

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD

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Investigation of:

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ENGINE ROOM FIRE ABOARD TOWING

VESSEL *DESPERADO* ON LAKE SALVADOR

NEAR NEW ORLEANS, LOUISIANA ON

FEBRUARY 17, 2023

Accident No.: DCA23FM018

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Interview of: WARREN SOILEAU, Captain  
*Desperado*

On board the *Desperado*  
Louisiana

Wednesday,  
February 22, 2023

APPEARANCES:

LUKE WISNIEWSKI, Investigator  
National Transportation Safety Board

■ ■ ■ ■ Investigator  
United States Coast Guard

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I N T E R V I E W

(11:10 a.m.)

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2  
3     █ █ All right. Good morning. It's is 22 February 2023;  
4 the time on deck is 11:10. Coast Guard and NTSB are here  
5 conducting a 46 CFR Part 4 joint investigation into the fire  
6 aboard the inspected towing vessel *Desperado* which occurred on 17  
7 February 2023.

8     At this time we're just going to go around and state our  
9 names. This is █ t █ -- excuse me -- █  
10 █ █ with U.S. Coast Guard.

11     MR. WISNIEWSKI: Hey, good morning. Luke Wisniewski with the  
12 National Transportation Safety Board.

13     MR. SOILEAU: Good morning. I'm Warren Soileau, Jr.,  
14 owner/operator of the motor vessel *Desperado*.

15     █ █ Okay. And, sir, could you just pass along a good  
16 phone number for you?

17     MR. SOILEAU: █ - █ - █

18     █ █ █. Okay. And I have a good email here for you  
19 as Warren -- █ -- decimal Soileau -- █ --  
20 █ --

21     MR. SOILEAU: Yahoo.com. Perfect.

22     █ █ Yahoo.com. All right. Excellent.

23     We'll go ahead and get started.

24                   INTERVIEW OF WARREN SOILEAU

25     BY █ █

1 Q. Okay. So can you please just tell me your role at the  
2 company and how long you have been here?

3 A. I'm the owner/operator of RIS (ph.) Equity Investments, LLC.

4 Q. Okay. How long have you owned the company?

5 A. I've owned the LLC company, I believe it's 8 or 9 years, but  
6 just purchased the boat in August 2021. I'm sorry, 2022.

7 Q. Okay. Gotcha. And then when did the vessel first sail  
8 operationally?

9 A. I don't know exact date.

10 Q. For you I mean. Okay. Rough estimate?

11 A. About a month and a half ago.

12 Q. Month and a half ago. Okay. Gotcha.

13 And then how many -- I don't know what you guys call them --  
14 contracts or whatever have you worked?

15 A. We was on number eight.

16 Q. Okay.

17 A. Job number eight.

18 Q. Just started job eight. Okay. All right. And what did you  
19 do -- I know we kind of talked about this earlier, but just for  
20 this purpose, what did you do prior to working on this vessel and  
21 owning this company?

22 A. I was in commercial fishing in my younger days with my  
23 grandfather and I had my own shrimp boat at age 16, and I --  
24 through the nineties I had four different shrimp boats and fish  
25 boats. And then I got out of it in 2000 because of the imports

1 and the prices, couldn't make a living anymore. So I went into  
2 the trucking industry and also as a welder and real estate. I had  
3 apartment complexes and rent houses and I built a subdivision and  
4 two RV parks. And at the same time I had a construction company  
5 and also worked on the boats as captain. I did a lot of different  
6 stuff.

7 Q. In terms of the maritime industry, so you said it's a lot of  
8 fishing, shrimping, but what about towing vessels? Can you kind  
9 of walk us through some of the vessels in your career?

10 A. In 2008, I got my 100 ton master's, and in 2010 when the -- I  
11 believe it was 2010, when the oil spill hit, I was hired to run a  
12 towing class vessel, and it was allowed because it was a state of  
13 emergency. They didn't have enough masters with towing. So I  
14 started off on a small boat and then I worked a year with the oil  
15 cleanup, oil spill cleanup. And then after that, I went to school  
16 and got my mate pilot. And then about a year and a half later I  
17 got my master's of towing.

