

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD

* * * * *

Investigation of: *

*

FIRE ONBOARD *SPIRIT OF NORFOLK* *

NEAR NORFOLK NAVAL STATION, *

Accident No.: DCA22FM022

VIRGINIA ON JUNE 7, 2022 *

*

* * * * *

Interview of: JOLENE PRICE-THOMPSON, General Manager
City Cruises

Virginia Beach, Virginia

Monday,
January 30, 2023

APPEARANCES:

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

MICHAEL KARR, Safety Program Manager
National Transportation Safety Board

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

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

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

ERIC DENLEY, Counsel
City Cruises

I N D E X

<u>ITEM</u>	<u>PAGE</u>
Interview of Jolene Price-Thompson:	
By LT [REDACTED]	6
By Mr. [REDACTED]	7
By LT [REDACTED]	7
By Mr. [REDACTED]	10
By LCDR [REDACTED]	39
By Mr. [REDACTED]	39
By Mr. Denley	45
By Mr. [REDACTED]	50
By Mr. Denley	53

I N T E R V I E W

1
2 CDR WADDINGTON: Good morning, everyone. This hearing is now
3 in session. I ask those in attendance to please silence
4 cellphones at this time and please exit the hearing room to make
5 or receive phone calls. For those interested, my opening
6 statement from the first day of this hearing is posted on the
7 livestream, and Coast Guard External Affairs website which
8 provides an expanded explanation of this hearing for the benefit
9 of the public.

10 My name is CDR Randy Waddington, U.S. Coast Guard, Chief of
11 the Analysis and Compliance Division, located at Coast Guard
12 headquarters in Washington, D.C. I am the lead investigating
13 office for this District Five formal investigation, and the
14 presiding officer over these proceedings.

15 The Fifth District Commander has convened this investigation
16 under the authority of Title 46, United States Code, § 6301, and
17 Title 46, Code of Federal Regulations, Part IV.

18 Our purpose is to investigate the circumstances surrounding
19 the fire and subsequent total constructive loss of the small
20 passenger vessel, *Spirit of Norfolk*, on June 7, 2022, while
21 transiting the Elizabeth River near the Norfolk Navy Base in
22 Norfolk, Virginia.

23 The investigation will determine as closely as possible the
24 circumstances and factors that contributed to the incident so that
25 proper recommendations for the prevention of similar casualties

1 may occur.

2 The Transportation Safety Board is also participating in this
3 hearing. Mr. Michael Karr is the Investigator-In-Charge for the
4 NTSB's *Spirit of Norfolk* investigation, and he is here with us
5 today. Mr. Karr will now say a few words on behalf of the NTSB.

6 MR. KARR: Good morning. I'm Michael Karr, Investigator-In-
7 Charge for the National Transportation Safety Board for the
8 investigation of this casualty. The NTSB has joined this hearing
9 to avoid duplicating the development of facts. I do wish to point
10 out that this does not preclude the NTSB from developing
11 additional information separately from this proceeding, if that
12 becomes necessary. At the conclusion of this hearing, the NTSB
13 will analyze the facts of this casualty and determine the probable
14 cause, independent of the Coast Guard. We'll issue a report of
15 the NTSB findings and, if appropriate, the NTSB will issue
16 recommendations to correct safety problems discovered during the
17 investigation

18 CDR WADDINGTON: Thank you, Mr. Karr. I have one
19 administrative remark. We intend to conduct a Teams interview
20 with Mr. Charles Walther, a mechanical systems expert, via Teams,
21 on Tuesday, January 31st.

22 Teams is a video-capable platform in which multiple parties
23 enter a digital conference room and conduct questions and answers
24 as we are doing live here in Virginia Beach. Due to technical
25 constraints, this may not be able to be accomplished live.

1 However, directly after the conclusion of that interview we will
2 post that interview to our livestream to facilitate availability
3 for the public.

4 At this time, I call Ms. Jolene Price-Thompson, General
5 Manager, Norfolk City Cruises. LT [REDACTED] will you administer
6 your oath? And he will ask you some questions, preliminary
7 questions. Thank you.

8 LCDR [REDACTED] Ms. Price-Thompson, please stand and raise your
9 right hand. A false statement given to an agency of the United
10 States is punishable by fine and/or imprisonment under 18 U.S.C.
11 1001. Knowing this, do you solemnly swear or affirm that the
12 testimony you are about to give shall be the truth, the whole
13 truth, and nothing but the truth, so help you God?

14 MS. PRICE-THOMPSON: I do.

15 LCDR [REDACTED] Thank you. Please be seated.

16 INTERVIEW OF MS. JOLENE PRICE-THOMPSON

17 BY LCDR [REDACTED]

18 Q. Ma'am, please state your full name and spell your last name.

19 A. Jolene Price-Thompson, P-r-i-c-e T-h-o-m-p-s-o-n.

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

21 A. I am the General Manager for City Cruises Norfolk

22 Q. What are your general responsibilities in that job?

23 A. I am responsible for the overall operation of City Cruises in
24 Norfolk which includes sales, food and beverage and Marine.

25 Q. Please identify counsel or representative, if present, and

1 have him state and spell their last name, as well as your firm or
2 company relationship.

3 MR. DENLEY: Good morning. Eric Denley, D-e-n-l-e-y. I'm
4 the Deputy General Counsel, City Cruises, and I'm here on behalf
5 of the Party-In-Interest.

6 BY LT [REDACTED]

7 Q. Can you briefly tell us your relevant work history?

8 A. I have been in this industry for over 35 years. I'm an
9 Alumni of Alderman University. And while I was in school I took a
10 job on a *Spirit* vessel in Downtown Norfolk as a singing server.
11 That is not a skillset I have any longer. But over the years,
12 I've progressed, moved into different roles, different leadership
13 positions at various ports across the country. And for the last
14 22 years, I've been the General Manager at our Norfolk port.

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

16 A. College.

17 Q. Do you hold any professional licenses or certificates related
18 to your position?

19 A. I do not.

20 Q. Thank you. Mr. [REDACTED] will now have follow-up questions for
21 you.

22 BY MR. [REDACTED]

23 Q. Thank you, good morning.

24 A. Morning.

25 Q. My name's [REDACTED] [REDACTED] I'm a Coast Guard investigator.

1 Thank you for being here. If you want to take breaks, let us
2 know. And all of my questions will be directly related to the
3 dates and times leading up to the actual event on June 7th, unless
4 I ask you otherwise. You have an exhibit binder. You've been
5 given exhibit access to the exhibits prior to your arrival here
6 today. The recorder, LT [REDACTED] right over here, will display
7 exhibits on these large monitors. But Mr. Denley perhaps can help
8 you find an exhibit in the binder so you can focus on it. And
9 please take your time looking at it so that you can absorb what
10 I'm -- questions I'm going to ask you, okay?

11 A. Yes.

12 Q. So we haven't interviewed you before for this investigation.
13 However, we did ask and receive emails that you sent and received
14 for a time period we specified, between yourself and the company
15 and other entities. So with that, I wanted just to ask you --
16 first we're going to break your testimony into two main parts.
17 One is your general duties as the general manager, and then we'll
18 focus directly on June 7th, 2022. So you have an extensive career
19 working around vessels in the hospitality industry. Have you ever
20 been part of the Marine crew?

21 A. I have not.

22 Q. So if you would, just so that I can understand it. Elaborate
23 on your role as general manager, in as much detail as possible.
24 Just tell us so we can understand, what you do and who you report
25 to and who works for you and some of the duties that you carry

1 out.

2 A. As I noted, I'm responsible for -- I have four direct
3 reports, one being the Director of Marine Operation, one being the
4 Director of Sales, one the Director of Food and Beverage, and one
5 the Administrative Director. So I receive the entire operation.
6 Those folks report directly to me. I report to a regional vice
7 president out of our D.C. operation, and then of course, also deal
8 with the CEOs of the company, and all things related to those
9 areas.

