that's we did. We could
20 only take on 20 we took on 20. Same thing, brought
21 them back to the pier and went back out there.

22 At that time I knew that there was 16 left.
23 So one of the actual 33s, one of the 33s got maybe 12
24 or 11 or 12. It had to be 11 because when the 33 went
25 away, we picked up the remaining five survivors and

1 brought them back to the pier.

2 And that's when we were tasked to tow the 55
3 because they fouled their props trying to retrieve the,
4 there was extra life rafts that didn't deploy.

5 MR. BOWLING: Okay.

6 MR. [REDACTED] So they were trying to, the
7 Tezanos tasked them to try to pick them up. But in
8 that time, I guess they didn't see that they were all
9 connected together supposedly. I guess they didn't see
10 that and the screw just sucked it right up. It was TIW
11 so we went out there and towed them. And got back in
12 and called it a day. Long day.

13 MR. BOWLING: I would say. Let me follow
14 up. And what I'm going to do is walk you back to the
15 chain of events.

16 MR. [REDACTED] Right.

17 MR. BOWLING: There's a couple questions as
18 you were going through and kind of explaining the long
19 day. And for the transcription, when you pass down,
20 basically it's a debrief from the previous watch
21 stander?

22 MR. [REDACTED] Right, right.

23 MR. BOWLING: You said when you were walking
24 in you were getting a pass down.

25 MR. [REDACTED] Right, right. It was

1 basically a pass down of what he did the past couple
2 days.

3 MR. BOWLING: And then the Coast Guard
4 acronym for RBM is a Rescue Boat Medium?

5 MR. [REDACTED] Response Boat Medium.

6 MR. BOWLING: Response Boat Medium. Okay.
7 All right. So you exited out, I guess out of the
8 harbor here. And you looked and you first saw the
9 black smoke. And you called back in to BM2, you said
10 [REDACTED]?

11 MR. [REDACTED] [REDACTED]

12 MR. BOWLING: [REDACTED]?

13 MR. [REDACTED] [REDACTED], yes.

14 MR. BOWLING: All right. And what exactly
15 did you pass back to him again?

16 MR. [REDACTED] I just, I told him, I was like
17 get everybody you can, get another 33 out here now.

18 MR. BOWLING: Okay.

19 MR. [REDACTED] Basically a sense of urgency,
20 we need another boat out here now.

21 MR. BOWLING: All right. And at that point
22 in time, before you called the BM2, what gave you the
23 sense of urgency? What did you see?

24 MR. [REDACTED] The smoke, just the smoke.
25 Like this is an actual fire. Because a lot of black

1 smoke like that, DIW -- when you get what Lieutenant
2 Commander told me like the boat is on fire. And then
3 you see the smoke, that's when you put two and two
4 together. And you're like okay, maybe this is real.

5 MR. BOWLING: Okay.

6 MR. [REDACTED] So get another asset out here.
7 Because I didn't know also, I didn't know how many
8 people were on the boat as well. So I just hey, get
9 another 33 out here as quick as possible and another
10 boat. Every 33 you can, get it underway.

11 MR. BOWLING: Okay.

12 MR. [REDACTED] But he still had to recall
13 people because it was a sports day, like I said. So
14 there were some people still working out or playing
15 some kind of sport. So they still had to, you know,
16 brought in some people. And then that's when they
17 finally got underway. I would say within less than 30
18 minutes, the 33s that were here at the station were
19 underway.

20 MR. BOWLING: Okay.

21 MR. [REDACTED] And the 45.

22 MR. BOWLING: I want you to try and describe
23 the smoke. And the reason, you know, sometimes from a
24 forensic you can tell maybe what's on fire based on the
25 color of the smoke, what kind of firefighting equipment

1 had been deployed on the colors of smoke. So when you
2 say black smoke, thick, spread out, dense? How would
3 you describe it?

4 MR. [REDACTED] Thick black smoke, especially
5 when we got onto the port side. That's when you saw
6 there was like a little small vent, like a little
7 window. It looked like this but a little bit bigger.

8 MR. BOWLING: Okay.

9 MR. [REDACTED] Probably the size of that
10 maybe.

11 MR. BOWLING: The credenza, the witness is
12 pointing to the credenza, roughly four feet by two and
13 a half or three foot.

14 MR. [REDACTED] Roughly. That little port
15 there, little vent, it was pouring out black smoke as
16 well. It was the same thickness as the black smoke
17 coming out of the stacks.

18 MR. BOWLING: Okay. Were you seeing it any
19 other locations, say the RORO ramp, any of the
20 exterior?

21 MR. [REDACTED] I believe there was a time
22 when we were on the starboard side it looked like it
23 was coming from the bow. But that could have been the
24 wind pushing it forward. Or you know, the wind could
25 be redirecting it somehow.