18 Q. Just writing all this down. Gotcha. How many towing vessels  
19 total have you worked on?

20 A. This is 21.

21 Q. What's that?

22 A. I said this makes 21.

23 Q. Oh, this one's 21? Okay.

24 A. Yeah.

25 Q. Wow, 21 towing vessels. Awesome. Excellent.

1 A. Yeah. A lot of trip work.

2 Q. What's that?

3 A. I did a lot trip pilot work --

4 Q. Gotcha.

5 A. -- for different companies.

6 Q. Okay. Excellent. And then has -- what other jobs have been  
7 done under the LLC?

8 A. RV parks.

9 Q. Okay. RV parks?

10 A. Yes, sir. That's the only --

11 Q. Okay. RV parks.

12 MR. WISNIEWSKI: Luke with NTSB.

13 Your trip pilot boat work, was that under your 100 tonner  
14 master's license? What were you sailing, what capacity?

15 MR. SOILEAU: It was under my master of towing. Yes, sir.

16 MR. WISNIEWSKI: And of those 21, they were all under your  
17 master's?

18 MR. SOILEAU: Yes, sir.

19 MR. WISNIEWSKI: Okay.

20 ■ ■ Okay. This is ■ ■ with the Coast Guard.

21 BY ■ ■

22 Q. So I think this is the last question I have before we'll kind  
23 of let you walk through what happened. But what type of work does  
24 the vessel typically do and then what was it doing the day of the  
25 fire?

1 A. Mostly rig tending and construction, moving construction  
2 crane barges.

3 Q. Gotcha. And what was it doing the day of?

4 A. It was rig tending.

5 Q. Rig tending, okay, day of.

6 ■■■ All right. Luke, if you don't have anything else,  
7 I'm going to go ahead.

8 BY ■■■

9 Q. All right, sir. So I think at this time you kind of just  
10 feel free to walk us through what happened. Please be specific  
11 and we won't interrupt. So just go ahead.

12 A. Yes. From the beginning of the day?

13 Q. If you don't mind, yes, please.

14 A. Yes. We were dispatched from the rig to go back to Tidewater  
15 Dock in Larose and stand by with a barge or to pick up equipment  
16 on the barge, they load the barge. And we left and we were about  
17 halfway there. It was just about a 3½ hour trip. And we crossed  
18 Lake Salvador and the alarm went off, alarm panel. And then I  
19 looked behind me and I seen smoke.

20 So I -- at that time the boys was in the galley, and they  
21 heard the alarm and they come up to the wheelhouse while I exit  
22 the wheelhouse, ran downstairs to see what was going on. And  
23 there was a lot of smoke coming out of the engine room, so I take  
24 the cover off the wheel unit and proceeded to try to put the fire  
25 out, but I wasn't able to enter down the stairs of the engine room



1 because the flames was starting to rise up. So I sprayed it the  
2 best I could and when I seen that it really -- I couldn't hit the  
3 actual fire itself because I couldn't get down far enough to see  
4 it, then I decided to close all the hatches and try to smother the  
5 fire.

6 So I alerted the boys to start closing the hatches and shut  
7 off the fuel, which they did. And we shut -- we sprayed the  
8 chemical in the hatches until we ran out and then we closed the  
9 hatch, the last hatch, sealed it all off. And then I --

10 Q. And what -- go ahead.

11 A. I went upstairs and called mayday on channel 13 and channel  
12 16. And I spoke to a Coast Guard woman, come back asked my  
13 coordinates and I gave them to her. And then we got on life vests  
14 and got a couple medicines and just grabbed a couple things real  
15 fast, the logbook, and then went down to the deck. And by the  
16 time I got back down to the deck, there was already a crew boat  
17 there to pick us up. They had heard the distress call. And then  
18 we got on the boat and then got away from it for about half a  
19 mile, and then we seen a Coast Guard helicopter fly over.