10 Q. So I want to ask you about the testimony of Ms. Candace
11 Baker, the restaurant manager. She stated when asked, she was
12 enrolled in a drug testing program. What would be the purpose of
13 her enrollment in that program?

14 A. We just included that several years ago. I don't think we're
15 actually doing it with the F&B team any longer and have not for a
16 couple years. But I'm not sure that Ms. Baker's aware of that.

17 Q. So the, you know, the Coast Guard uses a tremendous number of
18 abbreviations and acronyms. So F&B, if you could try --

19 A. Food and Beverage, I'm sorry.

20 Q. That's okay. So would it be correct to say that she might be
21 included -- not her personally -- but the position of restaurant
22 manager because it was a decision based on fund -- handling funds
23 or something like that and not safety?

24 A. Correct.

25 Q. Was that testing required by the drug testing program for the

1 restaurant manager, was that required by regulation?

2 A. No, sir.

3 Q. So there were some emails that I reviewed, and a number of
4 emails were included in exhibits. But at the time of the
5 accident, were you seeking any full-time captains or part-time
6 captains to employ them on the vessels?

7 A. We've had a position open. Yes, sir.

8 Q. A position for what?

9 A. For a captain.

10 Q. Full or part-time?

11 A. For another full-time captain.

12 Q. So at the port of Virginia, at the time of the accident,
13 there are two vessels. Could you -- we're pretty familiar with
14 the *Spirit of Norfolk* because we've displayed a slide that has all
15 the characteristics of the vessels and photographs and so forth.
16 Can you just tell me about the other vessel, just real quickly?

17 A. Freedom Elites (ph.)?

18 MR. DENLEY: Mr. [REDACTED] I guess I would object on the basis
19 of relevance.

20 MR. [REDACTED] Commander, would you like me to answer that?

21 CDR WADDINGTON: Yeah. Go ahead, [REDACTED]

22 BY MR. [REDACTED]

23 Q. Is it smaller? Is it bigger? The point I'm speaking to is
24 who was the full-time captain that you were seeking? Because you
25 could (ph.) going to work on both vessels or a single vessel?

1 A. Did (ph.) work on both vessels.

2 Q. And had the -- had you been seeking another full-time
3 captain, because that was like an original position or were you
4 expanding the number of full-time captains?

5 A. We have had -- we've always had the Marine Director. We've
6 had two full-time captains until COVID hit. And we then ran the
7 business with a one captain and the DMO, the Director of Marine
8 Operations, and we were looking to fill that position.

9 Q. So CPT Nadeau was here yesterday, or the other day. And does
10 he report to you directly in all of his -- in all of his roles?
11 In other words, does everything that he does either as a vessel
12 captain or the Director of Marine Operations funnel through you?

13 A. He is a direct report of mine and -- excuse me -- we are in
14 communication about all things. However, any decisions being
15 made pertaining to the mechanical aspects of the vessel, that
16 those conversations are had with our National Marine Department.

17 Q. And who would that be at the National Marine Department?

18 A. It would initially start with a Regional Director of Marine
19 Operations. He is based out of D.C., or any other member of our
20 national team up to the VP of Marine Operations.

21 Q. So taking the Captain. Who within the company would assess
22 his performance as Captain, the quality of his -- the work he does
23 on the vessel, how he handles the vessel, how he maintains the
24 vessel and so forth. Who would be responsible for appraising that
25 performance?

1 A. Me, in conjunction with the National Marine team.

2 Q. So do you actually go on the vessel and make a determination
3 of the effectiveness of his performance?

4 A. I would evaluate the effectiveness of his performance in the
5 other aspects, from an HR standpoint, from a financial standpoint.
6 That as far as the mechanical end of the business, that is not my
7 forte. So I would rely on the experts within our company to give
8 me that feedback. And that would be a discussion and that would
9 be included in an evaluation.

10 Q. And the results of the evaluation, where could I find them?

11 A. They're recorded. They're done annually.

12 Q. And would they be in a personnel record?

13 A. Yes, sir.

14 Q. So we ask for personnel records for the Captain on the
15 accident voyage for a period of January 7, 2020, which was the
16 repower timeframe when the engines were repowered, up until the
17 accident voyage and we did not see a performance evaluation in the
18 information supplied. Could you tell me where it also might be?

19 A. Other than the personnel records, no, because they're
20 completed on an annual basis.

21 Q. And where would I find like, who is designated to come down
22 to the vessel or however to conduct a performance review of his
23 capabilities as a master of the vessel?

24 A. I'm sorry, can you repeat the question?

25 Q. Yeah, the Marine side. Like, however evaluates his

1 performance of duties. Where would I find that evaluation and who
2 would conduct it?

3 A. That would be found in the annual evaluation. I generally --
4 the general managers would conduct the evaluation, again, with the
5 feedback from the National Marine team.

6 Q. And any other full-time captains, who evaluates them?

7 A. CPT Ryan.

8 Q. If the accident voyage captain had received letters of
9 commendation or any other documentation, would I find that in his
10 personnel file?

11 A. I'm not sure.

12 Q. Mr. Perry (ph.), who will be a witness at the conclusion of
13 the hearing, is a senior deckhand. Is that a designation?

14 A. That is an internal term that we use, is a senior deckhand,
15 based on their tenure and their ability and what they've learned.

16 Q. Would that be documented in his personnel record?

17 A. I'm not sure.

18 Q. To become a senior deckhand -- well, let's back up a minute.
19 To become a deckhand, at some point there is a training program
20 that a deckhand has to complete. Would I be correct in saying
21 that?

22 A. Yes.

23 Q. To become a senior deckhand and be designated, is there a
24 training program that those individuals have to complete, and
25 would that be documented?

1 A. To the best of my knowledge, there is a checklist that needs
2 to be met to move into those various different roles.

3 Q. So are you aware of what a safety management system is?

4 A. I am.

5 Q. So can you talk just briefly, very briefly, about what the
6 Marine University is?

7 A. Marine University is an annual meeting that is held by our
8 National Marine team where captains from all the ports gathered
9 together in different subject matters that they discuss, share
10 ideas, key learnings, that type of thing.

11 Q. Would you receive email? Would you receive email that would
12 talk about the Marine University and the contents of the Marine
13 University?

14 A. I would probably receive an agenda, but I have never attended
15 one of those meetings.

16 Q. Do you know, as general manager, if there was a plan to
17 implement the Flagship safety management system in 2019?

18 A. I'm not sure.

19 Q. So as general manager, do you expect Marine personnel to
20 comply with the emergency response plan?

21 A. I do.

22 Q. And are you familiar with the plan?

23 A. I am familiar with it, not well versed.

24 Q. Did you consult the emergency response plan when you were
25 aware of the events that took place around noon on June 7th?

1 A. I knew in an instant like that, I needed to report directly
2 to a vice president, which I did, and she made the initial
3 contacts to the others involved.

4 Q. During your time as a general manager, has anybody audited --
5 other than the Coast Guard -- audited or evaluated the operations
6 onboard the vessels to make sure that they are effective?

7 A. The National Marine team.

8 Q. And who would that be?

9 A. Tim Redman (ph.) is the Regional Director for the Mid-
10 Atlantic, but it could also be from other folks that are visiting
11 the City, the VPs of Marine. It can be any of those folks.

12 Q. Would the results of that kind of audit be given to you and
13 available?

14 A. Yes.

15 Q. And when was the last time an audit was conducted on the
16 operations of the vessel?

17 A. They are -- there are visits. We had Marine directors during
18 drydocks, that type of thing, from the National Team of Boards.
19 So they were at least aware and walking the boats. But as far as
20 date, I'm not sure.

21 Q. Is there an actual plan that you could point me to on how to
22 conduct a, like a company audit of vessel operations to ensure the
23 safety of vessel operations?

