

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD

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Investigation of: \*

SINKING OF THE FISHING VESSEL \*

JEANETTE OFF THE COAST OF PAGO PAGO \* Accident No.: DCA19FM010

DECEMBER 5, 2018 \*

\* \* \* \* \*

Interview of: RUEL LOPEZ  
Cook

Monday,  
December 10, 2018

## APPEARANCES:

LT [REDACTED], Supervisor, Marine Safety Detachment  
American Samoa United States Coast Guard

FRANK THOMSEN, Assistant Supervisor, Marine Safety  
Detachment  
American Samoa United States Coast Guard

DAVID FLAHERTY, Marine Accident Investigator  
National Transportation Safety Board

ROY HALL, JR.  
P&I

WARD GRASSEL  
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I N T E R V I E W

(9:10 a.m.)

1  
2  
3 LT [REDACTED]: This will be recorded --

4 MR. LOPEZ: Okay.

5 LT [REDACTED]: -- just for our own documentation purposes.  
6 Good morning.

7 MR. LOPEZ: Good morning, sir.

8 LT [REDACTED]: My name is [REDACTED], [REDACTED], lieutenant, Coast  
9 Guard. We have here Mr. Frank Thomsen.

10 MR. LOPEZ: Good morning, sir.

11 LT [REDACTED]: Over here we have Roy Hall, Jr.; he represents  
12 the owners. And then Mr. Ward Grassel over there. On the phone,  
13 we have David Flaherty with the National Transportation Safety  
14 Board.

15 MR. FLAHERTY: How are you doing?

16 MR. LOPEZ: Good morning, sir.

17 LT [REDACTED]: Here we have with us, Mr. Ruel Lopez, the  
18 cook. The time is 9:10 a.m., December 10, 2018.

## INTERVIEW OF RUEL LOPEZ

19  
20 BY LT [REDACTED]:

21 Q. We're going to be going over -- we're going to do an  
22 interview with you about all the -- everything you know, starting  
23 from the very beginning, about the *Jeanette* fire, all the events  
24 that led up to the fire and everything you can think of  
25 afterwards. So just take your time, go over it nice and slow,

1 just event by event, and at the end we'll just ask some follow-up  
2 questions, if you don't mind. So go ahead and get started  
3 whenever you're ready.

4 A. Okay. Almost lunch time, the welder call me to open the  
5 store room. So I went to open the store room, and that time I  
6 open, I already see a flame.

7 Q. You open what? I'm sorry.

8 A. The store room.

9 Q. Oh, the store room.

10 A. That's where we store.

11 Q. You can just keep talking. Go ahead.

12 A. And then I see the fire. I grab the fire extinguisher next  
13 to me, next to the other room. It's very close. And then I kill  
14 the fire. But that time the fire is going down, the smoke start  
15 going strong. I try to finish, to kill -- I out the fire, but  
16 it's still red because on top the fire is on the paper. So that  
17 time I cannot take anymore the smoke because very strong, then I  
18 go out. A lot of (indiscernible) already stand back there. I try  
19 to go, but only took a step go into the hallway, but no more. Is  
20 very, very strong, so I did not go back anymore. That is my part.  
21 And very fast, very fast.

22 Q. Keep -- please, please, keep --

23 A. That's all I know.

24 BY MR. THOMSEN:

25 Q. Okay. Ruel, if you don't mind, start at the very beginning

1 of your day, from the time you woke up to the time you guys -- I  
2 understand you guys had a break from 9 o'clock to 9:30, right?  
3 And I -- during the interviews, past interviews, all the welders  
4 and the fire watch, as part of the area of responsibility to take  
5 that break. So if you can please start from the very beginning of  
6 your day, leading up to the time they took a break, and leading up  
7 to the time that you discovered the fire, and keep on going,  
8 please.

9 A. Okay. I wake up 5 o'clock, prepare the breakfast. And then  
10 I ring the bell quarter to 7 for breakfast. After that, then I  
11 start again. For our lunch, I cook pizza and pork stew. And that  
12 time I always finish -- there's a routine. I always wake up 5  
13 o'clock and then ring the bell quarter to 7, and then the guys  
14 come and eat. After they eat breakfast, then I prepare again the  
15 -- for lunch.

16 Q. Okay. During the -- there's a break at 9 o'clock, right?

17 A. They have break. They have break.

18 Q. Did any of the crew come into the galley to relax?

19 A. There are some, there are some. Not all of them, because  
20 sometimes there's somebody come early, somebody lately. Not one  
21 time.

22 Q. Okay. Do you know the fire watch that morning, that day?

23 A. I don't know?

24 Q. Tinufi [sic]? The Samoan guy.

25 A. The Samoan guy? Yeah, I know him but I don't know what his

1 job was in the (indiscernible) during work.