1 MR. BOWLING: Moving up a little bit in your
2 timeline, basically when you began your surveillance or
3 you began your assessment of the vessel. You guys were
4 doing this horseshoe.

5 MR. [REDACTED] Yes.

6 MR. BOWLING: You said you saw there were
7 people waving.

8 MR. [REDACTED] Yes.

9 MR. BOWLING: Passengers, crew?

10 MR. [REDACTED] I don't know who was up on the
11 top deck. I just made sure I lit my siren up. Because
12 I like to light my siren up to let the people around in
13 the harbor know like, hey we've sense of urgency, get
14 out of my way. And more so because they know, then
15 they're aware this is Coast Guard underway. Just to
16 let them know basically.

17 And not get out of my way like I'm going to
18 run you over if you don't. It was more of like wide
19 berth please. But there was nobody out there. It was
20 7 in the morning.

21 MR. BOWLING: Okay. And when you say
22 waving, do you do security escorts outbound with the
23 cruise ships?

24 MR. [REDACTED] Yes. It wasn't waving like
25 hey, what's up Coast Guard, hey, nice to see you out

1 here. It was more like waving like hey, we're up here.

2 MR. BOWLING: Like help me, distress kind of
3 thing?

4 MR. [REDACTED] Right.

5 MR. BOWLING: Okay. All right. And I know
6 you weren't counting heads but was it rail to rail? Or
7 was it a few here, a few there? What were you seeing?

8 MR. [REDACTED] It was a lot. It looked like
9 they were, from looking up it looked like they were
10 just in a single formation line like more towards the
11 bow of the boat trying to get them away from the
12 stacks.

13 From what I remember, there wasn't, like say
14 the stacks were say here. This is the end of the line
15 that they were standing in. And the bow is roughly
16 around where her jug is. You know, from here on
17 forward it was all people.

18 MR. BOWLING: I'm going to ask you for the
19 record because the reader wouldn't understand what
20 you're describing --

21 MR. [REDACTED] Right.

22 MR. BOWLING: I'll ask you to draw that.
23 But let's go through the first line of questions with
24 the Coast Guard and me. And then we'll ask you to
25 sketch that out. We'll have you kind of when you're

1 looking up what you're seeing there.

2 Were you or any of the other crew captured
3 any kind of pictures on your personal cell phones or
4 video that you recall?

5 MR. [REDACTED] Yes. Because Sector, they
6 wanted a visual picture of what was going on.

7 MR. BOWLING: Okay.

8 MR. [REDACTED] So there was a 33 that was
9 specifically tasked can you take some pictures and send
10 it to us.

11 MR. BOWLING: Okay. Would anybody on your
12 boat be doing that?

13 MR. [REDACTED] Yes.

14 MR. BOWLING: Who was?

15 MR. [REDACTED] I think everybody was at that
16 point. I think it was more along the lines of, it was
17 like just to remember I guess, memory of it I guess.
18 But it wasn't for like hey Sector, this is the pictures
19 that we have.

20 MR. BOWLING: Have any of the investigators
21 of the Coast Guard or NTSB otherwise ask anybody at the
22 station for those pictures?

23 MR. [REDACTED] No. I think the pictures that
24 were taken and sent there would probably suffice for
25 it.

1 MR. BOWLING: Okay. We'll coordinate that
2 through the chain of command. We'll probably grab
3 those up from you. You're on scene on now and there
4 with that first lifeboat.

5 MR. [REDACTED] Right.

6 MR. BOWLING: Tell me what you recall with
7 the first crewman going into the water. You were still
8 at the helm --

9 MR. [REDACTED] Yes I was.

10 MR. BOWLING: -- serving as Coxswain. Did
11 you see the splash? Did you hear the splash? Did you
12 see the individual before he went in the water?

13 MR. [REDACTED] Like I said, my head was on a
14 swivel. Because at that point, there was a lot of
15 people, there was a lot more boats behind me. So I
16 wanted to make sure like what's going on if there's a
17 tugboat behind me on my starboard. Or there was
18 another 33 on the starboard side, port side.

19 So I was just kind of like looking around.
20 All of the sudden they were like man overboard, man
21 overboard. So sounded five short and, you know, I
22 proceeded to hail over the radio man overboard, man
23 overboard so the other 33 would know as well along with
24 the five blasts.

25 And since there was one, quickly there was

1 another one. Like I said, I can't remember how. But
2 from what I was told, since the lifeboat was banging up
3 against the Caribbean Fantasy, he just kind of like
4 fell off. He just kind of like let go and he fell in
5 the water.