20 Q. All right. So do you remember the vessel name that grabbed  
21 you guys off the vessel

22 A. *Miss Jess*, I think.

23 Q. Okay. So *Miss Jess* took you off the boat, you saw Coast  
24 Guard come in basically at that same time, right?

25 A. Yes.

- 1 Q. And then a fire boat, when did -- how do they play into this?
- 2 A. Yes. The *Miss Jess* decided to take us in to Tidewater Dock,  
3 which was like 15 miles away.
- 4 Q. Okay.
- 5 A. And about halfway to Tidewater Dock we started seeing fire  
6 and rescue boats passing --
- 7 Q. Passed in the ICW?
- 8 A. Yes, sir.
- 9 Q. Okay. And what did they say to you guys?
- 10 A. They was going out to try to get to the boat. It was windy,  
11 really windy --
- 12 Q. Right.
- 13 A. -- and probably 3 to 4 foot seas. I think only one boat  
14 actually was able to make it there out of five or six.
- 15 Q. Wow.
- 16 A. The parish president was also there himself, he was there.
- 17 Q. Wow.
- 18 A. And he met us at the dock with an ambulance and fire  
19 department, and they was all there to assist us. And the parish  
20 president actually brought us back to here, to my dock, in his  
21 personal vehicle. Mr. Archie Chaisson is his name.
- 22 Q. Did the fire crew give you any report or anything?
- 23 A. Nothing -- no. I know they took reports and we sat in the  
24 ambulance. It was really cold, and I had got a little wet; they  
25 gave me a blanket to warm us up and --

1 Q. Okay. What did they say -- did you ever talk to the guys  
2 that made it to the vessel?

3 A. I did -- yeah. Yes, I did talk to them.

4 Q. What did they say?

5 A. There was only one boat that made it there and -- I don't  
6 know if he was a fire chief or -- but he said that he didn't even  
7 open the hatches to see the damage. He just felt and everything  
8 felt cool. He didn't feel any heat and he thought the fire was  
9 out, but he didn't want to open the hatches because the wind was  
10 blowing real bad and it maybe restart it.

11 Q. Okay. All right. So let's see. You had mentioned earlier  
12 some work was completed on the vessel. When was that and what all  
13 was done?

14 A. We refurbished pretty much the entire boat in 5½ months from  
15 when I purchased it in August until we set sail.

16 Q. Okay. Excellent. And then what -- when you say all if it,  
17 you're talking like hull structure or mainly internals?

18 A. We did a month on the hull. We did water paints, new anchor  
19 line, shell plate welding in the shipyards, and we blasted and  
20 coated all the tanks. And the engines were here, but we had to  
21 rewire them. Most of the wheelhouse was -- we had to rewire all  
22 the -- like all new electronics, all new lights, safety stuff,  
23 painting, big painting, like the beg boards, the winches,  
24 generators. We put the -- I had the crane installed, the spuds  
25 installed.

- 1 Q. Whole refurb, pretty much?
- 2 A. Yeah, everything. Yes, sir.
- 3 Q. Okay. Got it.
- 4 A. And we hired, you know, licensed electricians, licensed  
5 hydraulic people, mechanics. We had --
- 6 Q. Yeah.
- 7 A. -- every -- we didn't just do it all ourselves.
- 8 Q. Sure.
- 9 A. It was all done by specialists.
- 10 Q. Yeah. Gotcha. Okay.
- 11 Oh, let's see -- okay. So full refurb for the boat. That  
12 was when you bought it in August of '22, up until the time you  
13 really started operating it?
- 14 A. Yes, sir.
- 15 Q. Okay. And then what type of firefighting equipment is on  
16 board, extinguishing and detection?
- 17 A. Everything that was required. I'm not sure exactly how many,  
18 what size of fire extinguishers.
- 19 Q. Yeah.
- 20 A. I have the big wheel and everything they required.
- 21 Q. Can you kind of walk me through -- you don't have to give me  
22 like the sizes, but how many portables, how many semi-portable,  
23 which are the wheeled ones, and then what other systems?
- 24 A. We have one big wheeled unit and we have, in the  
25 wheelhouse -- I mean in the engine room there's a large, I guess,

1 15-pound, and in the generator room there's another one. Then on  
2 deck next to the paint locker we have a fire extinguisher. We  
3 have an additional one that wasn't required on the (indiscernible)  
4 in the front near the crane, and we have one in the wheelhouse and  
5 one in the galley.