2 Q. That morning, did you see him in the galley?

3 A. No. I don't know.

4 LT [REDACTED]: You don't remember him coming to talk --

5 MR. LOPEZ: I don't remember.

6 LT [REDACTED]: -- to you or anything?

7 MR. LOPEZ: Because only I'm considering is my job. What  
8 they do, I don't care. Only doing for my job.

9 BY MR. THOMSEN:

10 Q. Okay. About what time did the welder tell you to open the  
11 dry store?

12 A. I'm not know the exact time, but that is almost lunch time.

13 LT [REDACTED]: When do you usually ring the bell?

14 MR. LOPEZ: 12 o'clock.

15 LT [REDACTED]: 12.

16 BY MR. THOMSEN:

17 Q. Who was the welder that told you to open the dry store?

18 A. I am the one open the dry store.

19 Q. I mean, who is the welder that told you? You said that the  
20 welder told you to open --

21 A. Michael. Michael.

22 Q. Was there an indication coming from the space, like smoke?

23 A. No, no. It's very clear, and no smell too.

24 Q. No smell?

25 A. Yeah. That's why I'm very calm to go.

1 BY LT [REDACTED]:

2 Q. Was the door locked?

3 A. Yeah.

4 Q. When did you unlock it?

5 A. That time he call me to open it.

6 Q. They were already welding before that?

7 A. Maybe. I don't know.

8 LT [REDACTED]: Oh, okay.

9 BY MR. THOMSEN:

10 Q. Now where is the opening for the dry store? Is it on the  
11 port or the starboard side?

12 A. Port side.

13 Q. Port side.

14 BY MR. HALL:

15 Q. Is there only one door?

16 A. No, in the -- have two doors, but already one was already,  
17 like, no more. Like still have the door over there.

18 Q. Okay, (indiscernible). So the only entrance and the exit  
19 is --

20 A. Yeah, next to my door.

21 Q. And it's one big compartment across?

22 A. Yeah.

23 MR. THOMSEN: Dave, I'm not sure if you've received the  
24 layout of the vessel. We received it yesterday. So I'm going to  
25 show him the main deck layout.



1 MR. FLAHERTY: Okay.

2 MR. THOMSEN: So can you, please, point out which one is the  
3 dry storage?

4 MR. LOPEZ: This one.

5 MR. THOMSEN: The whole, the whole --

6 LT [REDACTED]: Utility room?

7 MR. LOPEZ: This one.

8 LT [REDACTED]: Oh, rec room?

9 MR. LOPEZ: Yeah.

10 LT [REDACTED]: Dave, it's on main deck, the one that's  
11 labeled rec room.

12 MR. FLAHERTY: Or you mean rig room? On here it looks like a  
13 G.

14 LT [REDACTED]: Oh, okay. Well, then rig room. R-E -- it  
15 looks like R-E-C to us.

16 Oh no, you're looking at rig room. I'm saying R-E-C room.  
17 It's in the --

18 MR. HALL: It's right in the center of the --

19 LT [REDACTED]: Right in the center.

20 MR. HALL: -- the main deck.

21 LT [REDACTED]: After the utility room.

22 MR. FLAHERTY: Oh, that one. Okay. It's more up forward.  
23 Ah, I understand. So it's just after the utility room?

24 LT [REDACTED]: Correct.

25 MR. HALL: Correct. Right aft.

1 MR. FLAHERTY: Okay. All right. Interesting.

2 BY MR. THOMSEN:

3 Q. Okay Ruel, is this one room -- right through centerline of  
4 the boat, It's got two doors, port and starboard side. Is this  
5 one single room?

6 A. Yes.

7 Q. And you said the starboard side rooms were blocked off?

8 A. Yeah.

9 Q. Starboard side doors were blocked off?

10 A. Yeah, yeah.

11 Q. Okay. And what's this room right here that says utility?

12 A. This is the -- for the sewing machine -- or wash --

13 Q. Oh, washing --

14 A. Washing machine.

15 MR. HALL: Laundry.

16 BY MR. THOMSEN.

17 Q. That's laundry. Okay.

18 A. Laundry machine, yeah. Laundry room.

19 Q. And the toilet? Shower?

20 A. Toilet and shower.

21 LT [REDACTED]: Crew T and S is toilet and shower. Okay.

22 BY MR. THOMSEN:

23 Q. And what's after that?

24 A. This is more room for the stuff for the deck boat, like the  
25 shackles, metal stuff.

1 Q. Okay. Is this where they keep the SCBA?

2 A. No.

3 MR. HALL: Fire extinguisher.

4 MR. LOPEZ: Fire extinguisher over here, but to the outside  
5 chapel. There is a very small space over there between the chapel  
6 and the extra room, over here.

7 MR. THOMSEN: So this one right here?

8 MR. LOPEZ: No, that's the -- in the front is the chapel, on  
9 the front. Over here.

10 MR. HALL: When you're at the chapel, is there a small door  
11 right next to it, either side, or --

12 MR. THOMSEN: Okay. I'm sorry. You -- where is it?

13 MR. LOPEZ: This one.

14 LT [REDACTED] That's where the --

15 MR. LOPEZ: It's very small, sir. Very small room.

16 MR. THOMSEN: Like a closet?

17 MR. HALL: Like this one right here.

18 (Background conversation.)

19 LT [REDACTED]: Okay. David, just to give you a -- so aft of  
20 the dry store room, there's like a little wedge shape aft of the  
21 dry store room. Do you see it?