6 And then I turned around and saw it and
7 picked him up. And then the 33 picked up the other guy
8 that fell off too.

9 MR. BOWLING: Okay. What 33, what was the
10 hull number on that 33?

11 MR. [REDACTED] That one was the 33139.

12 MR. BOWLING: And you saw them recover the
13 other individual?

14 MR. [REDACTED] Yes.

15 MR. BOWLING: And are you confident it was a
16 crew member and not a passenger from the ship?

17 MR. [REDACTED] I'm not sure if it was a
18 passenger or a crew member. I'm not sure at all.

19 MR. BOWLING: Do you visually remember
20 anything the individual was wearing?

21 MR. [REDACTED] I do not, not from who they
22 picked up.

23 MR. BOWLING: Okay.

24 MR. [REDACTED] The guy, what I remember from
25 the one we picked up, he lost his shoes. But from what

1 he was wearing, I do not remember.

2 MR. BOWLING: Okay. All right. But the
3 female --

4 MR. [REDACTED] The female.

5 MR. BOWLING: -- exits the lifeboat, she
6 jumps?

7 MR. [REDACTED] She jumps. I saw that one. I
8 don't remember what she was wearing either. I remember
9 she was probably wearing jeans. But she deliberately
10 just jumped off the boat.

11 MR. BOWLING: Okay.

12 MR. [REDACTED] Because there was the guy
13 trying to man the helm. The person that was operating
14 the releasing mechanism --

15 MR. BOWLING: Right.

16 MR. [REDACTED] He was telling everybody to
17 sit down. And that's when she like looked at him. It
18 looked like she didn't care what he, I don't care what
19 you're saying, I'm jumping off this lifeboat and saving
20 myself basically.

21 And so, that's when she jumped off. And she
22 started swimming towards our boat. That's when our
23 crewmen, again, threw the rescue heaving line bag
24 towards her to be where she can pull it. And we pulled
25 her in.

1 MR. BOWLING: Okay. Through the timeline
2 we've moved up now to where you're interacting with the
3 sport fisherman.

4 MR. [REDACTED] Right.

5 MR. BOWLING: And you said it had agents.
6 And I missed who you said it had.

7 MR. [REDACTED] HSI, Homeland Security
8 Investigations I think. A lot of the times, they're
9 the ones that actually process them through Customs to
10 make sure that, you know, they're not illegal.

11 MR. BOWLING: Okay. And these HSI agents
12 were on this yellow sport fisherman?

13 MR. [REDACTED] Yes.

14 MR. BOWLING: Was it an official boat of any
15 type?

16 MR. [REDACTED] It wasn't an official boat.
17 It was just a regular good samaritan boat. Maybe
18 someone that knew someone at the marina that wanted to
19 help out. Also I do remember our first trip back,
20 there was a guy who was willing to stay and help. I
21 don't know if that helps any. But there was a guy, it
22 was a crew member off of the Caribbean Fantasy who
23 actually wanted to stay back and help. But he couldn't
24 obviously.

25 MR. BOWLING: Was this possibly one of the

1 individuals that fell overboard from the lifeboat or
2 somebody else?

3 MR. [REDACTED] Maybe.

4 MR. BOWLING: Okay.

5 MR. [REDACTED] It could have been. I'm not
6 sure. Because you know what, now that I think about
7 it, it could have been. Because he could have been
8 over the side of the lifeboat trying to help get the
9 thing off when it banged --

10 MR. BOWLING: The releasing hook, yes. Now
11 how did you know there were HSI agents on this yellow
12 sport fisherman? You saw them in uniform, you saw a
13 badge?

14 MR. [REDACTED] They have jackets on. And
15 also, when we came alongside we said hey, we've got to
16 take those people off. And they were like no, we're
17 HSI, we're going to process them on here. And that's
18 when we told them we got tasked to take them off. They
19 had no problem, roger that.

20 MR. BOWLING: Okay.

21 MR. [REDACTED] And that's when we picked them
22 up.

23 MR. BOWLING: And I missed the name of the
24 Chief that was at Pier 6 you were interacting with.

25 MR. [REDACTED] Chief [REDACTED].

1 MR. BOWLING: Spell that for me.

2 MR. [REDACTED] [REDACTED].

3 MR. BOWLING: Okay. And he is at --

4 MR. [REDACTED] He's at the small boat station
5 as well.

6 MR. BOWLING: Small boat station?

7 MR. [REDACTED] He's the Engineer Petty
8 Officer.

9 MR. BOWLING: EPO? All right, got you. All
10 right. A few more questions and we'll turn the floor
11 over to the Coast Guard. Are you doing okay, need a
12 break? You all right?

13 MR. [REDACTED] Oh yes, I'm fine.

14 MR. BOWLING: Total time from your call,
15 your initial SAR call, to the time you got the 55 in,
16 roughly how long do you think that was in your mind?

