

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD

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Investigation of: *

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FIRE ONBOARD *SPIRIT OF NORFOLK* *

NEAR NORFOLK NAVAL STATION, *

Accident No.: DCA22FM022

VIRGINIA ON JUNE 7, 2022 *

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Interview of: JASON SLEETH, Director of Operations
Darden Restaurant Group

Virginia Beach, Virginia

Saturday,
January 28, 2023

APPEARANCES:

CDR RANDY WADDINGTON, Lead Investigating Officer
Chief of Analysis and Compliance Division
United States Coast Guard

LCDR [REDACTED] [REDACTED] Inspections & Investigations
Oversight
United States Coast Guard

LCDR [REDACTED] [REDACTED] Staff Member
Fifth Coast Guard's District Inspections
United States Coast Guard

MICHAEL KARR, Safety Program Manager
National Transportation Safety Board

DAVID FLAHERTY, Office of Marine Safety
National Transportation Safety Board

CDR ERIC ROY, Technical Advisor
Chief of Response Training
Coast Guard Training Center Yorktown

[REDACTED] [REDACTED] Technical Advisor
Traveling Marine Investigator
United States Coast Guard

JONATHAN JACOBS, Division Counsel,
Washington Field Division,
Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives

[REDACTED] [REDACTED] Marine Board of Investigation
United States Coast Guard

LT [REDACTED] [REDACTED] Counsel
United States Coast Guard

CHRIS ABELL, Representative
Bay Diesel

ERIC DENLEY, Counsel
City Cruises

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I N T E R V I E W

(8:20 a.m.)

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2
3 CDR ROY: The time is 8:20 a.m. The hearing is now in
4 session. At this time I call Mr. Jason Sleeth, passenger of the
5 *Spirit of Norfolk*. LCDR [REDACTED] will administer your oath and ask
6 you some preliminary questions.

7 LCDR [REDACTED] Mr. Sleeth, please stand and raise your right
8 hand.

INTERVIEW OF JASON SLEETH

BY LCDR [REDACTED]

10
11 Q. Mr. Sleeth, please state your full name and spell your last
12 name?

13 A. Jason Sleeth, S-L-E-E-T-H.

14 Q. Please identify counsel or representative if present and have
15 them state and spell their last name as well as your firm or
16 company relationship.

17 A. I'm sorry, could you repeat the question?

18 Q. Are you represented by counsel today?

19 A. No, sir.

20 Q. Okay. Please tell us what is your current employment and
21 position?

22 A. I'm a director of operations with Darden Restaurant Group.

23 Q. What is your general responsibilities in that job?

24 A. I oversee the operations of around eight to nine restaurants.

25 Q. What is your education related to your position?

1 A. High school graduate, some college.

2 Q. Do you hold any professional licenses or certificates related
3 to your position?

4 A. No, sir.

5 LCDR [REDACTED] Thank you. LCDR [REDACTED] will have follow up
6 questions for you.

7 LCDR [REDACTED] Mr. Sleeth, could you just move the microphone
8 a little -- yeah, thank you.

9 THE WITNESS: No problem.

10 BY LCDR [REDACTED]

11 Q. So, good morning, Mr. Sleeth. Thank you for being here. And
12 as we ask you questions today if you need a break at any time just
13 let us know.

14 A. Okay.

15 Q. All of my questions today are related to the events on June
16 7th, 2022, unless I specifically ask you about a later date. For
17 the record at the time of the incident Mr. Sleeth was a passenger
18 on the *Spirit of Norfolk* on June 7th, 2022. Mr. Sleeth, there's
19 an exhibit binder in front of you.

20 The recorder, LCDR [REDACTED] will pull up any exhibits on the
21 monitors throughout the room as well but if you need to look at
22 something that we pull up there's a binder in front of you. And
23 please try to refrain from using any acronyms when giving your
24 testimony. And if you need to just kind of spell it out for us.

25 We're going to break your testimony into two parts today.

1 One is your experience as a passenger onboard the *Spirit of*
2 *Norfolk* prior to the fire and the second is the events of June 7th
3 after the fire was discovered onboard the *Spirit of Norfolk*.