22 MR. THOMSEN: Oh, okay. A very tiny little --

23 MR. LOPEZ: Yeah.

24 BY MR. THOMSEN:

25 Q. Okay. And what is this right here?

1 A. Yeah, this side is also for the stuff for the, like the  
2 engine. Metal stuff.

3 Q. This part right here, right before the corridor, this one?  
4 What is this?

5 A. In the front is the chapel.

6 Q. Oh, this is the altar? This is the chapel?

7 A. The altar, yeah.

8 Q. Okay. Now can you please tell us what's inside of the dry  
9 store room?

10 A. Like --

11 MR. HALL: He made us a list of everything.

12 MR. THOMSEN: He did?

13 MR. HALL: A written list. Yeah, in here. It's  
14 (indiscernible).

15 MR. LOPEZ: I don't know, maybe 4 or 5 meters from this wet  
16 deck, 4 or 5 meters, and -- 5 meters or 4, something like that.  
17 Almost a square.

18 BY MR. THOMSEN:

19 Q. Okay. What's in it? Can you please give us the contents?

20 A. All the stuff for the groceries, canned goods, and the paper  
21 towels, toilet tissue, napkin. I have the charcoals.

22 Q. Charcoal?

23 A. Yes. Cooking oil, soy sauce --

24 LT [REDACTED]: When you -- Frank, do you mind if I --

25 MR. THOMSEN: Yeah, go ahead.

1 BY LT [REDACTED]:

2 Q. So when you opened that dry store room and you looked and you  
3 saw the fire, where was the fire at?

4 A. Yeah, that time I opened, it's straight.

5 Q. So was it on the -- was the fire on the ground? Was it on  
6 the --

7 A. Already on top of those cart, of pile of paper towels.

8 Q. So if -- you have to be more specific. I'm sorry. Was it  
9 the whole wall was fire?

10 A. No, no, no, no.

11 Q. Where was the fire?

12 A. Let's say, four or five stack of carton of toilet paper was  
13 already on fire.

14 Q. So where was the toilet -- do you remember the toilet paper,  
15 where it was?

16 A. Yes, yes.

17 Q. Was it on the ground, on the deck?

18 A. On the deck.

19 Q. On the deck, okay. And it's stacked all the way up?

20 A. It's stacked over there.

21 Q. And that whole thing was on fire? The whole --

22 A. Yeah.

23 Q. All the toilet paper?

24 A. Yeah.

25 LT [REDACTED]: Okay.

1 BY MR. THOMSEN:

2 Q. Now, on the deck, the steel deck, is there some sort of  
3 wooden grating or just -- or the toilet paper was just right on  
4 the steel deck?

5 A. Yeah, yeah, the metal and painted with the blue, and already  
6 stack of stuff.

7 Q. So it's not sitting on top of a grating?

8 A. No.

9 MR. HALL: What are the shelves made out of? The shelves?

10 MR. LOPEZ: Made of wood.

11 MR. HALL: Wood?

12 MR. LOPEZ: Yeah.

13 MR. HALL: How many shelves? Two or three?

14 MR. LOPEZ: Two.

15 BY MR. THOMSEN:

16 Q. Now the stack of toilet paper, was it facing you? Was it  
17 stacked up against the wall facing you?

18 A. Facing me.

19 Q. Okay. So it's right along the centerline of the boat? Can  
20 you -- well, put it right here. If you can --

21 A. This one, like, already one room. Already one room. Already  
22 by that. So I stack the paper towel over here, toilet paper, and  
23 napkin. I open the door over there, and then I see the fire over  
24 there.

25 Q. So starboard side.

1 BY LT [REDACTED]:

2 Q. Just so that it's recorded, Ruel is saying that in the dry  
3 storeroom, the aft starboard side of the dry store room, that door  
4 was closed, right?

5 A. Closed.

6 Q. So that door was out of use. And the toilet paper or paper  
7 towels?

8 A. Same.

9 Q. Same, okay. Paper towels and toilet paper were stacked  
10 starting on the deck --

11 A. Yeah.

12 Q. -- and stacked on top of each other, going up to about, what,  
13 like 4 feet, 5 feet? Oh, okay, like -- he's saying about 3 feet.

14 A. Yeah, two level. Two stack, two pair toilet paper and two  
15 type towel paper.

16 Q. Starting on the ground?

17 A. Yeah, starting on the ground.

18 Q. And then up to like maybe --

19 A. Two level.

20 Q. -- 2 or 3 feet?

21 A. Yeah.

22 MR. FLAHERTY: Hi. This is David. How tall was the fire  
23 when he first saw it? Had it touched the overhead yet or was it  
24 just burning in a -- how tall was it?

25 MR. LOPEZ: Not yet reached the ceiling.

1 LT [REDACTED]: Not yet in the ceiling.

2 MR. LOPEZ: Not yet.

3 MR. FLAHERTY: Halfway?

4 MR. LOPEZ: Maybe halfway.

5 MR. FLAHERTY: A little more than halfway?

6 BY LT [REDACTED]:

7 Q. Fire was about halfway --

8 A. Yeah. Not yet touch the ceiling, but --

9 Q. So from the ground up to about halfway.

10 A. No, from the top of those paper.

11 Q. To the top of the paper. Got it.

12 A. Yeah. Not fire from the down, no. Fire is on top of those  
13 paper towels.

14 MR. FLAHERTY: Are there a lot of chemicals also stored in  
15 that space?

16 BY LT [REDACTED]:

17 Q. Chemicals? Were there a lot of chemicals in the space?

18 A. I do know if you say chemicals. Is spray bugs, it's fly and  
19 insect but far away. I separate what is the -- away from the food  
20 and paper and is separate on the --

21 Q. All right. You segregate the food and the --

22 A. Yes, in the -- yeah.

23 Q. So there was bug, like bug killer spray?

24 A. Yeah. Basically the (indiscernible) what you spray.

25 MR. FLAHERTY: All right. And are there detergents or dry



1 powder detergents?