24 A. I could not.

25 Q. Do you know if anybody's ever audited the actual emergency

1 response plan? Either did you hire somebody or did the National
2 Marine team conduct an audit to make sure it was effective and
3 that operations are carried out according to the plan?

4 A. I'm not sure.

5 Q. So LT [REDACTED] I'm going to ask you to bring up Coast Guard
6 Exhibit 008 Tag 4, which is the City Cruise's provided
7 organization chart. It's multiple pages and it's been redacted.
8 Is that Tag 4, sir? Go to page three, please. Okay, that's good.
9 Thank you, sir. If you'll look at the top of page three, you see
10 Marine leadership. Could you basically describe the National
11 Marine leadership? And we've redacted names, so it makes it a
12 little difficult. You don't -- you could just describe the
13 positions and not the names.

14 A. Can you repeat the question please?

15 Q. Certainly. So up top, they have the National Marine team.
16 It starts with VP. Could you describe each of those roles and
17 just generally what those people do within the organization?
18 Don't -- you don't have to name names.

19 A. Other -- I don't know that I could give you the details of
20 their particular roles.

21 Q. And then if you drop down in the Mid-Atlantic region, further
22 down, you'll see at the bottom, Captain in Norfolk. Would that
23 be correct?

24 A. Yes.

25 Q. And that blue line is indicated on there, it's been described

1 as a dotted line relationship. What does that mean, you know, as
2 the general manager and how people interact within the company?

3 A. We don't operate in silos, so a dotted line is it's a team
4 effort. It's decisions are made as a group on the details of
5 what's going on on a vessel.

6 Q. So we ask for an organizational chart of the crews and in
7 more detail as part of this investigation. And if we'll go to
8 page six. And it's heavily redacted, Lieutenant. If you'll --
9 when you zoom in you'll see it appears to me like under the
10 restaurant staff that the deckhand -- well, we'll zoom in for you
11 ma'am. We'll -- we're going to get there. Yeah, page six, left
12 column. Okay, that's not it. Go to the next page, sir. Next
13 page. It's the one with the long -- and it's hard to see. But on
14 -- let me rephrase the question, ma'am. We had Mr. Bryan Bracey
15 as a deckhand under -- on this prepared organization chart, as
16 working in the restaurant staff. Would that be correct?

17 A. No, sir.

18 Q. So he is part of the Marine crew, correct?

19 A. He is.

20 Q. Nowhere on any of these documents that I see is a reporting
21 relationship to the President of the company. So if, for example
22 -- let me back up a minute. If there was a safety issue, who
23 would you reach for directly if you couldn't resolve a safety
24 issue, within the company organization?

25 A. National Marine team.

1 Q. Specifically who?

2 A. I would probably go directly -- either one of two choices.
3 I'd start with the Regional Director for the Mid-Atlantic, or I
4 would go directly to the VP of Marine Operations.

5 Q. There is a position, and Lieutenant, if you could go to page
6 three of the same document. Go to two. Okay, thank you. If
7 you'll scroll into the middle bottom, blue box, it says Regulatory
8 Safety And Security over to the right there. I'll give you a
9 minute, ma'am. Take your time. Why wouldn't you go to that
10 person?

11 A. I go to who I would find support where I normally go. So
12 again, I would start with the Regional Director of Marine
13 Operations for Mid-Atlantic.

14 Q. Is there a document like in a -- that safety management
15 system requires clear lines of authority so that you can
16 understand directly who to go to for different events.

17 MR. DENLEY: Commander, I'm going to object based on
18 relevance.

19 BY MR. [REDACTED]

20 Q. Sir, if you'll look down below that, Risk Management and
21 Safety, it lists safety management system. Now, are there vessels
22 within the fleet that have a safety management system?

23 A. Other vessels in the fleet, I can't speak to.

24 Q. Okay, so to your knowledge there is no safety management
25 system that governed the *Spirit of Norfolk*, correct?

1 A. I'm unsure.

2 Q. Well, would there be a -- what would guide your decisions on
3 who to contact within the organization? In other words, you
4 didn't mention the safety individual whose name is redacted there,
5 who handles incident oversight, safety, regulation and security.
6 You mentioned the Vice President, Atlantic, I believe, and some
7 other individual -- the Vice President who's located in Chicago.
8 Is that correct?

9 A. He's out of our headquarters office, yes.

10 Q. But so, could you provide a document that shows who you turn
11 to when you have a safety issue to resolve within the company?

12 A. In our emergency response plan, when there's an incident,
13 there is a chain of who should be contacted. My initial contact
14 is directly to my supervisor or the COO, depending on what the
15 situation is, or I'd go directly to the Vice President of Marine,
16 depending on the incident.

17 Q. So in examining the information provided, you mentioned COO.
18 There are two COOs.

19 A. Correct.

20 Q. Which COO would you turn to?

21 A. Either.

22 Q. Okay. So one COO does what?

23 A. It is a shared position, so both are involved in the overall
24 aspects of the business.

25 Q. So one COO does what? I mean, what's their -- what do they

1 oversee as Chief Operating Officer?

2 A. The entire operation, would be the best answer I'd have for
3 you.

4 Q. And the -- would I be wrong in saying that the other COO
5 might be more concerned with like, Marine operations?

6 A. I couldn't answer that question.

7 Q. If you could -- if you had a safety issue that you couldn't
8 get resolve, and those individuals could not address the problem,
9 do you have a direct path to the President of the company so that
10 you could voice your concerns to the President of the company?

11 A. No.

12 Q. You can take that down, sir. Is there a 24/7 phone number or
13 contact information for someone that would be a safety person that
14 you could contact or if your captains could contact?

15 A. We have cell numbers of all of the folks we've been speaking
16 of.

17 Q. But if I went on the wheelhouse of the vessel, or as part of
18 the training and familiarization. Let's take CPT Brown. CPT
19 Brown was a new captain who first real underway, it was the fire
20 day. If you were going to train him, provide him information,
21 where would he find like the phone number or emergency contact
22 number of a safety person within the company?

23 A. I don't do that training, sir, so I couldn't answer that
24 question.

25 Q. And do you have a number such as that, as the general

1 manager, like that emergency contact number for safety purposes?

2 MR. DENLEY: Objection. She's asked -- it's been asked and
3 answered. It's also not relevant.

4 BY MR. [REDACTED]

5 Q. It's relevant in that, did Captain -- did the Captain on the
6 accident voyage make a contact to a safety person ashore?

7 A. I'm not sure.

8 Q. But he did call you.

9 A. He did not call me.

10 Q. No, I'm not saying during the fire. At some point, did he
11 call you during the day and report what happened onboard the
12 *Spirit of Norfolk*?

13 A. CPT Nadeau?

14 Q. Correct.

15 A. I saw him on Pier 4.

16 Q. Okay. While I'm at it, the First Mate or someone aboard is
17 generally required, as I understand it, to call somebody and
18 report accountability, number of passengers, number of crew.
19 Could you elaborate on that a little bit?

20 A. I don't know the details other than what you just stated.

21 Q. So the Chief mate has said that he calls and reports the
22 number. He puts together the number of people aboard the vessel
23 and reports it ashore. You're not aware of that procedure?

24 A. I am aware of that procedure.

25 Q. Okay, could you talk about it a little bit?

1 A. That's what I said. I don't know the details of all of that.
2 A line is called, a number is called, a landline is called and
3 that number is given.

4 Q. But you don't know who, to whom?

5 A. It's left -- the voicemail is left of that number.

6 Q. And is there a procedure that stipulates the contents of that
7 procedure? In other words, there was for some time after the
8 accident, the number of children reported aboard the vessel was
9 89, approximately. It was only until I contacted the schools and
10 asked for a head count of adults and children that there were --
11 we found out there were 36.

12 MR. DENLEY: I'm going to object. I don't believe that was
13 the testimony that CPT Nadeau testified to.

14 MR. [REDACTED] No, I'm speaking to --

15 MR. DENLEY: If you'd like to ask her questions as -- that's
16 great. But I'm, I just you know, I object. I'm not sure that's
17 actually what the testimony was. Thank you.