6 Q. So you -- that's quite a few. Was there like five or six on  
7 board of portables?

8 A. Yes, sir. Yes.

9 Q. Okay. And then what about other type systems? I think there  
10 was a fire pump; is that correct?

11 A. We have -- yes, we have a large fire pump in the engine room  
12 and we also have another water discharge pump on deck.

13 Q. On the deck. Okay. Is that hardwired to suction underneath  
14 the vessel? Where is that -- how does that work?

15 A. No, right where the fire pump is. The fire pump has a sea  
16 chest valve and it's --

17 Q. What about the deck one?

18 A. The deck one's a freshwater, potable water.

19 Q. Oh, okay.

20 A. It's like to transfer of potable of water to rigs and stuff.

21 Q. Gotcha. Gotcha. Okay.

22 A. But it can also be used to put out fires or anything else.

23 Q. All right. Excellent. Okay. And then walk me through  
24 maintenance on the vessel. You know, it looks like it's extremely  
25 clean throughout.

1 A. Yes, sir.

2 Q. So how often are you guys doing maintenance, who's doing the  
3 maintenance, are you guys keeping logs, and all that?

4 A. Yes, we all do the maintenance. I do the engine room. Every  
5 morning when I get up, I do the engine room, and I'm teaching my  
6 deckhands how to do it also and they check on it.

7 Q. What are they checking?

8 A. They're checking for oil leaks, fuel leaks, water in the  
9 bilge, any hazards or anything. They do walkarounds in the engine  
10 room usually every hour, is what I require them to do when we're  
11 underway.

12 Q. Is there like a -- they just doing checks of oil and sight  
13 glasses and all that stuff as well?

14 A. We don't have any sight glasses, but -- yeah, they walk  
15 around, completely around the whole engine and look for oil leaks.  
16 And we have found -- you know, they're older engines --

17 Q. Yeah.

18 A. -- and we have found oil leaks and we have changed gaskets.  
19 We had an exhaust leak before; we changed the gasket on it. Every  
20 time we find something we immediately fix it as soon as we get to  
21 the dock. So it's been -- well, you know, we would like -- I  
22 mean, getting the bugs out, the first month of every trip we'd  
23 make, we'd come back, we'd have a couple things to do until we --  
24 at the point of the fire everything was done, everything was --

25 Q. Awesome. What about engine oil? Are you guys checking that

- 1 pretty consistently?
- 2 A. Oh, yes, every day. Yes, sir.
- 3 Q. Every day. All right.
- 4 A. And they don't -- they don't use any; they don't burn any  
5 oil.
- 6 Q. All right. And then logbook, you guys -- do you have a  
7 logbook?
- 8 A. Yes, sir.
- 9 Q. Okay. How often are you logging stuff, I guess, about?
- 10 A. Every day.
- 11 Q. So daily logs?
- 12 A. Yeah. I do a daily inspection and daily logs.
- 13 Q. Okay. All right. Now what about -- do you guys have a  
14 computer system on board and who does that type of stuff?
- 15 A. Yes. I do it, and then Payton is better with a computer than  
16 me and he's actually -- I oversee him doing it.
- 17 Q. Okay. What kind of stuff are you inputting in the computer?
- 18 A. The logs and the invoices and stuff.
- 19 Q. Okay. So financial type stuff, your maintenance logs,  
20 training?
- 21 A. No, we just do verbal training.
- 22 Q. Just do verbal --
- 23 A. I mean, we have -- we did a man overboard and I believe we  
24 did a engine room fire, too, I believe.
- 25 Q. Okay.