17 MR. [REDACTED] I remember that was 7.4 hours.

18 MR. BOWLING: 7.4 hours? Okay.

19 MR. [REDACTED] That is what was logged in all
20 this.

21 MR. BOWLING: All right. How are you doing
22 with the -- we know you got some water for the crew.
23 What about fuel? How as the vessel doing fuel wise?

24 MR. [REDACTED] The fuel was fine. That can
25 hold a good amount of fuel. So there was a 33 that

1 traveled from Ceiba to where the incident was. And
2 they were down, I think, 230 gallons roughly. So
3 that's when they had to RTD because they weren't, they
4 didn't want to run the risk of being out there
5 stranded. And then they had to come back in as well.

6 MR. BOWLING: Okay.

7 MR. [REDACTED] But we were down maybe, after
8 everything, 120 gallons. That's what was told to me.
9 That's what I remember. Probably a little more,
10 probably a little less. I'm pretty sure probably more.
11 But yes, fuel we were fine.

12 MR. BOWLING: Okay. And performance of the
13 vessel, any issues with the propulsion system, steering
14 --

15 MR. [REDACTED] No.

16 MR. BOWLING: -- cooling? Everything was --

17 MR. [REDACTED] Everything was working fine.

18 MR. BOWLING: Functioning fine? Perfect.

19 Pier 6, we heard from another witness basically, I
20 think there was some color mats on there. I assume it
21 was for triage. Did you see any triage stations set up
22 to where you have a yellow, a green, a red so that, you
23 know, victims who really need medical assistance --

24 MR. [REDACTED] From what I remember, I
25 remember seeing orange like Miller boards, I guess you

1 would say.

2 MR. BOWLING: Okay.

3 MR. [REDACTED] They put a backboard on it and
4 then they'll put the patient into that orange, I don't
5 know, (inaudible) type of deal.

6 MR. BOWLING: Okay.

7 MR. [REDACTED] And then they'll transport
8 them up. I remember seeing, when we took the guy off
9 that was convulsing, there was some patients or some
10 people that were being looked at at another floating
11 pier. Because you have two. You have that Pier 6.
12 You have Pier 6 here. There's a little space in the
13 middle. There's a walkway here. And there's another
14 pier that goes along, that goes way down.

15 That's where they were mooring up, that's
16 where they were putting up the lifeboats. And it looks
17 like they were, as I was driving off I saw that it
18 looked they were looking at some passengers and making
19 sure that they were fine.

20 Maybe they didn't need to go to the
21 hospital. Maybe just they were just fatigued. And
22 they were just assessing them there. I'm not sure if
23 they took the guy that was convulsing there or not.

24 But I can't remember if I saw anywhere that
25 was color coded of come here, come there.

1 MR. BOWLING: You know, for the triage is
2 what I was asking?

3 MR. [REDACTED] Yes.

4 MR. BOWLING: Okay. Two final questions and
5 I'll turn the floor over to the Lieutenant here. And
6 this is not necessarily related. Well the first
7 question is a related event. Passenger accountability,
8 and I say passengers, not your crew, but people you
9 were coming on and counting heads, in your mind how
10 were you accounting for those you were transporting
11 from whatever the point it was on scene back to the
12 pier? What was your understanding of how you guys were
13 managing that?

14 MR. [REDACTED] We would just count the heads,
15 how many people we got. Because at first, the first
16 time they asked us how many people did we offload. And
17 I think we counted like roughly around 20 people. And
18 then from then on, we were just kind of telling people
19 like hey, we can't take no more than 20.

20 Or you know, at the time that we took the
21 guy that was convulsing, we only took off like 10
22 people off of the sport fisher. And then that's when
23 we got the guy convulsing and took him. There was one
24 point we only took that one lady that was pregnant.

25 But it was mainly just trying to get a head

1 count of how many people we've got onboard so we won't
2 go over.

3 MR. BOWLING: Okay. And then when you say
4 they --

5 MR. [REDACTED] They as in my crewmen.

6 MR. BOWLING: Okay.

7 MR. [REDACTED] Asked them to take a head
8 count of the survivors that were onboard.

9 MR. BOWLING: Okay.

10 MR. [REDACTED] To make sure we didn't go over
11 the limitations of the 45.

12 MR. BOWLING: Were you conveying that
13 information to the on scene coordinator?

14 MR. [REDACTED] The commander, no. It was
15 more, I wasn't saying we've got 20 people. They were
16 asking how many people do you have onboard. But they
17 were dealing with so much stuff as well. I was just
18 telling them what I was doing. Hey, we're going to go
19 take people to the pier, come back.

20 MR. BOWLING: So that passenger
21 accountability, you were conveying that information to
22 the individual on the pier as well? Or your team
23 members that were in the boat?