2 MR. LOPEZ: Yeah, I have.

3 MR. HALL: You have laundry soap in there?

4 MR. LOPEZ: Yeah, I had the powder soap, the powder soap, the  
5 laundry, and Ajax, like that.

6 BY LT [REDACTED]:

7 Q. Ajax? Yeah.

8 A. Ajax. Yeah. And the liquid dishwashing soap.

9 MR. HALL: Dishwashing is liquid, right?

10 MR. LOPEZ: Yes.

11 MR. HALL: I think he was asking about anything powdered  
12 soap. You had powdered laundry soap or (indiscernible) Ajax?

13 BY LT [REDACTED]:

14 Q. Any chemicals or anything that's flammable, or something like  
15 that?

16 A. No, only bugs spray --

17 Q. Only bug spray.

18 A. -- like that. Those like Lemon Pledge for cleaning stuff.

19 Q. Where was the charcoal at?

20 A. Next to the toilet tissue.

21 Q. On the ground?

22 A. In the ground, too.

23 Q. Right next to the toilet paper and paper towels?

24 A. Yeah.

25 Q. Oh, man. Okay.

1 BY MR. THOMSEN:

2 Q. Now when you opened this door, was the fire only in this  
3 area?

4 A. Yeah. Only in the paper towels.

5 Q. And none of the other side was affected?

6 A. No, no, no, no. Only right -- it was in straight. I open, I  
7 see the fire over there.

8 Q. Now why did the -- well, I'm going to go to this other  
9 question. Were you aware that there was hot work being done that  
10 day underneath the dry stores?

11 A. No. Because usually if they work, they -- I just only do my  
12 job. If they tell me to do something, then I open like that,  
13 okay. I don't ask what they're doing or what -- only I do my  
14 part, just prepare every day the food like that.

15 Q. So did anybody -- that morning, did anybody come to you to  
16 let you know that there is welding underneath the dry store, to  
17 open the door for the fire watch to observe?

18 A. No.

19 By LT [REDACTED]:

20 Q. The door was locked?

21 A. Yes.

22 Q. Dry store room locked. And when, what time did you open it?  
23 Do you remember?

24 A. I don't know the time. But that time he call me, right away,  
25 I go open it.

1 Q. Yeah. Was it before the break, after the break? Like give  
2 me like something --

3 A. I don't know what time they break.

4 Q. Were you -- what were you doing?

5 A. But almost lunch time.

6 Q. It was almost lunch?

7 A. Yeah.

8 Q. So you were doing -- you were cooking in the kitchen,  
9 right --

10 A. Yeah.

11 Q. -- when he called you?

12 A. No, preparing. I already done for cooking. I just  
13 preparing.

14 Q. So what time would that have been probably, kind of on  
15 average?

16 A. Because I usually, I cook -- I ring the bell 12.

17 Q. It would have been what?

18 A. We eat 12 o'clock.

19 Q. So it would have before 12 o'clock --

20 A. Yeah.

21 Q. -- that you opened that door?

22 A. Yeah.

23 Q. So maybe, what, like 11:30, 11 o'clock?

24 A. Quarter.

25 Q. Quarter to 12?

1 A. Yeah.

2 BY MR. THOMSEN:

3 Q. Ruel, did -- you know, the welder approached you to open the  
4 door. Did he ask you why? Did he give you a reason why he wanted  
5 that door open?

6 A. No.

7 Q. He just came up and --

8 A. He said, yeah -- say, Apo (ph.), can you open the door to the  
9 store room? So I open.

10 LT [REDACTED]: Who asked you? I'm sorry.

11 MR. LOPEZ: The welder, Mike. Michael.

12 LT [REDACTED]: Michael, the welder.

13 BY MR. THOMSEN:

14 Q. Now, was there any smoke coming from the air conditioning  
15 vents?

16 A. It might in the galley, but I was there in the galley, no. I  
17 never noticed anything about the smoke.

18 Q. Where is the vessel's main A/C unit? Air conditioning that  
19 cools the vessel.

20 A. I don't know.

21 BY LT [REDACTED]:

22 Q. Michael saw the fire too when you opened it?

23 A. I don't know.

24 Q. You opened that door and you saw the fire.

25 A. I opened the door.

1 Q. Was Michael behind you?

2 A. I don't know. Because I don't -- I just open the door, and I  
3 see the fire and I got the fire extinguisher. I don't know who  
4 around me.

5 Q. The fire extinguisher was in that room?

6 A. They have one inside the room, inside store room, and also  
7 outside.

8 Q. Which one did you use?

9 A. The port side.

10 Q. You used the one outside the --

11 A. Outside.

12 Q. -- outside the dry store room.

13 A. Because we have a lot of fire extinguisher on the boat.

14 MR. THOMSEN: They normally got A2 extinguisher, which is  
15 normally dry chem, on the port -- or starboard side of the  
16 corridor.