4 Mr. Sleeth, as a passenger onboard the *Spirit of Norfolk* on
5 June 7th, 2022, can you tell us why you were onboard that day and
6 who you were with?

7 A. Yes, ma'am. My son, Benjamin, his school was having a trip.
8 It was not a school-funded trip. It was just kind of a bunch of
9 classmates and parents that got together as kind of an end of the
10 year celebration. So, I accompanied him as a chaperone.

11 Q. And can you tell us how old your son was?

12 A. He was fifth grade at the time, ten years old.

13 Q. And have you ever been onboard the *Spirit of Norfolk* prior to
14 June 7th?

15 A. No, ma'am.

16 Q. Okay. Mr. Sleeth, before I ask you to describe the events of
17 June 7th, 2022, I'm going to ask LCDR [REDACTED] to pull up and play
18 Coast Guard Exhibit 044. This may help you recall the events of
19 that day and kind of bring you back to that day and you can watch
20 on one of the monitors if you --

21 CDR ROY: Can you please tell us what exhibit you're going to
22 be pulling up?

23 LCDR [REDACTED] Oh, I'm sorry. It's a video footage from a
24 passenger that day.

25 CDR ROY: Okay. Thank you.

1 LCDR [REDACTED] You're welcome.

2 (Video playing.)

3 THE WITNESS: Yes, ma'am, I did.

4 LCDR [REDACTED] Thank you.

5 BY LCDR [REDACTED]

6 Q. So, seeing that video in your own words. Can you please
7 describe for us what you did, what you saw, what you and your son
8 experienced, any interactions you had with the crew, wait staff
9 and other passengers while onboard the *Spirit of Norfolk* on June
10 7th, 2022?

11 A. Yes, ma'am.

12 Q. You can take your time to kind of --

13 A. No problem. I remember it. So, we got into the port area, I
14 want to say it was around 9:00 or 10:00. Not 100 percent sure
15 what time we got on the boat but we were let on the boat I believe
16 it was the first level. It's kind of a ballroom, dining room type
17 level.

18 In there they had seating for our school and there was
19 another school that I believe was a kindergarten class from
20 Virginia Beach. There was probably only about 20 of us but there
21 was definitely a lot more of the other class that was there. We
22 first got onboard we were allowed to take some seating in some
23 areas.

24 I joined several other parents that were at one round table.
25 My son and his friends were sitting at a table that was near the

1 window. A little bit of time passed by and then they started
2 opening up the buffet line for the children. They started with
3 the kindergarten class first, then our class then proceeded to get
4 food. We got the food. We then sat down. A DJ kind of started
5 up and was playing some music and stuff.

6 The kids were eating and then they started dancing. During
7 this time is when we actually took off and started down the river.
8 Probably 45 minutes or an hour after we ate, or maybe not even
9 that long, about 30 minutes or so after we ate folks kind of
10 started getting up migrating elsewhere on the, on the ship.

11 Me and my son and a couple of his friends walked out of that
12 room, walked up a couple flights of stairs on to that top level
13 that was uncovered as you saw in that video. There was a foosball
14 table and some like Jenga type games for the kids to play so they
15 were playing that.

16 I was hanging out speaking with another parent at the time,
17 just kind of looking at the scenery and whatnot and probably -- a
18 timeline is a little fuzzy. Right around before noon or right at
19 noon I started smelling something that smelled similar to burning
20 wire.

21 Looking around though there's ships being built on either
22 side of us and there's piers and docks where they're working and
23 welding, so I didn't really think anything of it at the time. And
24 then I started to see a little bit of smoke kind of proceed from
25 one side of the ship.

1 So, I kind of looked over and at this point in time it wasn't
2 very heavy. It was kind of light, like a whiteish smoke, but and
3 I kind of thought to myself, well this doesn't seem right. So,
4 there was one -- somebody that was working, a crew member that was
5 working kind of walked by and I said, hey, you know, I'm not sure
6 if this is okay. And he kind of was like, oh yeah, I'm, I'm not
7 really sure but I'll go talk to somebody or find out.