18 CDR WADDINGTON: Objection noted for the record. Carry on,
19 Mr. [REDACTED]

20 BY MR. [REDACTED]

21 Q. How did you report? Where did you get the information there
22 were a much larger number of children aboard versus the actual
23 number of children, which was 36?

24 A. Our business is not run to know the breakdowns of the large
25 groups that are aboard our vessel.

1 Q. And you don't know where to retrieve or -- I'm going to
2 rephrase that. Do you know where to retrieve the telephone
3 information that's called ashore with the accurate passenger count
4 for a particular cruise in an emergency?

5 A. No, that is managed by the Marine department.

6 Q. And would you know who at the Marine department would have
7 access to that?

8 A. I believe it's the captains.

9 Q. But outside, outside Norfolk's office, do you know anybody
10 that would have access to an accurate passenger count on that
11 audio recording when the First Mate calls ashore?

12 A. I'm not sure.

13 Q. As General Manager, did you attend any meetings or
14 participate in any discussions with anybody about plans to develop
15 or implement a safety management system?

16 A. I'm not sure.

17 Q. So CPT Brown was aboard the vessel on the accident day. I
18 will describe him as a new captain. Had he been hired?

19 A. He had.

20 Q. He was on the vessel for a familiarity ride, as described, to
21 you know, get an overview of the operations. Later, where would
22 you point him to find the standard operating procedures for the
23 vessel? Is it a document or a computer program, or what is it?

24 A. That would be handled by the Director of Marine Operations.

25 Q. So you do appraise -- you are -- are you involved with an

1 appraisal of the performance of the Director of Marine Operations?

2 A. As stated earlier, yes.

3 Q. So as Director of Marine Operations, how would you appraise
4 whether or not he was properly evaluating drills being conducted
5 and standard operating procedures were being followed, if there
6 were any standard operating procedures? For example, I'll give
7 you an example. We looked at the logs. The logs for the vessel
8 did not discuss the overheating incident that took place on May
9 15th, the fact that there was a tug escort. If you're going to
10 evaluate the Director of Marine Operations, where would you turn
11 to see if he was conducting that correctly?

12 MR. DENLEY: I'm going to object based on relevance. I don't
13 believe there is a requirement that anybody log whether there's a
14 tug escort or not.

15 CDR WADDINGTON: Objection noted for the record. Continue,
16 Mr. [REDACTED]

17 BY MR. [REDACTED]

18 Q. Well other -- other events like the operation of the vessel.
19 Where would you turn?

20 MR. DENLEY: Objection. It calls for speculation.

21 CDR WADDINGTON: Objection noted. Continue, Mr. [REDACTED]

22 BY MR. [REDACTED]

23 Q. Okay, thank you. So we did ask for a station bill, which is
24 a -- usually it's a spreadsheet type document that lists jobs on a
25 vessel, captain, first mate, senior deckhand, deckhand. It -- I'm

1 speculating on what might be on there -- and then what they do in
2 all of the emergencies. Do you have any idea during your time as
3 General Manager, if you've been involved with the creation of a
4 document like that aboard -- for the *Spirit of Norfolk*?

5 A. I have not.

6 Q. Have you ever seen a copy of it?

7 A. They're posted on the vessels, at various locations on the
8 vessels.

9 Q. In your discussions with the Director of Marine Operations,
10 have you ever discussed actually taking a look at those and see if
11 they're sufficient?

12 A. No.

13 Q. So how would you evaluate if the Director of Marine Operation
14 is following procedures for the company?

15 A. Again, those are discussions that are had within the National
16 Marine team who, as I noted earlier, I am not a subject matter
17 expert when it comes to the maintenance level, the maintenance
18 elements of the crews itself. So those discussions would be had
19 with National Marine.

20 Q. So in looking at some of the evidence provided. They talk
21 about, like if there's an incident aboard the vessel, what happens
22 next? Let's say, May 15th, there's a propulsion casualty and the
23 vessel returns to the dock on a single engine. Would that be --
24 who handles the incident investigation for something like that?

25 A. Those -- I'm made aware of it, obviously. But those

1 discussions would be had with, again, the National Marine team,
2 that CPT Nadeau would have with them.

3 Q. So you don't participate in incident investigations for the
4 *Spirit of Norfolk*?

5 A. I may be there for the discussion, but that is -- I don't
6 understand that aspect. So I'm hearing the conversations but I'm
7 not adding to the conversation.

8 Q. So would it be the Director of Marine Operations'
9 responsibility to conduct investigations?

10 A. I'm not sure.

11 Q. Did the Director of Marine Operations discuss the May 15th
12 event with you?

13 A. He did.

14 Q. And later, there was mechanical work conducted onboard the
15 vessel, to put the vessel back in service. Did he discuss that
16 with you?

17 A. Yes.

18 Q. Did he ever discuss with you the recommendation to replace
19 the inboard turbo charger or any turbo charger?

20 A. I knew there were issues, initial issues with the water pump
21 and then that progressed and we needed a full rebuild. As to the
22 details of that, I don't know.

23 Q. So let's take 2022. Were there any -- was there any
24 mechanical work that was done on the vessel where you didn't have
25 the budget or funds to carry it out?

1 A. No.

2 Q. So, Coast Guard Exhibit, Lieutenant, please pull up Coast
3 Guard Exhibit 086 Tag One (ph.). These are emails back and, you
4 know, we garnered this from emails back and forth between CPT
5 Nadeau and General Manager. And if we could shift to page 51,
6 they discuss the duties of the Port Safety Officer for Norfolk.
7 We asked the Captain if he was a Port Safety Officer. He said he
8 was. Was he?

9 A. He was the designated safety officer for the Norfolk port.

10 Q. Lieutenant, if you could scroll so i could see the upper
11 portion of that. This is a -- keep going up, sir. This is an
12 agenda of a safe cruise meeting. And you'll note at the top, this
13 is why I need some clarification. It basically says, PSOs. I
14 would assume those are Port Safety Officer. They've been
15 identified for Newport, Northern California, and Alexandria. I
16 didn't see Norfolk there and that's why I asked the question.

17 A. I'm not sure why that's omitted.

18 Q. Do you know if the Captain was designated, in writing, as the
19 Port Safety Officer?

20 A. I believe so.

21 Q. And would that be in his personnel file?

22 A. I don't think so.

23 Q. Where would I find that?

24 A. It could probably be found in minutes from some of these
25 other safety meetings.

1 Q. And for the benefit of the public, if -- this is from May
2 2022, the month preceding the accident. So I just wanted to
3 describe it correctly, that's all. It's at the top of the page.

4 A. So these are meeting notes from a meeting held on May 19th.

5 Q. Correct.

6 A. Then the PSOs identified were probably those that were in
7 attendance for this meeting, and based on this I would assume that
8 Ryan wasn't present for this meeting.

9 Q. Did the Captain on the accident voyage, the Director of
10 Marine Operations, have a conversation with you about his plans to
11 replace the turbo charger?

12 A. No, sir.

13 Q. Lieutenant, if you'll call up Coast Guard Exhibit 034. This
14 is a listing of the cruises. And you don't have to -- you can
15 take a look at it for a minute. But there's a few days in late
16 May and early June that the vessel didn't operate. Would that be
17 correct, if you looked at that? Mr. Denley's going to open that
18 up for you and give you a moment.

19 MR. DENLEY: Yeah, we just need a minute to --

20 MR. [REDACTED] Sure.

21 MR. DENLEY: -- work with the binders.

22 MR. [REDACTED] Yep.

23 MS. PRICE-THOMPSON: What was your question?

24 BY MR. [REDACTED]

25 Q. Yeah, were there some days towards the end of May where the

1 vessel did not operate in early June. For example, June 7th, the
2 vessel had a survey. Looking at that list, do you see that the
3 vessel had a cruise or didn't have a cruise?