17 BY MR. THOMSEN:

18 Q. So, Ruel, so how long did you stay there? Did you expend the  
19 whole fire extinguisher?

20 A. I almost finish one. I keep checking. I keep checking.

21 Q. Was anybody around you?

22 A. I don't notice it.

23 Q. Did you yell "Fire, Fire"?

24 A. I yell. I yell. The time I see the fire, I yell, and right  
25 away I grab the fire extinguisher and -- to kill the fire. But I

1 say, when the fire go down, then is smoke, is smoke, is smoke.  
2 But I try to kill it but cannot, that's why I back up. But I  
3 still try to go with the fire hose, because they already ready  
4 fire hose.

5 Q. Okay.

6 A. But took step only inside, to go into the galley, you cannot.  
7 Cannot go inside.

8 Q. Too much smoke?

9 A. Was very smoke.

10 Q. Now did anybody think about using the SCBA, the fire  
11 extinguisher with the mask?

12 A. No, we didn't have the mask, and we didn't have the fire  
13 suit, because next to the fire, and we cannot go in and get it.

14 LT [REDACTED]: It was in the -- it was in that space?

15 MR. LOPEZ: Close.

16 MR. HALL: Right next -- going in the chapel.

17 MR. LOPEZ: Close to that --

18 LT [REDACTED]: Oh, right, right, right. Yeah.

19 MR. LOPEZ: --to that room.

20 BY MR. THOMSEN:

21 Q. Are they aware that there's another fire suit near the  
22 entrance back here by the galley?

23 A. No. We don't have, but we have the gas, the (indiscernible)  
24 -- the tank.

25 Q. The tank?

1 A. Yeah.

2 Q. Did anybody think about using that?

3 A. One guy, he use it. They put him in it. I don't see. But I  
4 see him, that they put him.

5 Q. Um-hum.

6 MR. HALL: Was that the deck boss?

7 MR. LOPEZ: No, he is Charge.

8 MR. HALL: Who?

9 MR. LOPEZ: Charge, like a -- the assistant.

10 MR. HALL: The what? Assistant engineer?

11 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: (Indiscernible) Charge.

12 MR. LOPEZ: Charge.

13 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: Remy.

14 MR. LOPEZ: Remy.

15 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: Charge or --

16 MR. HALL: That's his name --

17 BY MR. THOMSEN:

18 Q. Did you see him go in the space with a hose?

19 A. Yeah.

20 Q. Okay. And then what?

21 A. Then I don't know how many times, how many -- I mean, how  
22 long he is inside. Then I also help him to take up the vest, and  
23 he say it's very strong.

24 MR. HALL: When you first -- that dry chemical extinguisher,  
25 when you were spraying that, once you finished that and left the

1 room, did you close the door or leave it open?

2 MR. LOPEZ: Leave it open.

3 BY MR. THOMSEN:

4 Q. How long was Remy inside fighting the fire with the hose?

5 A. I don't know.

6 Q. Okay. From the entrance here at the stern of the vessel,  
7 from the entrance, how long would you say the distance is in feet  
8 to the dry store room, from this entrance?

9 A. Okay. This is the entrance, it's only behind. We cannot go  
10 far away. It's only like we step in and that's it.

11 Q. What do you mean? He didn't go too far?

12 A. No, no, no, it's very smoke. A lot of smoke.

13 MR. HALL: Because of the shelves everywhere?

14 MR. LOPEZ: No. He still in the entrance.

15 BY MR. THOMSEN:

16 Q. He was still in the hallway prior to reaching the double  
17 corridor port -- starboard side.

18 Okay. Did anybody grab the other SCBA up on the bridge?

19 A. I don't know.

20 Q. So can you give me just an idea how long do you think Remy  
21 was inside this corridor?

22 A. How long I think?

23 Q. How long? How long do you think?

24 A. Not even a minute. That time I attempt to go back.

25 MR. HALL: No, but he's asking how long was Remy there --



1 MR. LOPEZ: Remy?

2 MR. HALL: -- (indiscernible) SCBA?

3 MR. LOPEZ: Oh, oh, oh.

4 MR. HALL: Five minutes, 10 minutes?

5 MR. LOPEZ: I don't know because somebody hearing the fire,  
6 and also now I'm going to that, helping the deck boss, we run,  
7 run, run, and like that.

8 BY MR. THOMSEN:

9 Q. I'm just trying to get -- you think, 10, 15 minutes?

10 MR. HALL: Only a few minutes?

11 BY MR. THOMSEN:

12 Q. Okay. When you saw Remy come back out, was there an alarm  
13 going off from the tanker, you know, like an alarm?

14 A. No, no, I don't notice. No, I don't notice that.

15 Q. Can you mark where you -- how far Remy went inside, in your  
16 best opinion?

17 A. I see him, they were in the -- but I don't know how far he  
18 go.

19 Q. Okay. Now prior to him going in, did he know the location of  
20 the fire?

21 A. Yeah, he knew.

22 Q. Okay. All right. To continue on with the story, so after  
23 you came back out, then what happened?

24 A. Okay. Like something, you know, like if you inhale a lot of  
25 the smoke, it look like very (indiscernible, the feeling when you

1 inhale a lot of the smoke, you're going to (makes sound) like  
2 that.