8 A few minutes later the smoke started really, starting to get
9 thick and turn that black color. At that point I had texted my
10 wife and said, I think the boat's on fire. And then started
11 taking pictures and videos and things like that. Another crew
12 member walked by and then I mentioned something to him, and he
13 said, yes, they're, they're working on it.

14 I proceeded to kind of take video and that's when we saw
15 flames and then at that point as the smoke started to billow over
16 the top of the ship, the crew members started kind of migrating us
17 towards a stairwell and kind of an area that's on that top ship
18 that's a little covered and there's a bar right there were the
19 foosball table was so they started migrating us there to kind of
20 figure out I guess where we were supposed to go at that time.

21 The smoke started getting real thick in that area. People
22 started coughing, children started coughing. I remember grabbing
23 my son and kind of looking at him and I could tell he was getting
24 very anxious and nervous. And I said, listen, I said we're fine.
25 I said, look both sides, you can see the shore. I said, worst

1 case scenario if we have to jump an swim, we jump and swim. I
2 said, but you'll be okay.

3 And at that point he started to calm down and then the smoke
4 got real thick and then he started coughing and that's when he
5 started getting very anxious again and we kind of covered up. At
6 that point they directed us down a stairwell, and I believe it was
7 to the second floor.

8 I'm not 100 percent positive at that time but I believe it
9 was one level down. When we got in there there were crew members
10 everywhere kind of ushering people to an area and making sure that
11 they got life preservers. Everybody was then told to put on a
12 life vest.

13 And they kind of got us into a single file line to an area
14 where another ship had pulled up next to us, which was the *Voyager*
15 (sic) and started kind of helping people lift them over a railing
16 to get onto the ship. It was a little -- I don't, I don't want to
17 say it was sketchy scene, but it was, you know, when you're
18 dealing with a bunch of kindergarteners and fifth graders, it
19 wasn't the easiest task.

20 The boat was pretty stable for a while. There was that one
21 point where it started to separate, and I remember the lady in
22 front of me was getting onto the *Voyager* at that time and it
23 started to separate, and I grabbed her life vest and kind of just
24 held her. And then they stopped the line. And then they pulled
25 the boat back closer to the *Spirit of Norfolk* and then proceed to

1 help people get over it at that point.

2 Once we -- everybody was on the *Voyager* they did somewhat of
3 a quick headcount and kind of asked around to make sure that
4 everybody that was passenger was onboard. The crew members were
5 on there as well or wait staff. And then we proceed to take off
6 after that.

7 Q. Thank you. I have a few follow up questions for you.

8 A. Yes, ma'am.

9 Q. Were there any safety announcements or a briefing of what to
10 do in an emergency by the captain or crew prior to the vessel
11 leaving the pier or immediately following departure?

12 A. Yes, ma'am. So, similar to boarding an airplane, they went
13 through a safety list. They showed the life preserver. They
14 showed how to put it on. And kind of talked, pointed to different
15 exit doors.

16 LCDR ██████████ LCDR ██████████ can you pull up Coast Guard
17 Exhibit 0 (ph.), which is the recording of the *Spirit of Norfolk*
18 safety announcement and play it.

19 (Video playing.)

20 THE WITNESS: -- I remember over the side of it where I saw
21 the actual flame. We then proceeded to go to the markings where E
22 and D are and that's kind of where the overhang on the ship where
23 the bar area and the foosball table were. And then from there
24 then we went down that staircase that is marked letter D/E and
25 then proceeded down to that second level deck.

1 During that, the cruise time that deck was closed to us so we
2 didn't have access to it until at this point and that's when they
3 opened it up and kind of shoveled us into there. That is the
4 level that we then -- or at least the people that I was able to
5 see at that time were administered life preservers and help
6 getting them on and then kind of navigating everybody to that exit
7 door.

8 BY LCDR [REDACTED]

9 Q. And from the discovery of the smoke and flames to the
10 evacuation onto the *Victory Rover*, was there ever an announcement
11 from the captain informing passengers of the situation or telling
12 passengers what to do?