4 A. It appears it did not.

5 Q. And how about May 30th?

6 A. It did not.

7 Q. So knowing this, would the Captain have -- as the General
8 Manager, would it be required for the Captain to report like
9 maintenance of the vessel, like replacement of the turbo charger
10 in his plans and intentions?

11 A. To me?

12 Q. To you.

13 A. Not necessarily.

14 Q. So if you'll look at that same exhibit for a minute. And
15 Lieutenant, looking at the timeframe, May 29th. There was a large
16 capacity cruise, I'll call it, with 312 people aboard, that left
17 the dock at 11:30 at night. From your perspective if, as General
18 Manager. Do you put additional measures in place when you have a,
19 you know, that large a number of passengers aboard, other than
20 increased number of wait staff?

21 A. And security on those late-night cruises.

22 Q. So I asked you a question a moment ago about the aspect of
23 replacing that turbo. Do you know if he has to get permission
24 from anyone to do that?

25 MR. DENLEY: Objection. Asked and answered. She's already

1 indicated that she's not involved with that process.

2 CDR WADDINGTON: Objection noted. Continue, Mr. [REDACTED]

3 MR. [REDACTED] Thank you.

4 BY MR. [REDACTED]

5 Q. I'm going to shift -- I'm going to shift to the events of
6 June 7th. And what I'd like you to do is, you know, think about
7 that day and look at from your, you know. Take a moment and then
8 tell us what you were doing and walk us through the events of that
9 day. Tell us as complete a story as possible from the time just
10 before the event through the time you completed doing whatever
11 you're going to do that day. So whenever you're ready, I mean,
12 just gather yourself and tell that story.

13 A. I was in the office on that day. The food and beverage
14 director came to me and said he'd received a message from the sous
15 chef who was aboard that cruise and that they believe there was a
16 fire in the engine room and they were moving the guests to the
17 third deck. Right after that he also sent the food and beverage
18 director -- the sous chef also sent the food and beverage director
19 a picture that showed a -- a flame coming from the side of the
20 vessel. So the food and beverage director and I left the office.
21 And in that conversation he told them they were right off the
22 Naval base. That's all we knew. We left the office and headed
23 toward -- toward the base. Soon after, we were headed down
24 Hampton Boulevard. I received a text message from one of the
25 managers of Rover Marine, and it was just a text that said, "We

1 have 106 passengers and crew on the Victory Rover and we're headed
2 to town (ph.), Point Park (ph.). Again, we're -- don't know
3 exactly where we're going. We don't know where the vessel is
4 going. But shortly after that, I was notified by a mariner on the
5 water who told me that, again, that the passengers were off the
6 vessel and that they were taking the boat to the Naval base. So
7 we continued to the Naval base. The food and beverage director is
8 retired Air Force, so we didn't have any issues getting into the
9 base. We still didn't know exactly where the boat was going, so
10 we headed toward the piers until we saw the boat. And then we
11 headed to Pier 4, and when we got to Pier Four the boat was not
12 yet secured to the dock. Excuse me. A lot going on on the pier.
13 I believe there were some firetrucks already on the pier. I know
14 there were -- as I'm walking down I can remember firetrucks
15 passing me on the pier. My goal was to, at that point, was to do
16 what I could to help but to, you know, I knew I still had the
17 captains on the vessel and that was -- my goal was to find CPT
18 Ryan at that point in time, which I did pretty quickly. You're
19 wanting me just to continue through the rest of the day?

20 Q. Please.

21 A. When I caught up with Ryan, we did not have a whole lot of
22 time for him to give me really any information on what went down
23 because he was quickly approached by Coast Guard, I'm assuming,
24 investigators who were pulling him away for the details, which is
25 understandable. I did see C.J. (ph.) as well, CPT Brown. There

1 was a lot going on at that point. It was pretty chaotic, pretty
2 crazy. One -- can I have just a second?

3 Q. Certainly.

4 A. So we were just kind of watching what was going on. There
5 was still some smoke coming from the vessel. At one point, I
6 don't know, maybe, I don't know, maybe an hour after we'd been
7 there, I was approached by firefighters. I could not tell you who
8 they were with, whether it was Navy firefighters was -- or Norfolk
9 Fire Department. And I was asked if there was a back entrance to
10 the engine room. And my response was no, there's not a back
11 entrance but there is a hatch on first deck stern that leads to
12 the engine room. But I told them, I said let me grab Ryan for
13 you. He can you know, give you more of the details, which I did,
14 because he was -- Ryan was maybe 20 feet down from me on the pier,
15 again with a Coast Guard personnel. Ryan came up and the
16 firefighters were talking about the hatch and that they thought it
17 might be compromised, and something was said about a hinge?
18 Hinges? And Ryan was quick to say, again, he told them, you know,
19 it's in the back door, first deck stern maybe 20 feet port side.
20 It's directly under this last window on the starboard side. And
21 then they made the comment about the hinges and Ryan was like,
22 wait a minute, that's not the way that works. And he demonstrated
23 for them, you know, you lift up and you turn to get the hatch
24 opened. And these firefighters asked if he would show them on
25 their schematic, their plan of the vessel where that hatch would

1 be. So Ryan went with them, I don't know, maybe 15 to 20 feet to
2 my left. And I saw him pointing to the schematic and then I saw
3 him again physically like doing the motions of how to open that
4 hatch. Again, I knew some firefighters had already been on the
5 vessel. Again, it was -- there was a lot of movement on that
6 pier, a lot of -- it was kind of hard to tell what was going on.
7 And then shortly after that conversation, maybe I don't know, an
8 hour or so after that conversation there were alarms going off on
9 the pier. Firefighters were scrambling. You could feel the
10 tension on the pier, so you knew something had happened. They
11 knew there was an issue onboard the vessel. Quickly heard after
12 that that there were some firefighters in distress, was what we
13 were told. I didn't know the details of that. That's the point
14 to when I had heard also that the engine room door had been
15 opened. Then that led, from my understanding, I don't -- then it
16 was just, again, it was just kind of chaotic. I think all
17 firefighters were pulled off of the vessel at that time. And then
18 it was just still chaotic but less movement on the pier at that
19 point, if that makes any sense.

20 Q. And then what happened?

21 A. Again, the fire started to spread. We were contacted at some
22 point that there was -- I was told there was going to be press
23 conference at 6:00, so I had to kind of ready myself for that.
24 And we'd also been told that there would be a meeting, and we
25 called it a unified command meeting at 8:00 that evening, which I

1 attended. And the vessel just continued to burn.

2 Q. And then what happened with regards to you? What did you do
3 on that day?

4 A. Stood and watched.

5 Q. I mean, what time did you leave?

6 A. I didn't leave until about 4:00 the next morning.

7 Q. So I want to go back and make sure. There was a press
8 conference, you mentioned. Approximately what time was that?

9 A. 6:00.

10 Q. And did you participate?

11 A. I did.

12 Q. So it sounds to me like in general, based on what you just
13 said, you were receiving phone calls from galley, you know, people
14 onboard the vessel, another vessel on the water and so forth. Is
15 there a procedure that requires you to make notification in an
16 emergency to the company? And by the company I mean any -- anyone
17 within the company organization?

18 A. There was, and I did leave that piece out. As we were
19 heading to the base, soon as I got in the car and we were headed
20 that direction, I called my direct supervisor, which is a regional
21 vice president, and told her the situation. And she at that point
22 stated that she would make the necessary phone calls to the COOs
23 and National Marine to ensure that everyone was in the loop. And
24 from there, I know arrangements were made. We had National Marine
25 folks on the pier that arrived probably 5:00 that afternoon. Our

1 VP of National Marine got a flight out that day. He hit the pier
2 at about 10:00 that night. And our senior VP of marine operations
3 for Hornblower Group made travel arrangements, and he arrived on
4 the pier the next morning.