3 Q. Did you see if there was any oxygen in the tank?

4 A. I don't know.

5 Q. Okay, please carry on. And then what happened?

6 A. And that time -- okay, that time the firefighters, they come,  
7 they're spraying on the bow. But I think it's not going to kill  
8 the fire. So I take the safety plan, we grab the safety plan and  
9 show it to him. But I don't know if he understands. Say you are  
10 here, the fire is over there, how are you going kill it if you  
11 hold it in the door?

12 Q. Is this the -- was this the first firefighter?

13 A. The first fighter, and I ask him point blank, I ask him  
14 oxygen, he don't have.

15 Q. So when you said, he was shooting at the door --

16 A. Yeah.

17 Q. -- what do you mean?

18 A. Like, he is outside here, you see the -- you see this, and he  
19 put the fire -- I mean, the hose, is only hitting the altar in the  
20 chapel.

21 Q. So he stood outside --

22 A. Yeah, yeah.

23 Q. -- and shot straight towards --

24 A. The fire. Of course, the water is not going to  
25 (indiscernible) that.

1 Q. Yeah, it's going to go around (indiscernible), yeah.

2 LT [REDACTED]: Who did that?

3 MR. LOPEZ: The first guy, the firefighter come.

4 LT [REDACTED]: Okay.

5 MR. THOMSEN: Okay. And then what happened, sir?

6 MR. LOPEZ: Also, I grab also the fire hose at that time  
7 because he don't what the location of the fire. I grab it. I  
8 near -- the smoke is going up there, so I put it near, but it's  
9 even -- it's very strong.

10 BY LT [REDACTED]:

11 Q. You tried to take the fire hose from him?

12 A. Yeah, I take from him.

13 Q. Did he -- he let you?

14 A. Yeah.

15 Q. And you went and fought it yourself? What did you do when  
16 you took the fire hose?

17 A. I take it from him and try to go inside.

18 Q. Oh, okay.

19 A. Half of my body, like a step, go in there. I like hold that  
20 one and (indiscernible) and shoot it. I'm sure I'm not going to  
21 hit this one because the entrance is have a block.

22 BY MR. HALL:

23 Q. Were you shooting inside the room, or --

24 A. Yeah.

25 Q. You're shooting inside the room?

1 A. Inside -- inside, but not the room, just inside.

2 Q. Oh, inside the hallway --

3 A. I know I just hitting only this one. If I can go more  
4 further, yeah, maybe I can shoot this. But only here, only here.

5 Q. So how far where you able to get? As far as the galley door,  
6 or --

7 A. No. I not get past the galley door.

8 Q. Okay. So you didn't get very far then.

9 BY MR. THOMSEN:

10 Q. So just on the record, you got to --

11 A. Yeah.

12 Q. Okay. From the time the fire -- when you first saw the fire,  
13 how long did it take for the fire department to get on scene? The  
14 fire, firefighters --

15 A. Um-hum.

16 Q. -- how long did it take for them to get there?

17 A. At the time I still there, nobody was inside. They are all  
18 outside.

19 MR. HALL: No, I think he -- I think Frank's asking for when  
20 you guys called 911 --

21 MR. LOPEZ: Somebody call.

22 MR. HALL: -- how long until they -- the fire department  
23 showed up?

24 MR. LOPEZ: I don't know. I not --

25 MR. HALL: About how long, do you think?

1 BY MR. THOMSEN:

2 Q. Okay. Picking up the story. So you took the fire hose away  
3 from the firefighter, and then -- keep on going, please.

4 A. Yeah. And then as I say, I tried to kill the fire but I  
5 can't, so I give him, back to him. But I ask him, that time you  
6 are using already, if he had the flashlight, because very dark.  
7 They didn't (indiscernible) lamp oxygen, he didn't have.

8 Q. How many of the firefighters showed up?

9 A. Well, I notice only one.

10 Q. Only one?

11 A. Only one.

12 Q. Only one firefighter?

13 A. Yeah.

14 Q. What about a fire truck?

15 A. Outside.

16 Q. Okay. So one -- how many firefighters were on the dock?

17 A. I don't know. By that time already everything coming. There  
18 are already a lot, I see a lot of fire truck and -- two fire truck  
19 and those firefighters.

20 MR. HALL: But only got actually on the boat?

21 MR. LOPEZ: But the one go inside the boat. I notices only  
22 guy, the one I grab from him the hose.

23 MR. HALL: All the rest were on the pier.

24 BY MR. THOMSEN:

25 Q. Did you see other firefighters on the dock? You saw -- you

1 say one came on board and was using the hose.

2 A. Yeah.

3 Q. Did you see any other firefighters on the dock?

4 A. I don't remember because everything is fast. Like only  
5 concentrating to concentrate to --

6 LT [REDACTED]: On the fire.

7 MR. LOPEZ: -- kill the fire. If I have grab something -- II  
8 said, give me that (makes sound).

9 LT [REDACTED]: Yeah, you weren't looking outside.

10 MR. LOPEZ: Yeah, I don't look at even those right around  
11 with me and who are there, who is -- I don't know.

12 LT [REDACTED]: Yeah, makes sense.

13 BY MR. THOMSEN:

14 Q. Okay. On board the *Jeanette*, was anybody giving directions  
15 on how to respond to the fire? Anybody?

16 LT [REDACTED]: Was anyone in charge?

17 BY MR. THOMSEN:

18 Q. Was anybody in charge?

19 A. What you mean? You mean the time we get fire?

20 Q. If I'm your boss, I'm going to tell you, hey, go in there and  
21 fight the fire. Is anybody telling people what to do? Anybody be  
22 the lead and taking charge?