13 A. No, ma'am, I do not recall so, not an actual announcement.
14 There were crew members that were directing people and telling
15 people. I think at this point everybody knew that there was a
16 fire on the, on the ship. But there was never any kind of audio
17 alarms for us or any kind of lighting or anything that I had saw
18 going off.

19 I'm not sure that there -- if there was or not when we got to
20 that second floor. It was a little bit -- it wasn't a chaotic
21 moment but when you're trying to get children together and get
22 life preservers on them, I wasn't really paying attention to those
23 things at that time.

24 Q. And you had mentioned you didn't hear an audio alarm or
25 anything. Did you hear anything like a siren or the ship's horn

1 or anything like that?

2 A. No, ma'am.

3 Q. And how were you -- you said it was crew members had informed
4 you where to go prior to the evacuation. Do you recall if it was
5 the vessel crew members or the wait staff?

6 A. I don't recall. I think it was a combination of both to be
7 honest with you. I think some of the wait staff was assisting.
8 There was two different uniforms I do remember. I don't recall
9 exactly what they looked like, but I do know that at the door and
10 at the top I believe it was a crew member.

11 They looked, the uniform looked a little bit more of a dress
12 style than the wait staff, which was just kind of like a normal
13 button-up, Oxford, black shirt. But I couldn't tell you exactly
14 who was who at that point.

15 Q. And from the time you saw the smoke and flames to the actual
16 time of the evacuation can you tell us approximately how much time
17 had passed?

18 A. I'm not really sure to be honest with you.

19 Q. Can you talk about your interactions with the other
20 passengers, other parents and children onboard during the fire?

21 A. Yeah. I mean up and to that point I didn't really know
22 anybody else on there. So, I was kind of just chatting with a few
23 parents and meeting. There was -- once the smoke started
24 billowing over the top and getting really thick at that point me
25 and another parent and I'm not really sure who it was was kind of

1 helping direct people to the area.

2 I had my son right next to me so I wouldn't get lost from
3 him. It was crowded but it wasn't, you know -- and we were still
4 contained on a small area. So, but I didn't want him getting onto
5 the next ship without me there. And, you know, they were kind of
6 just, at that point parents were helping but then they kind of
7 stepped back and allowed the crew to give the direction.

8 Q. And can you describe the overall mood? Did the other
9 passengers seem calm, confused, scared, et cetera?

10 A. I'll be honest, the children were a lot calmer than the
11 parents, which was a little ironic when you're dealing with a
12 bunch of kindergartens and fifth graders. There were some that
13 were crying. I don't think they knew what was going on. Most of
14 the adults seemed to be okay.

15 But I could tell that there were some that were coughing
16 really bad, and they were starting to get very anxious. But
17 overall, the general I guess were pretty calm for the most part.

18 Q. And at any point after the discovery of the smoke and flames
19 that you saw did you witness any crew members staging or bringing
20 out firefighting equipment to include hoses, extinguishers, et
21 cetera?

22 A. No, ma'am.

23 Q. And at any point in time after the discovery of smoke and
24 flames did you witness any of the *Spirit of Norfolk* crew members
25 attempting to extinguish or fight the fire that you saw?

1 A. No, ma'am.

2 Q. Were you able to see the responding vessels in the area and
3 if so can you describe for us what you witnessed?

4 A. Yes, ma'am, and there were several boats out there. The only
5 one that I really remember is the one that you saw in that
6 previous video that had the kind of firehoses that were going, and
7 they were there fairly quick once everything -- I say fairly quick
8 but from the point where the flames started getting very big they
9 were there fairly quick.

10 It was probably from the time that I noticed the smoke, I
11 would say maybe 15 minutes or so give or take. I'm not exactly
12 sure to where I remember kind of seeing that ship coming towards
13 us and spraying the water. They weren't spraying the water
14 directly onto the ship, kind of allowing it to the side and
15 allowing the mist to kind of hit the boat at that point.