5 Q. So speaking again to the notification, and you don't have to
6 have an exact number. But either Hornblower, City Cruises or any
7 of those entities. Approximately how many vessels do they operate
8 globally?

9 A. Globally? I'm not sure.

10 Q. Are you aware of -- does the company -- and I -- by that I
11 mean the company itself. Do they have an incident response team
12 that is reachable 24/7 so that you can report emergencies such as
13 what occurred on the *Spirit of Norfolk*?

14 A. Globally? I don't know.

15 Q. No, I mean anywhere, so that you could pick up the phone or
16 communicate and say, I have an emergency, and you get that
17 support.

18 A. As I mentioned earlier, we have a -- cellphone numbers of
19 everyone involved at all leadership levels, so I could reach
20 someone at any point.

21 Q. And was that -- at this time, do you have any idea if that is
22 -- the notifications you made were what were required in the
23 emergency response plan?

24 A. I know my initial contact would have been to my supervisor,
25 and that's what I did.

1 Q. And when did you get the first call, inbound call, from
2 company management? Approximate is fine.

3 A. In less than an hour.

4 Q. So you arrive at the pier. Who would you say, when you
5 arrived at the pier, was the senior most City Cruises person that
6 was on the pier in the initial phase of the response?

7 A. Early in the day it was me.

8 Q. Did you ask who was in charge of the response efforts, either
9 at the command post? Or as the situation evolved did you go up
10 and identify yourself and say, who's in charge here?

11 A. Sir, from my viewpoint it was hard to even tell who to
12 communicate with.

13 Q. Did you request to be involved with the discussions that took
14 place on the pier?

15 A. I did not.

16 Q. And before I continue. You mentioned the emergency escape
17 hatch on the main deck aft in the *Spirit of Norfolk*. Have you
18 seen it?

19 A. Yes, sir.

20 Q. Have you seen it often?

21 A. Yes, sir.

22 Q. So if I was standing with you 10 feet from that emergency
23 escape hatch, or 15 feet from that escape hatch, could I look over
24 there and identify the actual hatch in the carpeted deck of the
25 vessel?

1 A. From that distance you would notice that there was something
2 different in the carpet, because it was not smooth like the rest
3 of the deck.

4 Q. So to help me --

5 A. The carpet is cut out over that hatch and it's -- it's not
6 flush to the carpet. There's probably, I don't know, at least a
7 half-an-inch gap around that circle where it meets the carpet
8 that's laid on the floor.

9 Q. And there's no -- is there any like striping around it like
10 black and yellow tape or red tape so that I could be able to, you
11 know, differentiate it from the carpet other than that slight
12 recess over the hatch?

13 A. On the carpet, no. There is a plaque on the wall.

14 Q. And the plaque, if we were -- if we entered the vessel,
15 walked forward, turned to the starboard or the right and I was
16 standing sort of in the middle of the vessel and I looked at that.
17 Would the plaque be like directly behind it or would it be on the
18 wall or what we call the bulkhead to the right?

19 A. It is not on the starboard wall. It's on a -- the wall
20 perpendicular to that.

21 Q. Okay, sir.

22 CDR WADDINGTON: The time is 9:07. I think a 10-minute break
23 is in order. We will reconvene at 9:20. Thank you.

24 (Off the record)

25 (On the record)

1 CDR WADDINGTON: The time is 9:20. This hearing is in
2 session. Mr. [REDACTED] please continue.

3 MR. [REDACTED] Thank you, Commander.

4 BY MR. [REDACTED]

5 Q. Welcome back. The -- and I only have a few questions. The
6 replacement vessel, the *Spirit of Norfolk*. Is it of similar
7 design, construction and age as the *Spirit of Norfolk*?

8 A. She is a sister ship to the *Spirit of Norfolk*, so she is very
9 similar. She's a few years older.

10 Q. Do you know why the *Spirit of Mt. Vernon* was fitted with a
11 fire suppression system or a fire detection system and the *Spirit*
12 *of Norfolk* was not?

13 A. Those decisions were made at the National Marine level, so I
14 can't answer that question.

15 Q. Were you part of those decisions or discussions?

16 A. I was aware that we were getting one, but as far as the
17 decisions being made, no.

18 Q. And did the budget you have for the vessel, did it come out
19 of your normal operating budget to fit those systems, either one
20 of the other?

21 MR. DENLEY: Objection -- relevance.

22 MR. [REDACTED] The --

23 MR. DENLEY: This has nothing to do with Coast Guard
24 regulations or the incident on June the 7th. We're not even
25 talking about the same vessel.

1 CDR WADDINGTON: Objection noted.

2 BY MR [REDACTED]

3 Q. Is there anything, to your knowledge, that would have
4 prevented the *Spirit of Norfolk* from being fitted with a fire
5 suppression or a fire detection system?

6 A. Again, those decisions are not made by me, so I can't answer
7 that question.

8 Q. So we, not only the Coast Guard but the NTSB, conduct these
9 investigations to prevent similar tragedies. I would like to
10 offer you, before I turn it over to my colleague, the opportunity
11 to share any suggestions or thoughts, based on your knowledge of
12 the situation, and what occurred on June 7th, 2022 on the *Spirit*
13 *of Norfolk*, to improve and enhance the safety of operations of
14 small passenger vessels.

15 A. I don't have anything to add at this time.

16 Q. Thank you. Commander.

17 CDR WADDINGTON: LCDR [REDACTED] do you have any questions of
18 this witness?

19 LCDR [REDACTED] Yes, Commander. Just a few.

20 CDR WADDINGTON: Thank you.

21 BY LCDR [REDACTED]

22 Q. I just want to clarify, for the record. As you had mentioned
23 prior to the break, you attended a press conference on June 7th
24 with other leadership of the Navy, Coast Guard and fire
25 departments. During that press conference you stated that during

1 the voyage you were servicing a group of school children, of 89
2 school children. I just want to clarify, where did you get that
3 number from that you reported to the press?

4 A. That was a total passenger numbers that we had on the cruise
5 that day.

6 Q. Did COVID affect that *Spirit of Norfolk* or City Cruises in
7 Norfolk in terms of operations, maintenance or funding?

8 A. I'm sorry?

9 Q. Did COVID affect any of your operations as far as the *Spirit*
10 *of Norfolk's* maintenance, operations or funding?

11 A. Due to COVID we were shut down for an extended period of
12 time, but we still had a Marine team and personnel who were
13 maintaining the vessels.

14 Q. And we know that you directly reported to Pier 4, and CPT
15 Nadeau was already on Pier 4. Did City Cruises send anyone to
16 tell Point Park to attend to the passengers or check on the
17 passengers when they disembarked the Victory Rover?

18 A. Yes, I requested that our Director of Sales, and I believe it
19 was our Administrative Director, to meet the vessel.

20 Q. And is meeting with the passengers, is that part of your
21 emergency response plan as well?

22 A. That, I'm not sure.

23 Q. That's all my questions.

24 CDR WADDINGTON: Thank you. NTSB, do you have any questions
25 of this witness?

1 MR. KARR: Yes I do, thank you.

2 BY MR. KARR:

3 Q. Mike Karr with the NTSB. We were talking about the night
4 cruises, and you mentioned that you have extra security --

5 A. Yes, sir.

6 Q. -- on night cruises. Can you describe who those, you know.
7 Can you describe the type of qualifications of those people that
8 we (ph.) have onboard?

9 A. The qualifications, I don't recall. But it is --

10 Q. Are they retired police officers?

11 A. It's a -- we do have a contract with a security firm.

12 Q. And do they report -- when they're onboard the *Spirit of*
13 *Norfolk* doing their security duties, do they report to the captain
14 of the ship, or do they report to --

15 A. To the captain of the ship.

16 Q. All right. Would you happen to know how many security forces
17 were onboard the boat the night of May 29th, that we were talking
18 about earlier?