24 MR. [REDACTED] I remember at a point I was
25 calling back to Chief [REDACTED] saying we're bringing

1 back 11, there's one convulsing. We're bringing back a
2 pregnant lady. We're bringing back five. Just to have
3 better communication and what they are going to expect
4 when I get back.

5 MR. BOWLING: Okay.

6 MR. [REDACTED] But the first beginning, there
7 wasn't really much we've got 20 people. Or if the
8 Tezanos asked yes, we have so many people. Or you
9 know, we just got them back basically.

10 MR. BOWLING: I got you. My final question,
11 and this is not related to this specific incident, but
12 you know, the Coast Guard does a lot of preparedness.

13 MR. [REDACTED] Yes.

14 MR. BOWLING: And one of the things they
15 prepare for is mass rescue operation. Have you heard
16 the term MRO?

17 MR. [REDACTED] Yes. Well not MRO but --

18 MR. BOWLING: Mass rescue operation.

19 MR. [REDACTED] Right.

20 MR. BOWLING: Have you ever participated in
21 any of the table top exercises?

22 MR. [REDACTED] I was talking about this the
23 other day when it happened. Back in Cape May, I was
24 off that day so I didn't partake. But I remember they
25 did a mass rescue like that with the same scenario too.

1 There was a ferry that went from Cape May,
2 New Jersey to Lewes, Delaware. And they said this boat
3 is on fire, you've got to get all the people off.
4 Other agencies come in and they help. The medical,
5 they put like little tents up and they had people with
6 fake burns on and stuff just to --

7 MR. BOWLING: The triage I was just asking
8 about.

9 MR. [REDACTED] Yes.

10 MR. BOWLING: Okay.

11 MR. [REDACTED] But that was the same exact
12 concept. But I didn't partake in it because I was off
13 that day.

14 MR. BOWLING: Oh okay.

15 MR. [REDACTED] It was for the people that
16 were just standing duty. They wanted to make it seem
17 like it was just another day standing duty. You guys
18 were offgoing, these people stayed back and it
19 happened.

20 MR. BOWLING: I got you.

21 MR. [REDACTED] But that was the only thing
22 that I heard of, that I've seen actually for -- and I
23 remember actually bringing it up for Fiestas de la
24 Calle, San Sebastian up here. It's a big festival and
25 there's a lot of people that transport from Catano to

1 here on the ferry.

2 And I was actually, maybe can we run some
3 kind of scenario and drill? Because the ferries
4 sometimes, when a few of them fall overboard, what's
5 going to happen? But that was for like next year, you
6 know, to prepare for next year. But like I said, I
7 never really partook in one.

8

9 MR. BOWLING: Okay. Thank you. Coast
10 Guard?

11 MS. [REDACTED] [REDACTED] In the
12 beginning you said you were talking to the pilot and
13 the Captain. Were you in direct radio comms with the
14 pilot and Captain for the ferry?

15 MR. [REDACTED] No. I was trying to relay
16 through Santander to talk on the radio. Because like I
17 said, the radio was on the port side and I was driving
18 on starboard. And at the same time I have the radio
19 CG113 in front of me so I could be able to talk up to
20 Sector if need be or another 33.

21 MS. [REDACTED] So you talked on CG --

22 MR. [REDACTED] 113.

23 MS. [REDACTED] And that was to Tezanos?

24 MR. [REDACTED] To Tezanos, the 33s that were
25 out there, mainly the 33139 and then 114. And also at

1 Sector if they asked questions. And again, with the
2 Tezanos.

3 MS. [REDACTED] I see. So BM3 [REDACTED] was
4 the one who had direct comms with the Captain of the
5 ferry?

6 MR. [REDACTED] No. She was trying to like
7 relay conversations with the pilot and the pilot was
8 talking to the Captain of the ferry.

9 MS. [REDACTED] Okay.

10 MR. [REDACTED] And there was a time when I
11 tried to ask her if she could talk to the tugboat. But
12 it was hard to talk to anyone really. I mean, when I
13 could, obviously I was able to. But when it came to
14 16, there were just people talking to everyone.

15 MS. [REDACTED] Okay. So with the people
16 falling in the water with the lifeboat, the very first
17 lifeboat that you approached --

18 MR. [REDACTED] Right.

19 MS. [REDACTED] There were two people that
20 fell in the water and then a female passenger?

21 MR. [REDACTED] Yes.

22 MS. [REDACTED] Okay. And of the two people,
23 you recovered one and the 33139 recovered the other?

24 MR. [REDACTED] Correct.

25 MS. [REDACTED] Okay. And were there any

1 handicapped personnel? I'm not talking injured like I
2 broke a leg just now but like any people requiring
3 special assistance or special needs.