16 Q. I know you had mentioned about the evacuation and then who
17 was doing what whether it was the crew members or the wait staff,
18 but do you remember who was assisting passengers with the life
19 jackets and helping pass out the life jackets?

20 A. It was a combination of crew members and parents. There was
21 a couple of crew members that were towards where the life
22 preservers were stored and just kind of handing them out. And
23 then the parents were kind of determining if it was a child size,
24 if it was an adult size. And kind of distributing them that way.

25 Q. And was it the vessel crew or the wait staff that was making

1 announcements to the passengers and keeping them informed of the
2 situation?

3 A. Again, I'm a little hazy on that because -- but I believe it
4 was the vessel crew. At the point that we started to get onto the
5 other ship at that point I believe most of the wait staff also in
6 life preservers and also exiting the boat just like the
7 passengers.

8 LCDR [REDACTED] And as we move into the evacuation efforts, I'm
9 going to ask LCDR [REDACTED] to pull up and play Coast Guard Exhibit
10 073. And start the video at minute 01:15.

11 (Video playing.)

12 THE WITNESS: -- on to the *Victory Rover*. *Victory Rover* that
13 we had to climb across and in that video you see the parents that
14 are helping the children and other parents board the *Victory*
15 *Rover*.

16 BY LCDR [REDACTED]

17 Q. What were the physical conditions like at the embarkation
18 area between the two vessels? For example, was it choppy, were
19 there wet surfaces, physical --

20 A. Absolutely wet surfaces for sure. I do remember there was a
21 couple of children that slipped a little bit. There was no
22 injuries that we saw at that time. And it would go from being
23 pretty, I don't want to say still, but easy to kind of climb over
24 to at times the it did get very choppy and then there was a couple
25 of times where the boats started to separate a little bit and then

1 we held the line and then they would come back together and then
2 we would continue to disembark.

3 Q. And in that exhibit you could see flames coming from the area
4 that you described the flames coming from with the *Victory Rover*
5 right there. Did you see those as you got onto the *Victory Rover*?

6 A. Yes, ma'am.

7 Q. In your opinion as a passenger that day how successful was
8 the evacuation from the *Spirit of Norfolk* to the *Victory Rover*?

9 A. You know, at that time I didn't think -- I was like okay,
10 great. We, we're able to get off of there and got on there. I
11 don't know what else we could have done having never been in a
12 situation like that. I mean I felt like it was handled to the
13 best that we could or the best that could have been handled during
14 that time.

15 Q. And during the evacuation or any point in time during that
16 day, did you or your son feel unsafe or felt like you were in
17 danger?

18 A. No. I don't think, for me, no, personally. My son
19 absolutely did for a period of time and he was getting very
20 anxious and nervous and I had to calm him down. But I was pretty,
21 I guess parent mode kicked in so it was just a matter of, okay,
22 let's do what we have to do to help these children and get where
23 we need to be.

24 You know, I think afterwards is when I started thinking about
25 the entire thing and kind of realized the magnitude of, wow, this

1 could have been pretty bad. And that's when it kind of set in.
2 But during that time, I wasn't scared. No, ma'am.

3 Q. Mr. Sleeth, previously you had just said that you had
4 mentioned to your son like if worse case we have to go into the
5 water, Captain Nadeau had mentioned in his testimony yesterday
6 that he did not make an emergency announcement over the public
7 address system informing passengers of the situation because of
8 the children onboard.

9 So, as a parent and passenger onboard the vessel that was on
10 fire would you have wanted the captain to make an announcement or
11 let you know what was unfolding and what the evacuation plan would
12 be?

13 A. You know, personally I think it would have been -- I mean the
14 children knew what was going on from seeing all the smoke. They
15 knew something was wrong so I think it would have been more
16 beneficial for us to kind of understand, like, hey, we have an
17 emergency situation.

18 We need everybody to report to this level and follow the
19 instructions from the crew. Again for me for my child I think
20 that would have been beneficial but I can't speak for the rest of
21 the parents.

22 Q. And from a passenger perspective is there anything that could
23 have been done better by the crew during the incident on June 7th?