- 1 A. We did a couple, I believe, (indiscernible) --
- 2 Q. How long ago was that?
- 3 A. About a week and a half ago.
- 4 Q. Okay. Probably came in handy.
- 5 A. Yes, sir.
- 6 Q. Okay. When your deckhands come on board -- so let's say you
- 7 just bought the company, the vessel -- or let's say you the
- 8 vessel, right, and they come on board. What type of overview are
- 9 you giving them? Are you going through all the safety stuff
- 10 and --
- 11 A. Well, these are the only two deckhands I've ever had --
- 12 Q. Yeah.
- 13 A. -- and they helped me build the boat, so they know the boat
- 14 as good as I do.
- 15 Q. Awesome. Okay. So do you feel like they were adequately
- 16 prepared for this?
- 17 A. Yes, sir.
- 18 Q. Yeah. How is the dynamic between those two, their working
- 19 relationship?
- 20 A. Oh, they're great. They a very good --
- 21 Q. Never argue?
- 22 A. No, not at all.
- 23 Q. No? What about with you and them, ever have any issues?
- 24 A. No, sir, not at all.
- 25 Q. Excellent. Okay.



- 1 A. Good kids. They read their Bible every day and they're --
- 2 Q. That's awesome.
- 3 A. -- really good Christian kids.
- 4 Q. Perfect. Let's see. Okay, go back to this -- okay, so I got
- 5 that. You talked about rounds being made every hour, right?
- 6 A. Yes, sir.
- 7 Q. Okay. Are those rounds of just the engine room or the deck
- 8 spaces? Are you kind of walking around the deck as well?
- 9 A. Yeah, they -- you don't have to walk around the deck. You
- 10 can --
- 11 Q. You can kind of see it, yeah --
- 12 A. Yes, sir, you can see it.
- 13 Q. -- from up there, yeah. Okay. We talked about the
- 14 firefighters when they arrived, and they met with you as well once
- 15 they got back, and said that the deck was cool. Did they mention
- 16 any type of damage that they could see?
- 17 A. No, they never opened the engine room.
- 18 Q. Yeah. So that makes sense. You probably thought when you
- 19 were on --
- 20 A. We thought it was a lot worse, yes, sir.
- 21 Q. Yeah. Okay. That makes sense. So when you guys were on the
- 22 *Miss Jess* and you were kind of away from it -- I don't know how
- 23 far it was, but did you see the fire go out? Could you kind of
- 24 see it?
- 25 A. We seen smoke, but it kept getting less and less.

1 Q. Yeah, okay.

2 A. And it felt like hours even though it may have only been 15  
3 minutes or 10, 15 --

4 Q. Sure.

5 A. -- it just felt like -- it was in shock and it felt like a  
6 lot longer. But we eventually seen it stop smoking and that's we  
7 just -- you know, that's when we left the site, the scene, and it  
8 was not smoking anymore.

9 Q. Gotcha. Okay. All right. Let's see. And then you kind of  
10 mentioned this earlier as well, but just for this purpose, can you  
11 walk me through what the plans are for the vessel and timeframe  
12 you're thinking to get it back operating?

13 A. We changing everything on that engine, all the hoses and  
14 wires, and the electricians will be out today to survey it. And I  
15 already had a third-party surveyor come out yesterday -- was it  
16 yesterday? Monday. He came out Monday and did a survey. But  
17 we're going to do everything, change all the hoses and wires, and  
18 I'll have a mechanic and electrician go through it all completely  
19 and then a Coast Guard, a new inspection early next week.

20 Q. Yeah. Okay. And then what about a -- can you give me like a  
21 rough, ballpark estimate of total cost of damages?

22 A. Damages with loss of wages or just total --

23 Q. You can give me both if you want, whatever you can --

24 A. Probably 25-, 30,000 dollars, I guess.

25 Q. All right. And then any -- so this is the only vessel for

1 the company; is that correct?

2 A. Yes, sir.

3 Q. Okay, only vessel for the company.

4 ■ ■ Luke, I'll pass it to you if you have anything?