4 MR. [REDACTED] Not that came onto my 45.

5 MS. [REDACTED] At any point?

6 MR. [REDACTED] At any point. Like I said,
7 elderly, women, and children.

8 MS. [REDACTED] Okay. How many runs did you
9 do?

10 MR. [REDACTED] Let's see, first one --

11 MS. [REDACTED] Just summarize the runs, if
12 you can recall, in order with like the first was one
13 was lifeboat number with 20 people or whatever.

14 MR. [REDACTED] The first run, went back out.
15 We took on 20, that was the second. No, we took the
16 pregnant lady.

17 MS. [REDACTED] The pregnant lady was number
18 two?

19 MR. [REDACTED] Yes.

20 MS. [REDACTED] And that was from the 55?

21 MR. [REDACTED] We took her from the 55.

22 MS. [REDACTED] Okay.

23 MR. [REDACTED] Went back out after that,
24 three, that was the guy with the messed up leg.

25 MS. [REDACTED] Say that --

1 MR. [REDACTED] The woman with the messed up
2 knee, sorry.

3 MS. [REDACTED] So then that was another
4 lifeboat, you recovered about how many passengers?

5 MR. [REDACTED] That wasn't a lifeboat. From
6 this point on we didn't take anybody else from a
7 lifeboat. Because everybody was pretty much either
8 picked up from a lifeboat by one of the 33s. Or the 55
9 actually had to nose up to a lifeboat that didn't even
10 get lowered at all. I mean, they got lowered up until
11 maybe a foot off the water. And maybe the mechanism
12 burned out or something. And that's when they had to
13 take off people one by one.

14 MS. [REDACTED] Okay. So you recovered, trip
15 number three, you recovered approximately 20 passengers
16 from the 55 foot? And that included the female with
17 the injured knee?

18 MR. [REDACTED] Yes.

19 MS. [REDACTED] Okay.

20 MR. [REDACTED] And then we took her back and
21 came back. That's when the Tezanos told us to go to
22 the yellow sport fisher, took the guy off.

23 MS. [REDACTED] How many people from the
24 fishing boat?

25 MR. [REDACTED] I remember them saying 11.

1 And then they were saying no, there's only 10 onboard.

2 So it was either 11 or 10, 10 or 11.

3 MS. [REDACTED] From the fishing boat?

4 MR. [REDACTED] From the fishing boat,
5 correct. And then we got the convulsing person off of
6 the 55. And then we rushed back in. That was four.

7 MS. [REDACTED] Yes.

8 MR. [REDACTED] That was four? Okay. So came
9 back out. That's when we came to the Tezanos and took
10 another 20 people.

11 MS. [REDACTED] When you say Tezanos, you went
12 directly to the fast response cutter?

13 MR. [REDACTED] Yes.

14 MS. [REDACTED] To offload 20 people?

15 MR. [REDACTED] Correct. Because I remember
16 coming back out and I saw two lifeboats actually full
17 of people getting brought back in. One is being manned
18 and that was escorted by, I think, a pilot boat. And
19 the other one looked like it was getting towed by a
20 police boat.

21 MS. [REDACTED] The hard shell lifeboats?

22 MR. [REDACTED] The hard shells, yes.

23 MS. [REDACTED] Okay.

24 MR. [REDACTED] So that was a good chunk of
25 people, or survivors that came in at that point. So

1 yes, I went straight to the fast response cutter and
2 took on 20 people. Took those back and came back out.
3 I thought I was going to get the remaining 16. Because
4 like I said, I remember them saying they had 36 left.
5 And unfortunately, we weren't able to take all 36. So
6 we took as much as we could.

7 MS. [REDACTED] From Tezanos?

8 MR. [REDACTED] From the Tezanos. And the 33
9 was able to take on either 11 or 12. And the remaining
10 five we took and we brought them back to the pier.

11 MS. [REDACTED] How many on your last trip?

12 MR. [REDACTED] The five were on my last.

13 MS. [REDACTED] Just five?

14 MR. [REDACTED] Just five.

15 MS. [REDACTED] Okay.

16 MR. [REDACTED] Before that was 20. And the
17 33 got around 12, or 11 or 12. They would have to say
18 11. And then the remaining five that we took.

19 MS. [REDACTED] Okay. That helps clarify.
20 Thank you. Did you see any passengers or crew members
21 from the ferry in an inflatable life raft?

22 MR. [REDACTED] Yes.

23 MS. [REDACTED] You did?

24 MR. [REDACTED] Yes.

25 MS. [REDACTED] Where was that?

1 MR. [REDACTED] That was after we got the
2 pregnant lady off the 55. There was a 33 that was
3 towing a life raft.

4 MS. [REDACTED] A life raft?

5 MR. [REDACTED] Yes, the actual inflatable
6 one.

7 MS. [REDACTED] Do you know which 33 that was?

8 MR. [REDACTED] That was the 137 I believe.
9 Yes, that was the 137.

10 MS. [REDACTED] And the people were still
11 inside the life raft while it was being towed?

12 MR. [REDACTED] Correct. We were going to try
13 to take some people off. But that was a hassle on our
14 own. So we couldn't really get alongside safely. So
15 we just go ahead and departed and took the pregnant
16 lady back to the pier. She needed EMS so we didn't
17 want to try to prolong this.