24 A. You know, when I, when I first reported the smoke to the crew
25 member it was kind of -- and no fault to theirs, they may not have

1 known and it may have been a wait staff, too.

2 I'm not really sure at that time. It was kind of an, oh,
3 okay, the first person I talked to, like, oh yeah, I'll go let
4 somebody know that. Now I have no idea what was going on below.
5 Maybe they already knew. Maybe things were going on.

6 I do remember when I texted my wife later on she had replied
7 to me, she had said, you know, you texted me and let me know
8 before supposedly the call even went out that there was an
9 emergency. I don't, I think if there was some kind of alarms or
10 something triggering I think that we would have understood and
11 maybe been able to get down below a lot quicker.

12 Could it have been handled differently? I'm not really sure.
13 I don't know.

14 LCDR [REDACTED] Thank you, Mr. Sleeth. Commander, that's all
15 my questions.

16 CDR ROY: Mr. [REDACTED]

17 BY MR. [REDACTED]

18 Q. Good morning, sir, [REDACTED] [REDACTED] Coast Guard.

19 A. Good morning.

20 Q. So, you might have stated this but how old is your son?

21 A. At the time he was ten, maybe 11.

22 Q. Had he been on a large vessel before like the *Spirit of*
23 *Norfolk*?

24 A. No, sir. We have a 18 and a half foot boat at home so he's
25 been on a boat before but nothing of that magnitude.

1 Q. During the event after the fire was identified, did you see
2 any of the crew persons give contradictory or what I would say
3 confusing instructions? In other words, one person say do this,
4 another person say, do that? Was there any instances of that
5 where you might have been a little confused?

6 A. No, sir.

7 Q. And you mentioned that you talked about the smoke to a crew
8 person. Would you recall if you sat there for a minute and
9 thought about it whether it was somebody like a wait staff person
10 or would it have been one of the vessel marine crew that wore more
11 of a nautical uniform?

12 A. So, I believe the first person that I came in contact and
13 mentioned something was a wait staff person. The second person
14 that I spoke to about it definitely had a more of a dress style,
15 kind of nautical themed uniform on. So, I would assume that that
16 was the crew.

17 Q. So, I know you're in the hospitality support industry. Did
18 you have any interaction just casually with the restaurant
19 manager, a blonde woman. Her name at the time was Ms. Ginn. Like
20 did you introduce yourself because you're in the restaurant
21 support business?

22 A. No, sir.

23 Q. She stepped up onto a chair and was directing the movement of
24 passengers pointing, telling the DJ to make announcements. Did
25 you witness anything like that?

1 A. At that time, no, sir. And I think probably because I was
2 not on that level. If she was downstairs making announcements
3 where the DJ was, that would have been on the Deck 3, or the
4 bottom level Deck 1, I guess. I was up top on the very top deck
5 so and then they ushered us down to that middle level that was
6 closed previously and what they opened up to us. So, if she was
7 making announcements I was not on that level, sir.

8 Q. And you couldn't hear the DJ make announcements on the upper
9 open deck, is that correct?

10 A. No, sir, not that I recall.

11 Q. So, do you recall what type of person, was it a marine crew
12 as we described or was it hospitality staff, waiters, bartenders
13 or so forth that personally handled you or directed you to put on
14 a life jacket?

15 A. I believe it was the marine crew at that point.

16 Q. Did you see wait staff helping to move people about the boat
17 or helping people put on life jackets?

18 A. I don't recall. Everybody was kind of assisting everybody at
19 that point. The crew, the crew members were the ones that kind of
20 pointed to where the life preservers were, starting taking them
21 out of the storage areas, putting them on tables, handling them
22 out.

23 And the parents just kind of all jumped in and started
24 handling them out once the crew was taking them out of the storage
25 area that they were. The wait staff may have been assisting. I

1 know I helped my son and about three other kids and a couple of
2 parents to put theirs on as well. So, it was kind of everybody
3 just assisting everybody at that point.

4 Q. So, you got the life jacket. Did you have any problems
5 like -- so you pick up the life jacket, did it function properly?
6 Was it easy to put on? Could you fasten the straps? Were there
7 any condition issues like it, you know, was stuck together or the
8 fabric tore?