5 MR. WISNIEWSKI: Sure.

6 BY MR. WISNIEWSKI:

7 Q. Luke Wisniewski, NTSB. Captain, if you could just go through  
8 a couple of these items. You did a great job going through the  
9 details, so I just want to make sure I got it here correctly. So  
10 you were rig tendering, but you were told to go to Tidewater?

11 A. Yeah.

12 Q. And so how long were you underway from --

13 A. It's about a 3½ hour trip and we was underway probably a half  
14 of that, I guess.

15 Q. You were half of that.

16 A. Halfway (indiscernible).

17 Q. So you were -- and you're full ahead?

18 A. Oh, no. We was -- no, it was really rough and we was  
19 probably 1200 rpms, making about 4 miles --

20 Q. Okay, 1200 rpm.

21 A. -- about 4 miles an hour.

22 Q. All right.

23 A. No, it was rough and the waves were coming over the rail, you  
24 know, splashing. So, no, we were not at all running hard, not at  
25 all.

1 Q. Okay. Were you using the rudders a lot due to the wave  
2 action or --

3 A. No, not really because the track line was pretty straight  
4 coming across --

5 Q. Straight track line?

6 A. -- coming across the lake. Yeah, so --

7 Q. And what do you use for like navigation? Do you have Rose  
8 Point or do you --

9 A. Yes, Rose Point.

10 Q. And -- all right. So let's go a little bit more into the  
11 steering, the hydraulic system, the maintenance on it. You  
12 indicated that maintenance -- did you or did you have a crew come  
13 on and do the maintenance to replace those hydraulic lines when  
14 you were under that 5 months of refurbishment? Who did the work  
15 on that?

16 A. Southern Crane & Hydraulics did all the hydraulics for the  
17 steering.

18 Q. Did the work on that?

19 A. They did the work on that, yes.

20 Q. Okay. So you have invoices on what they charged you, what  
21 they --

22 A. Yes, sir.

23 Q. -- charged you for the hoses and everything?

24 A. Yes, sir.

25 Q. Okay. And that was done approximately when?

1 A. From -- well, October/November is when the -- some of the  
2 last stuff done was the steering. He was working on electronics  
3 and the steering, that was some of the last stuff that was done.  
4 So I'd say November or October, October/November.

5 Q. Okay. And any other -- have you, prior to that indicated  
6 rupture of the hose, any issues with the steering system?

7 A. Not at all. No, sir.

8 Q. Did you have to top up the storage tank with hydraulic oil?

9 A. Never.

10 Q. No? Okay. So basically that maintenance that they did in  
11 the November timeframe was the last time like anyone has really  
12 had to touch that system?

13 A. Yes, sir.

14 Q. From what you can recall?

15 A. Yes, sir.

16 Q. Okay. And if I can have a little bit more detail with the,  
17 like the fuel shutoffs. The other -- your crew members told us,  
18 you know, you instructed them. Can you go through and tell us  
19 like what you actually said to them, like who you told to shut off  
20 the fuel valves, what --

21 A. I just screamed at both of them to shut off the fuel and then  
22 shut -- close the hatches. I'm not sure which one went and cut  
23 the fuel valves off.

24 Q. Okay.

25 A. One of them had to -- I helped close the back hatch and I

1 walked on the front deck and we all met on the front deck in  
2 the -- don't remember if I checked (indiscernible), but I know  
3 that they were -- (phone ringing) -- I know they was off, because  
4 when we -- a couple days later --

5 Q. Okay.

6 A. -- that they --

7 Q. Do you need to take that?

8 A. No.

9 Q. I can pause it.

10 A. No, I'm good.

11 Q. All right. All right, so -- yeah, so that's all I wanted to  
12 do was --

13 A. Yes, sir.

14 Q. Okay. So you told them to execute it. It sounds like  
15 listening to their stories, they cross-checked each other. But  
16 did you look at it as well to make sure they were shut off or --  
17 fuel valves or --