23 LT [REDACTED]: Or was it just everyone just do their own  
24 thing?

25 MR. LOPEZ: I don't -- the question. Like, he the one -- at

1 the time we had the fire already, everybody tried to get the --  
2 somebody get the freshwater from the pump and the firehose, like  
3 that. But the problem is we cannot go inside because there is  
4 smoke. Is smoke, is smoke, is smoke.

5 LT [REDACTED]: Was it also hot, or just smoke?

6 MR. LOPEZ: Hot and smoke.

7 LT [REDACTED]: Hot and smoke?

8 MR. LOPEZ: Even the water that time that fell down, the  
9 (indiscernible) already, water already warm.

10 LT [REDACTED]: Oh, wow.

11 BY MR. THOMSEN:

12 Q. Okay. And then what happened? Keep on going.

13 A. And then I saw that the firefighter, there is -- the door  
14 putting the water, I remember the safety plan. So we grab that  
15 one and show it to him. And explain to him, you are here, you're  
16 not hitting the fire. You're hitting the wall, the altar.

17 But he still keep doing the --

18 LT [REDACTED]: The chapel?

19 MR. LOPEZ: The water. I did not only stay over there. I  
20 keep running back and forward with the bow, and the chapel deck,  
21 out to (indiscernible) the rooms. By that time --

22 BY MR. THOMSEN:

23 Q. Ruel -- I'm sorry. Go ahead. Finish what you were saying.

24 A. That time I grab the, what you call, the supplies to get the  
25 mask, because it's bolted, but it's easy with (indiscernible) I

1 think you can get the whole thing. But bolted, how can I take  
2 out? So I grab the channel lock, but I still (indiscernible) try  
3 to open, but I go down again, I don't know how to (indiscernible).  
4 And the SBCA I grab like that. But that time I step my feet in  
5 the (indiscernible) room for the chapel, the chapel room, the  
6 (indiscernible) room, already the water is very hot now.

7 So, yeah, I see it, oh, maybe we get fire also in the galley.  
8 But I never fire in the galley (indiscernible). No, I never seen  
9 a flame.

10 Q. Ruel, when we got on the scene, I saw a firefighter  
11 continuously spray this room.

12 MR. THOMSEN: Hey, Dave, I'm talking about the pilothouse,  
13 the wheelhouse.

14 MR. FLAHERTY: Yeah.

15 MR. THOMSEN: We're talking about that diagram right there,  
16 on the port side there's a -- it says heli shop.

17 MR. FLAHERTY: Right. Yeah, I saw it right behind the  
18 captain's.

19 MR. THOMSEN: That's what I'm referring to.

20 BY MR. THOMSEN:

21 Q. Why was the firefighter continuously standing here spraying  
22 into that very small space?

23 A. Because that's the next captain rooms and already fire.  
24 Because they cannot go this way. Maybe this one, and also one  
25 over here, outside. But only hitting the walls. Hitting the --



1 MR. HALL: He never opened the door to that --

2 MR. LOPEZ: No.

3 MR. HALL: -- (indiscernible), right? They just used  
4 outside.

5 MR. LOPEZ: Only outside. They spray in the wall. I said,  
6 oh, you do not (indiscernible) the fire.

7 MR. THOMSEN: I understand there's a gasoline tank --

8 MR. LOPEZ: Yeah.

9 MR. THOMSEN: -- somewhere. Where's the gasoline tank at?

10 MR. HALL: For the helicopter.

11 MR. LOPEZ: Helicopter is on the other, on top --

12 LT [REDACTED]: Different deck?

13 MR. LOPEZ: Different deck. It's another one. But that one  
14 like the speed boat is --

15 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: Speed boat, yeah. So --

16 MR. LOPEZ: For the speed boat.

17 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: Right where --

18 MR. LOPEZ: Like this --

19 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: The (indiscernible) room?

20 MR. LOPEZ: Yeah, outside.

21 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: The starboard side?

22 MR. LOPEZ: Yeah.

23 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: So right there?

24 MR. LOPEZ: It's only this, like this. Yeah.

25 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: It's probably a little bit longer,

1 but --

2 MR. THOMSEN: Okay. But --

3 MR. HALL: And they have another one on the port side. Only  
4 one?

5 MR. LOPEZ: Only one.

6 BY MR. THOMSEN:

7 Q. Okay. The gas tank for the skip boat is located on starboard  
8 side right next to the murk (ph.) room.

9 Was -- I could not see when we were on scene, was any  
10 firefighter in this area?

11 A. That time I was in deck, I already see -- only see the guys  
12 over here. As the crew get the fire hose and we make wet.

13 Q. So you guys were also fighting alongside --

14 A. Yes, yes.

15 Q. So the crew, in addition to the firefighters, you all were --

16 A. Still fighting the fire. We make it wet.

17 Q. So for the crew, where was the crew at?

18 A. Me and Bruno, run and look what you can do. And then Alvin  
19 -- I know Alvin, he grab the hose and make wet. This one, this  
20 one, yeah, make wet this one.