9 A. No, sir. They all seemed to be in good condition, in working
10 order.

11 Q. How about your son, did he put on, to your knowledge, an
12 adult PFD, as we call it, a life jacket?

13 A. No, sir. I had grabbed a child size for him and put that on
14 him.

15 Q. And did it fit properly and fasten properly?

16 A. Yes, sir.

17 MR. [REDACTED] That's all I have, sir, thank you.

18 THE WITNESS: Thank you.

19 CDR ROY: NTSB, do you have any questions for this witness?

20 MR. KARR: Thank you. Mike Karr with the NTSB.

21 BY MR. KARR:

22 Q. Mr. Sleeth, you mentioned the smell of burning wire. Can you
23 give me a reference as to how you concluded that that it smelled
24 like burning wire? Had you been around an electrical fire in the
25 past?

1 A. Yes, in restaurants I've, I've had to deal with a couple
2 situations where been involved in that also having kind of growing
3 up working on certain things with my dad and things of that nature
4 have kind of messing around even with the boy scouts and stuff,
5 learned about that type of stuff. So, I kind of had a reference
6 and understanding what it was.

7 MR. KARR: All right. Thank you.

8 THE WITNESS: Yes, sir.

9 CDR ROY: Bay Diesel, do you have any questions of this
10 witness?

11 MR. ABELL: Thanks Commander. There we go. Mr. Sleeth, my
12 name is Chris Abell. I'm an attorney representing Bay Diesel

13 BY MR. ABELL:

14 Q. Just a question for you about the smoke that you saw
15 initially. Can you tell me what color the smoke was at least as
16 you recall?

17 A. Yes, sir. The initial color of the smoke was light white and
18 that kind of came up for a while and then it turned like a super
19 dark billowing smoke when it started to come over the top.

20 Q. Thanks. And you were asked earlier by Mr. Karr about the
21 burning wire smell, was that about the same time you had the white
22 smoke that you saw, sir?

23 A. Yes, sir. It was probably within seconds of smelling that
24 and kind of looking around and going, okay, there's ships being
25 built on every side. It got a little bit, the smell got a little

1 bit, I guess thicker and that's when I kind of looked over. And I
2 as standing on that side and kind of look over and saw the white
3 smoke coming up the side of the ship.

4 Q. All right. And so, to be clear the smell first, a little
5 investigating and then you saw the white smoke?

6 A. Yes, sir.

7 MR. ABELL: Thank you, sir. No further questions, Commander.

8 CDR ROY: City Cruises, do you have any questions for this
9 witness:

10 MR. DENLEY: I do, just one. Good morning. I'm Eric Denley.
11 I'm with City Cruises. And Mr. Sleeth, I'd just like to start by
12 saying on behalf of City Cruises we're certainly glad that you
13 sailed with us on June the 7th, and at the same time regret, you
14 know, the experience that you had. And thank you for being here.

15 Just one question. You commented that, you know, when the
16 smoke started to get bad on the upper deck, you were moved down to
17 the second deck and that's where the life jackets were distributed
18 and you all started to line up. Can you describe the environment
19 on the second deck? Was there smoke? Was there -- was it a
20 better environment there?

21 THE WITNESS: Yeah. It as a much better environment. There
22 was no smoke on that deck at that time. When we were on the third
23 deck it had gotten to the point where we really couldn't be up
24 there because the smoke was so thick. And then when we got down
25 it's kind of a stairwell hallway, you know.

1 It was still a little smokey in there but as we got down to
2 that next level it had cleared up and there was no smoke in that
3 level.

4 MR. DENLEY: Thank you. I don't have any more questions. I
5 appreciate --

6 THE WITNESS: Yes, sir.

7 MR. DENLEY: -- your testimony today. Thanks.

8 THE WITNESS: Thank you.

9 CDR ROY: LCDR ████████ do you have any follow up?

10 LCDR ████████ I just have one follow up question.

11 Mr. Sleeth, can you elaborate when you got onto the *Victory Rover*
12 where did they position you and was anyone taking passenger counts
13 or accountability? How were they ensuring that all the passengers
14 got on to the *Victory Rover*?