19 A. I -- I do not know.

20 Q. Can you estimate how many people might have been -- how many
21 you might have had? You know, if you've got 400 passengers
22 onboard, how many extra security you might have had for night
23 voyage?

24 A. I'm not sure.

25 Q. All right. Earlier you were discussing being with CPT Nadoe

1 (ph.)?

2 A. Nadeau.

3 Q. Nadeau, thank you.

4 A. Nadeau.

5 Q. Nadeau on the pier, talking with the firefighters about the
6 hatch. Where did that discussion take place? Can you, you know,
7 was it by the command post? You know, give me some sort of
8 physical relationship to the ship or the command post.

9 A. If the command post is where they took Ryan back to where
10 they had the schematic, that was kind of in the middle of the
11 pier, probably. I mean, the boat was directly in front of us. We
12 were near the stern of the *Spirit*. We were across the pier from
13 that, and the command post was maybe 15 feet in front of me. I'm
14 not sure that answers your question.

15 Q. Were you looking at the back? We have an exhibit where
16 there's an SUV that's got a command post sign.

17 A. Mm-hm.

18 Q. Was that the command post?

19 A. I would assume.

20 Q. Yeah.

21 A. I'm not sure.

22 Q. So that's what you were talking about.

23 A. Yes, sir.

24 Q. All right, thank you. And besides CPT Nadeau, who else was
25 present with you that you remember that you recognize, you know,

1 that wasn't a Norfolk or Navy firefighter?

2 A. Our F&B Director was with us for a short period of time.

3 Primarily I was there with Ryan.

4 Q. Pardon me? What was the last one?

5 A. Primarily I was there with CPT Nadeau.

6 Q. Nadeau. Specifically, was Mr. Burket there with you?

7 A. I saw Mr. Burket but not until later in the day. I know Ryan
8 had been talking with Mr. Burket.

9 Q. And much earlier in the testimony, we were talking about the
10 chain of command. And we talked about safety management systems.
11 So I know you don't have a safety management system, you have
12 procedures. In a safety management system there's things called
13 nonconformities which you know, if someone who's responsible for
14 something can't handle it, they push it up the chain. So if you
15 could -- they discuss it with their superiors. So what I'd like
16 to learn is tell me, you know, how often did you and CPT Nadeau,
17 the Director of Marine Operations, meet to discuss what was going
18 on and on the ship. If -- I'll leave that question right there
19 and then I'll come up with -- I'll have a second one.

20 A. Are you asking?

21 Q. So he's your --

22 MR. DENLEY: Could you repeat the question?

23 BY MR. KARR:

24 Q. Ryan -- CPT Nadoe (ph.) --

25 A. Nadeau.

1 Q. -- thank you -- is the Director of Marine Operations who in
2 the chain, in a chain of command or the corporate structure, you
3 know, you're his supervisor there in Norfolk. So how often did
4 you regularly meet with him? You know, would you meet daily? You
5 know, describe the interactions you would have with him to talk
6 about the Marine operations.

7 A. Regularly? I mean, it's a small organization. It's a small
8 group of folks, so you would see him regularly. We would have
9 standing weekly meetings.

10 Q. All right. Now, did you as a general manager give him any
11 specific instructions on what he should be keeping you informed
12 about?

13 A. No.

14 Q. You know, specifically if -- let's call them the uglies. If
15 something bad happened, you know, if something that does not go
16 according to the way CPT Nadeau thinks it should or you should or
17 the corporate thinks it should, how you know -- have you ever
18 instructed him on the things he should keep you informed about?

19 A. It's pretty open conversation. I trust Ryan completely.
20 He's -- doesn't keep secrets. We're pretty much in the know on
21 anything that's going on.

22 Q. All right, thank you.

23 CDR WADDINGTON: Bay Diesel, do you have any questions for
24 this witness?

25 MR. ABEL: I do not, Commander.

1 CDR WADDINGTON: City Cruises?

2 MR. DENLEY: I do. Thank you, Commander.

3 BY MR. DENLEY:

4 Q. Good morning. I do have some questions for you. The -- I'd
5 like to go back to the date of the incident on June the 7th. And
6 could you maybe just describe the scene like when you arrived
7 there? What did you see? Who was there?

8 A. While we were initially walking up, I believe there was
9 already a firetruck on the pier. I know -- I can remember walking
10 down the pier and there were trucks that were coming by me because
11 I was having to get out of -- of the way of these trucks. And
12 then it was just, there was a lot of movement, a lot of chaos.
13 Again, when I first initially got there, the boat wasn't tied up.
14 But it was just, I don't know, it was like a lot of moving parts
15 in all different directions.

16 Q. And you described, I guess during that initial time. I mean,
17 you described them having -- CPT Ryan having some conversations
18 with fire -- representatives from the fire departments?

19 A. Mm-hm.

20 Q. Do you know? Do you know which fire departments were there?

21 A. I know there were Navy Fire Department. I know Norfolk Fire
22 Department was there, and Chesapeake Fire came because they had
23 the -- the foam that they use (ph.) on the ship.

24 Q. And do you know which fire departments you and CPT Nadeau
25 spoke to?

1 A. When I was first approached, I don't know. There were at
2 least two or three of them when they came to us.

3 Q. And you described an interaction that you and then CPT Nadeau
4 had with, you know, at least one representative from one fire
5 department about the escape hatch. Do you recall any other times
6 when CPT Ryan was discussing or having conversations with
7 representatives from the fire departments?

8 A. That I witnessed? I mean, there were -- well, there was that
9 discussion where again, he was talking about the hatch. He was
10 talking about the window and the hatch was directly below the
11 window. He was talking to fire folks periodically.

12 Q. Kind of throughout the afternoon?

13 A. Yes.

14 Q. You talked about a press conference?

15 A. Yes.

16 Q. Who called that press conference and --

17 A. I was notified by the Navy. And attending the press
18 conference was myself, CPT Stockwell (ph.), the Coast Guard, CPT
19 Deiz (ph.) who's is over (ph.) the Naval base. There was a fire
20 chief from the Navy. And I believe there was a representative for
21 Norfolk Fire Department.

22 Q. And you recall about what time that was?

23 A. That was at 6:00.

24 Q. Yeah, and was this before or after the mayday event that you
25 discussed?

- 1 A. It was after.
- 2 Q. And then you talked about a unified command meeting?
- 3 A. Correct.
- 4 Q. About what time was that?
- 5 A. It's at 8:00.
- 6 Q. Can you talk about that meeting?
- 7 A. Yes. That meeting was held in, I don't know if it was a
8 trailer or it was a bus. There was conference room area,
9 conference room table in the middle of the room, benches along the
10 side, it was packed. The first -- the meeting was actually quite
11 frustrating. The first 15 minutes of the meeting, there was a
12 discussion, a debate between the Captain of the Navy base and
13 Captain of the Coast Guard on who was in charge, who was going to
14 take the lead. And the gentleman from the base was insistent
15 that, you know. He talked about the fact that, you know, this
16 boat was a national security risk and he could take care of this
17 situation and we could be done with it. And then there was the
18 discussion from the Coast Guard that no, this is a civilian
19 vessel. So that debate was going on. And then there was talking
20 about water and who's going to provide water. Who's going to, you
21 know, the port-a-potties. But there was a screen in that room
22 that had a camera focusing on the ship. And the whole time this
23 conversation's going on, there's this bright color light that just
24 kind of surrounds the boat. So while they're debating on who's in
25 charge, my boat continued to burn. And I think that's when the

1 fire hit first deck really, really hard. So it's frustrating.

2 Q. And just to be clear. When you say who's providing water,
3 you don't mean firefighting water, do you?

4 A. No, no, no, no. I'm talking about who's going to keep the
5 bottled water on the pier.

6 Q. Who's bringing bottles of water.

7 A. Yes.

8 Q. The -- so you know, back up. There was the media event, and
9 I think you then described that the fire continued to burn. So
10 what was happening during the press conference with the vessel and
11 the firefighting efforts?