21 Q. That fuel tank?

22 A. Yeah.

23 LT [REDACTED]: The fuel tank is right there?

24 MR. THOMSEN: It's right here, starboard side.

25 LT [REDACTED]: Oh, okay.

1 BY MR. THOMSEN:

2 Q. Okay. Continue with the story.

3 A. And then I -- that time because already a lot of firemen  
4 already on board, so we -- I cannot -- I mean, I just assist them,  
5 I don't hold any water hose. Yeah, but I try to -- especially the  
6 safety plan, that's the one I always carry me, and I explain also  
7 one guy on top, what the boat location is. And that time, and  
8 then the security, tell them okay, because I can't do anymore,  
9 because they already take over, we stay on the dock, and the  
10 security -- the security guard and the men, they say, go, go, go  
11 away, go away. So we stay now on the side, and the fire -- I  
12 mean, the harbor (indiscernible) take over the job.

13 Q. You know the guys wearing the yellow fire suits? The firemen  
14 wearing the yellow --

15 A. I don't remember who have the yellow. I only remember the  
16 red astronauts, that's the one I remember. But the yellow, I  
17 don't remember any yellow firemen wearing that one.

18 Q. When the guys with the equipment, the guys that showed up  
19 with the mask and the hoses --

20 A. Yeah, the gas --

21 MR. HALL: Yeah, he said they looked like astronauts.

22 BY MR. THOMSEN:

23 Q. They're the airport guys. Did they go inside when they  
24 showed up?

25 A. They go inside the boat.

1 Q. Main deck or --

2 A. On the -- this side, this deck.

3 Q. Pilothouse?

4 A. Pilothouse.

5 Q. Did anybody go through the main deck?

6 A. I don't know because there's a wing, so they're here outside,  
7 yeah, like that. Even if they were, I don't know because those  
8 are the wings, you cannot see, because this is only the entrance.  
9 Go this way or go that way.

10 Q. Okay. During this time did the fire -- when they showed up  
11 with the suits, did the fire appear to be under control?

12 A. What do you mean?

13 Q. When they showed up, they went in the pilothouse or the main  
14 deck, did it appear that the fire was going to die?

15 A. I don't think so. But only my opinion is. Everything close,  
16 they put water in the wall only. I don't know if they broke the  
17 glasses. I don't know.

18 Q. Now who told you to evacuate the boat? Anybody come on board  
19 and tell you guys to leave the boat?

20 A. I no heard anybody say evacuate, but myself, because I said  
21 okay, like I do -- I already the (indiscernible) so it's better I  
22 go, get out.

23 BY LT [REDACTED]:

24 Q. Nobody told you to leave?

25 A. Nobody told me to get off on the boat, get off with the

1 boat. There was already the first fireman take over the job. And  
2 even I stayed there, I can't do anything. I don't have equipment.  
3 I only use my slipper.

4 Q. You had flip-flops on? Slippers? What were you wearing?  
5 What kind of shoes were you wearing? Flip-flips?

6 Q. What is that?

7 A. Flip-flops? Like slippers?

8 A. Yes, slippers.

9 Q. You were wearing slippers? You were wearing those? Yeah.

10 A. Yeah.

11 BY MR. THOMSEN:

12 Q. Now, for the interior of the dry store room, the interior of  
13 the dry store room, the walls wood?

14 A. Yes, wood.

15 Q. There was no, like, insulation of any type?

16 A. No, only the plain wood.

17 Q. Plain wood? The wood inside the walls, inside the dry goods  
18 store, are they old walls?

19 A. Around. Yeah.

20 Q. I mean, were they old.

21 A. All wood.

22 Q. I mean, did they look something like this, smooth, solid?

23 A. No. Because that was before, it's like the old wood, like a  
24 recreation room. It's a nice room but it's not that plain like  
25 this. It's not plain. Only wood, nothing, no paint, no anything.

1 It's only wood, brown wood.

2 Q. You know how wood is, after certain amount of time, it sort  
3 of -- not really flake, you know what I'm talking about --

4 MR. HALL: Gets kind of fuzzy.

5 MR. LOPEZ: Yeah. No, this is still okay. Still okay.

6 BY LT [REDACTED]:

7 Q. It's still smooth?

8 A. It's -- yeah, it's still nice.

9 Q. And the shelves are wood?

10 A. Yeah.

11 Q. Everything in the dry storage room was wood. No insulation?

12 A. Yeah. No insulation.

13 LT [REDACTED]: Yeah.

14 MR. THOMSEN: I ain't got nothing else.

15 LT [REDACTED]: I don't either.

16 Thank you for all the work that you did in there trying to  
17 put that fire out. It sounds like you really put forth a valiant  
18 effort.

19 David, do you have any further questions?

20 MR. FLAHERTY: No, I think you covered all of the aspects I  
21 was interested in for the fire. So, yeah, I'm fine with it.

22 LT [REDACTED]: Thank you very much. I'm going to stop  
23 recording.

24 (Whereupon, the interview was concluded.)

25

CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the attached proceeding before the

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD

IN THE MATTER OF:                   SINKING OF THE FISHING VESSEL  
  *JEANETTE* OFF THE COAST OF PAGO PAGO  
  December 5, 2018  
  Interview of Ruel Lopez

ACCIDENT NO.:                       DCA19FM010

PLACE:

DATE:                                 December 10, 2018

was held according to the record, and that this is the original,  
complete, true and accurate transcript which has been transcribed  
to the best of my skill and ability.



Transcriber