18 MS. [REDACTED] Was this pregnant lady from
19 that inflatable life raft?

20 MR. [REDACTED] No, no.

21 MS. [REDACTED] Oh.

22 MR. [REDACTED] We took her from the 55.

23 MS. [REDACTED] Sorry, from where?

24 MR. [REDACTED] From the 55.

25 MS. [REDACTED] Oh okay. That's right.

1 MR. [REDACTED] It was the second trip that we
2 did.

3 MS. [REDACTED] Did you see any issues with
4 the inflatable? Did it look like it was sinking or
5 partially deflated at all?

6 MR. [REDACTED] What they wanted us, at first
7 -- it was riding fine.

8 MS. [REDACTED] Okay.

9 MR. [REDACTED] There was just a lot of people
10 in there.

11 MS. [REDACTED] Okay. I don't have any
12 questions.

13 MR. BOWLING: Okay. All right. Just a
14 couple quick followups and then we'll turn the floor
15 over to you [REDACTED] And again, before we close out I'm
16 going to have you, we'll go off the record, but I'll
17 have you sketch out your first visual recollection. I
18 want to know where those individuals who were on the
19 rails.

20 MR. [REDACTED] Okay.

21 MR. BOWLING: With regard to the recovery of
22 these individuals, the crew member that the 45
23 recovered, when you were interacting or when you were
24 maneuvering the vessel holding position off that
25 lifeboat, did you ever see a crew member in a white

1 jumpsuit forward or aft working on those pelican hooks?

2 MR. [REDACTED] Because where it was, if you
3 could picture the lifeboat itself, I don't know if they
4 call it the front or the back. It's all the same shape
5 basically. So I would say it's the back of it.

6 MR. BOWLING: Okay.

7 MR. [REDACTED] He was there. He looked like
8 he was trying to help the one in the back.

9 MR. BOWLING: Well on that vessel, the
10 lifeboat would be bow first. So were you on the
11 starboard side?

12 MR. [REDACTED] Yes.

13 MR. BOWLING: So if the lifeboat is coming
14 down, the bow of that lifeboat is going to be oriented
15 the same direction as the bow of the ferry. And the
16 stern would be the stern.

17 MR. [REDACTED] Okay.

18 MR. BOWLING: So where were they at?

19 MR. [REDACTED] When they were coming down, he
20 was standing, I would say if that's the front like you
21 said, then he would be on the front then.

22 MR. BOWLING: Okay.

23 MR. [REDACTED] Because it was the starboard
24 side, he was coming down the starboard side. He was on
25 the front of the lifeboat.

1 MR. BOWLING: Lifeboat, okay.

2 MR. [REDACTED] And so it looked like he was
3 trying to help one of the guys. But I can't really
4 remember. But I mean, there was times when he was up
5 on top of the lifeboat trying to talk to us. And he
6 was going back and forth. But mainly he stayed in that
7 little cockpit area.

8 MR. BOWLING: Okay. And as far as the
9 lifeboat commander, there's a person in charge of that
10 lifeboat. And that was the one, I think, some of the
11 crew were interacting with initially about the motor
12 not starting and so forth.

13 MR. [REDACTED] Right.

14 MR. BOWLING: Did you have any direct
15 interaction with him?

16 MR. [REDACTED] I had to tell him to calm
17 down. Because basically he was trying to yell over us
18 and our crew members. So I had to kind of yell at him
19 and tell him like hey, we got it.

20 MR. BOWLING: What was he, do you recall --

21 MR. [REDACTED] I don't remember what he was
22 saying. He was just mumbling a whole bunch of stuff.
23 Also he had, he was from a different country so he did
24 have an accent. But I do not remember what he was
25 saying. I just remember him yelling and being like

1 over the place. And I just had to yell at him like
2 hey, we got this.

3 MR. BOWLING: Okay.

4 MR. [REDACTED] I mean, bring him back a
5 little bit.

6 MR. BOWLING: Did that correct the behavior?

7 MR. [REDACTED] In my eyes, yes they did.

8 MR. BOWLING: And that was still the
9 starboard lifeboat?

10 MR. [REDACTED] Yes.

11 MR. BOWLING: Now let's move around in the
12 timeline. I want to hear more specifics if you can
13 recall them about this lifeboat (inaudible) that was
14 just above the waterline. So pick me up from the first
15 time you recall looking over or being told this was
16 going on and what you saw.