12 A. It didn't seem like there was much going on.

13 Q. And what was happening during your unified command meeting in
14 terms of like firefighting or operations?

15 A. To my knowledge, there was not anything going on.

16 Q. And you said you stayed on the pier until 4:00 in the
17 morning?

18 A. I did.

19 Q. And what happened overnight?

20 A. The boat continued to burn.

21 Q. So did you come back to the pier the next day?

22 A. I did. I got back to the pier, I don't know, 11:30, 12:00
23 the next day.

24 Q. All right. Did you have any conversations with anybody about
25 the incident? Did you ever -- do you know what happened during

1 the mayday incident?

2 A. I had heard, you know, the day before, and I'd stated earlier
3 that, you know, the door to the engine room had been opened.
4 There was an incident. There were -- somebody had -- that there
5 was some firefighters that were in peril. The second day I was
6 on, I saw the fire chief for the Navy. And I had met him at the
7 press conference the night before. And I approached him to just
8 ask if you know, his guys were okay from the day before. And he
9 looked at me and he said, "Are you talking about during the mayday
10 event when someone opened a door they shouldn't have opened?" And
11 my response was well yeah, it's a self-contained area. Why would
12 that door have been opened at all? And the conversation just kind
13 of fizzled at that point.

14 Q. Obviously you've been working for City Cruises here in
15 Norfolk for 22 years. This was a pretty significant event. Do
16 you have any -- the Coast Guard has repeatedly said that, you
17 know, this is for the benefit of the public. Do you have any
18 comments or statements that you'd like to make to the public?

19 A. There are a lot of emotions that are -- that we've all felt
20 that were tied to the events of -- of June the 7th. Intense
21 sadness, anger, frustration, but also gratitude. I'm incredibly
22 proud of the efforts of the City Cruises team on that day and how
23 they performed during that situation. I am grateful to be part of
24 a maritime community here that, you know, they don't hesitate to
25 help. The Rover Marine team, they're just, they're awesome folks.

1 I am -- the support we've received from the community-at-large has
2 just been touching. It's been overwhelming for all of us. And
3 I'm grateful to be part of a company, at City Cruises, who
4 provided us support during all of us -- all of this. They -- they
5 gave us another boat, which is great. And as we mentioned before,
6 it's the *Spirit of Mt. Vernon*. She's very similar to the *Spirit*
7 *of Norfolk*. And we're, you know, City Cruises Norfolk is -- we're
8 cruising, thank goodness. It is '23. We are happy to have '22
9 behind us, but we are excited about this '23 season and cruising
10 with both vessels on the waterfront and we're excited to invite
11 guests back aboard to cruise with us. I'm happy it's 2023.

12 Q. Thank you. No further questions.

13 CDR WADDINGTON: Mr. [REDACTED] do you have any follow-up
14 questions?

15 MR. [REDACTED] Yes sir, Commander. Thanks.

16 BY MR [REDACTED]

17 Q. So at the unified command meeting on June 7th, talk about the
18 support you provided the unified command. Any of the comments you
19 made to help them support their decisions?

20 A. No, sir.

21 Q. So you didn't provide support.

22 A. Oh, we provided -- you talking about waters and that type of
23 thing, the next day? For the (indiscernible)?

24 Q. No, I'm talking about June 7th.

25 A. Yes, sir.

1 Q. What support did you provide while you were there as the
2 senior representative of the company, for their decisions?

3 A. I was the local representative there. I do believe that our
4 Senior VO of Marine Operations was on that call as well.

5 Q. Did you give any support during the night for the
6 firefighting and salvage efforts?

7 A. I did not. One, we weren't asked a whole lot. But we did
8 have two of our National Marine team arrived at the pier around
9 5:00 and I know they were working directly with the salvage team
10 once they arrived.

11 Q. So on that same call you said that Senior Vice President
12 called in?

13 A. Yes, sir.

14 Q. Talk about the support he provided to the unified command on
15 that phone call. Could you hear him?

16 A. I believe he was on the call, but I don't recall the
17 discussions there. There was not a whole lot of opportunity
18 during that meeting to -- for discussions, from my viewpoint.

19 Q. So you had mentioned you were offered an opportunity by your
20 -- Mr. Denley, to make a statement regarding your views of the
21 operations. And there was a mention of the *Mt. Vernon* and so
22 forth. So in your opinion, do you feel that the *Mt. Vernon*, based
23 on what you know, is safer with a fire suppression system and fire
24 detection system and/or both installed?

25 A. I never questioned the safety of the *Spirit of Norfolk*.

1 Q. No, I didn't -- I didn't ask that. I said is the *Spirit of*
2 *Mt. Vernon* safer because it has a fire detection and/or fire
3 suppression system installed?

4 A. There is an added level of safety with that system onboard
5 the vessel, yes.

6 Q. Thank you very much.

7 CDR WADDINGTON: LCDR ████████ do you have any follow-up
8 questions?

9 LCDR ████████ (No audible response.)

10 CDR WADDINGTON: NTSB?

11 BY MR. KARR:

12 Q. Did you, prior to the press conference held on the 7th, did
13 you get together with the other folks that were giving the press
14 conference with you?

15 A. Did we get together?

16 Q. Did you meet ahead of the press conference to discuss the
17 upcoming press conference?

18 A. No, we walked to the area together but there was no
19 discussion.

20 Q. Prior to that press conference there was no preparation, no
21 get together ahead of that --

22 A. No, sir.

23 Q. -- prepare for the press conference?

24 A. No, sir.

25 Q. Who directed you to come over and participate in it?

1 A. It was someone from the Navy.

2 Q. All right, thank you.

3 MR. DENLEY: Commander, I just have a couple more questions
4 please.

5 BY MR. DENLEY:

6 Q. So going back to the unified command meeting, when there was
7 a discussion about kind of who was in charge. Was there ever a --
8 was there a decision made at that 8:00 meeting that you were aware
9 of?

10 A. Not that I can recall.

11 Q. And then Mr. [REDACTED] asked you about, you know, how City
12 Cruises was providing support to the firefighting efforts. You
13 were not the only person on the pier that day. Is that correct?

14 A. No.

15 Q. So, CPT Nadeau was on the pier?

16 A. Yes, Ryan was having conversations.

17 Q. And then at what time did the folks from Washington, D.C.
18 arrive?

19 A. At 5:00 -- maybe between 5:00 and 6:00.

20 Q. And were they part of the unified command meeting?

21 A. They were.

22 Q. Okay. And then you indicated that there was another
23 individual on the phone?

24 A. Yes, our Senior VP.

25 Q. And who was that person?

1 A. Scott Smith (ph.).

2 Q. Okay. And the -- was there a salvage team?

3 A. There was a salvage team. City Cruises had reached out to
4 the salvage team and the environmental group to ensure that there
5 were no issues.

6 Q. So City Cruises provided a salvage team and an environmental
7 response group?

8 A. Yes.

9 Q. And were those folks in place before the unified command
10 call? Do you recall?

11 A. I don't recall.

12 Q. Okay. Thank you. No further questions.

13 CDR WADDINGTON: Mr. [REDACTED] anymore? LCDR [REDACTED] No?
14 Ms. Price-Thompson, you are now released as a witness at this
15 formal hearing. Thank you for your testimony and cooperation. If
16 I later determine that this team needs additional information from
17 you, I will contact you through your counsel. If you have any
18 questions about this investigation, you may contact the
19 Investigation Recorder, LT [REDACTED] [REDACTED] The time is 9:46. We'll
20 take a quick 10-minute recess and reconvene at 9:55, approximately
21 -- or excuse me, at -- yeah, 9:55. Thank you.

22 (Whereupon, at 9:46 a.m., the interview was concluded.)
23
24
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 Jolene Price-Thompson

ACCIDENT NO.: DCA22FM022

PLACE: Virginia Beach, Virginia

DATE: January 30, 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.



Suzanne Ventura
Transcriber