15 THE WITNESS: Yes, ma'am. So, at first -- and I don't really
16 remember the layout of the ship, but we were first in an area, I
17 remember they had kind of a concession stand like snack bar type
18 thing in it. And they were continuing to count as they got people
19 off.

20 And then kind of started asking, like hey, is everybody
21 within your family or whoever you were chaperone, are you
22 accounted for? And everybody kind of, you know, thumbs up and
23 what not. And there was people constantly counting. There were
24 rows of seats there that people were sitting in and then we were
25 kind of piled into an area by the snack bar area.

1 Once we were kind of given the thumbs up, like okay,
2 everybody's good, then they kind of allowed us to move out of that
3 deck or that room and go to an area that as open on all sides
4 because it was super hot in there and people were, you know,
5 obviously sweating and just needed some fresh area.

6 And so, once they accounted for everybody that was on the
7 ship they allowed us to kind of spread out for the remainder of
8 the ride into port.

9 LCDR ██████ Thank you. Commander that's all I need.

10 CDR ROY: Mr. follow up -- Mr. ██████ any follow up?

11 MR. ██████ Thank you, Commander. Mr. Sleeth, we played
12 that Coast Guard Exhibit 073, which was a video taken by a
13 passenger on the *Victory Rover*. In that video and I can play it
14 again do you recall on the *Victory Rover* just -- I could play it
15 to refresh your memory.

16 Did the captain or someone make public address announcements
17 telling you what was going on, like sit here? Did you overhear
18 any public service announcements on the ship's PA system?

19 THE WITNESS: Yes, sir. They were definitely communicating
20 with us, letting us know where we needed to be. They kept us
21 contained in that one level I believe to get a head count. And
22 then they said, you know, once we were done, they -- I don't
23 remember everything that was said.

24 But they were communicating to us and stated once, you know,
25 we were good to go, and everybody accounted for we could kind of

1 spread out and go to the levels that were open for some air.

2 MR. [REDACTED] Thank you, sir.

3 THE WITNESS: Yes, sir.

4 CDR ROY: NTSB has one follow up.

5 MR. KARR: Yeah, Mr. Sleeth, on the *Victory Rover* when the,
6 when you and other passengers were being accounted for, can you
7 tell me who was, who was directing that? Was it the people from
8 the *Spirit of Norfolk* or was it the *Victory Rover* crew?

9 THE WITNESS: The *Victory Rover* crew from my understanding
10 and knowledge, I believe it was folks that looked to be some kind
11 of t-shirt that had some kind of design or something on it. If
12 there were other people directing other passengers I'm not really
13 sure. But from what I remember it was somebody that was on from
14 the *Victory Royal* (sic), or *Rover*.

15 MR. KARR: All right. Thank you, sir.

16 THE WITNESS: You're welcome.

17 CDR ROY: Mr. Sleeth, you are now released as a witness at
18 this formal hearing. Thank you for your testimony and your
19 cooperation. If I later determine that this team needs additional
20 information from you, I will contact you. If you have any
21 questions about this investigation you may contact the
22 investigation recorder, LCDR [REDACTED] [REDACTED] The time is 9:03. We
23 will reconvene at 9:15. Thank you.

24 (Whereupon, at 9:15 a.m., the interview was concluded.)

25

CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the attached proceeding before the
NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD

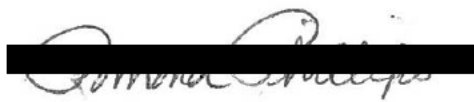
IN THE MATTER OF: FIRE ONBOARD *SPIRIT OF NORFOLK*
NEAR NORFOLK NAVAL STATION, VIRGINIA
ON JUNE 7, 2022
Interview of Jason Sleeth

ACCIDENT NO.: DCA22FM022

PLACE: Virginia Beach, Virginia

DATE: January 28, 2023

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.



Romona Phillips
Transcriber