17 MR. [REDACTED] Well I remember looking over
18 and seeing it suspended. But I didn't really pay no
19 mind to it. I thought it was being lowered and end up
20 being --

21 MR. BOWLING: Right.

22 MR. [REDACTED] -- you know, taking people
23 perfectly fine. And it's not until I like kind of like
24 realized that the 55 was getting to close to it to take
25 people off. It was probably like around, we were

1 taking the guy that was convulsing off, or maybe the
2 trip before that.

3 That was when I realized like, well this
4 lifeboat is obviously not working because it's not in
5 the water yet. And then obviously, the 55 taking
6 people off of it kind of, that's another sign it
7 probably doesn't work.

8 MR. BOWLING: Okay.

9 MR. [REDACTED] But yes, that was around that
10 time is when I really just sat back and was like okay,
11 this boat doesn't work.

12 MR. BOWLING: Where, what was the position
13 of that lifeboat? Was it port side, starboard side?

14 MR. [REDACTED] Starboard side.

15 MR. BOWLING: Starboard side?

16 MR. [REDACTED] Yes.

17 MR. BOWLING: Okay. And do you recall
18 seeing any crew members along the rail for the davit
19 system or up on the deck?

20 MR. [REDACTED] No. At that point, I think
21 everybody was inside and just waiting to be taken off
22 on the 55.

23 MR. BOWLING: Okay. Thank you. I have
24 nothing else. Okay. Before we wrap the interview up,
25 have we failed to ask you anything? Anything you'd

1 like to get on record that would help us find a cause
2 for the event and hopefully prevent it from happening
3 again?

4 MR. [REDACTED] I can say that, I think, about
5 a week ago maybe, a few weeks ago I would say, it just
6 got out of dry dock. Now it being out of dry dock,
7 that's when you kind of want to test everything and
8 make sure it works fine. Make sure all the lifeboats,
9 they're going to come out of their little cell
10 properly.

11 And the mechanics of the lifeboat itself,
12 have all the crew actually know how to work them.
13 Because in my mind, from what I heard also from the
14 crew members, that it was bouncing them back and forth.
15 You have mitigated that time and lowered it back and
16 got the lifeboat in the water. If he or they, as crew
17 members of the cruise ship, would have known how to
18 actually work that releasing mechanism.

19 MR. BOWLING: Right.

20 MR. [REDACTED] Or maybe they would have
21 known. I can't really say because I wasn't on the
22 lifeboat trying to release it myself. They could have
23 known and the mechanism was just maybe dry rotted or
24 corroded together, it wasn't releasing.

25 So that on it's own probably could have

1 helped with the time of that lifeboat getting in the
2 water. And those people may have not either jumped in
3 the water or fell into the water.

4 I mean, basically that's it. I mean, my
5 remembrance of it isn't the best, I would say. My
6 adrenaline was pumping, a lot of things were going on.
7 And that was the first case I've ever had like that
8 ever in my whole Coast Guard career.

9 MR. BOWLING: It's a big event.

10 MR. [REDACTED] I've actually had a Medevac
11 case pulling someone off of a cruise ship before ten
12 miles out. And they lowered the lifeboat and pulled up
13 alongside, pulled the people off, went on my merry way.
14 And back here to the pier, got them to EMS and
15 everything worked out fine.

16 But something of this size is just, it was
17 like, I explain to people like it was a movie. Because
18 it went along scene, I got on the scene and people were
19 crying, screaming, you know, people in the water. It's
20 just a big boat on fire. But like I said, that was the
21 first time I ever had to deal with a situation like
22 that.

23 MR. BOWLING: Let's hope it's the last time
24 you have to deal with it.

25 MR. [REDACTED] Oh yes, definitely.

1 MR. BOWLING: Anything else you want to
2 leave on the record?

3 MR. [REDACTED] Not that I know of. I mean, I
4 could always check my phone as well to see if I have
5 pictures.

6 MR. BOWLING: If you do, coordinate with --
7 this is a joint investigation. The NTSB is
8 participating and the Coast Guard is lead. So
9 coordinate with the Lieutenant. But we'll talk
10 afterwards. We'll get an official request into the
11 station so you guys can collect them up. It's not
12 urgent.

13 But at this point, we'll go ahead and -- let
14 me kill this real quick. It was an hour and 12
15 minutes.

16 (Whereupon, the above-entitled matter went
17 off the record at TIME NOT GIVEN.)

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C E R T I F I C A T E

MATTER: Fire Onboard the Caribbean Fantasy
August 17, 2016
Accident No. DCA16FM052
Interview of [REDACTED]

DATE: 08-22-16

I hereby certify that the attached transcription of page 1 to 61 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.

[REDACTED]

NEAL R. GROSS

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