18 A. I always -- I think I did.

19 Q. Okay.

20 A. I'm pretty sure I did. Obviously I was in shock and -- yeah,  
21 I'm almost certain I checked them also.

22 Q. All right. And I just want to go through a little bit on the  
23 stern again.

24 A. Yes, sir.

25 Q. When you opened up the hatch to go down to the engine room

1 you were spraying the portable fire extinguisher. That's what you  
2 referred to as the --

3 A. The wheeled unit.

4 Q. -- the wheeled unit?

5 A. Yes, sir.

6 Q. Yeah. So your semi-portable fire extinguishing unit?

7 A. Yes, sir.

8 Q. You are the one that opened up the door and then sprayed it,  
9 what, into the port side?

10 A. Yes.

11 Q. Can you go through and just discuss that? Like how --

12 A. I wanted to walk down the stairs and spray exact -- you know,  
13 on the fire, but I wasn't able to get down the stairs. So I was  
14 limited to actually aiming it to the fire, so I just sprayed it  
15 all in there and just closed all the hatches and --

16 Q. Could you see what was on fire? Was it really bellowing of  
17 smoke or --

18 A. There was a lot of smoke. It was coming from the port, the  
19 top of the port engines and it was coming from -- the flames were  
20 coming from the ceiling, you know, not low on the bottom. It was  
21 coming from the top.

22 Q. Okay. Was there any visible sign of fire outside of that  
23 engine room hatch? Could you see it out of the supply --

24 A. No. No, sir.

25 Q. -- vents or out of the vents just forward of the --

- 1 A. Only smoke.
- 2 Q. Only smoke?
- 3 A. Yes.
- 4 Q. Okay. Then, okay, so you went through -- you pretty much  
5 used up the portable fire extinguisher, the wheeled unit, and then  
6 you decided -- you made that decision to close everything up.
- 7 A. Yes, sir.
- 8 Q. At what point did you say, hey, grab all your stuff versus  
9 like trying to fight it? Like, you know, you had -- right there  
10 on the stern you had that number 1 fire hose. Was there any  
11 discussion or thought of, hey, maybe we should fire this up and  
12 fight the fire or --
- 13 A. No, because water -- I was always told if it's an oil fire or  
14 chemical fire never to put water on it.
- 15 Q. All right. So you made that decision, so then you told  
16 everyone to, what, go get their --
- 17 A. Yes.
- 18 Q. -- gear, get your stuff that you want to take?
- 19 A. Yes. I came back up to the bridge and that's when I made  
20 contact with the -- I tried to call the Coast Guard again. I  
21 initially -- I'm trying to think. Yeah, that must be when I made  
22 the mayday call, right at (indiscernible)
- 23 Q. Okay. And you made the mayday over VHF?
- 24 A. VHF, yes.
- 25 Q. Sixteen, channel 16?



1 A. Sixteen and 13, yes.

2 Q. And 13? All right.

3 A. Yes.

4 Q. Good. Okay, yeah, just continue. So you're up there on the  
5 bridge and then you're trying to contact them. Who were you able  
6 to get ahold of?

7 A. I talked to the Coast Guard, a woman, who asked my  
8 coordinates, and then I didn't get any more response. I tried a  
9 couple more times and I never got any answer. And when we got on  
10 the *Miss Jess*, we tried to call the Coast Guard and I never got no  
11 response, also on 16. So we didn't know when you -- I gave the  
12 coordinates, but we never got a response until we seen the  
13 helicopter afterwards.

14 Q. All right. And so you were -- okay --

15 ■■■ No, please, Luke. I'm sorry.

16 BY MR. WISNIEWSKI:

17 Q. When you were up there, you gave the coordinates out, you  
18 didn't hear a response back. What did you do next? Did you --  
19 were the guys down here, your two deckhands, gathering up their --

20 A. Yeah, we just grabbed some --

21 Q. -- gear?

22 A. Yes, sir, grabbed just a handful of important stuff --

23 Q. Important documents?

24 A. -- and just pills and stuff, and then prepared to -- we  
25 didn't know if we was going to have to jump overboard or what, but

1 we wanted to be prepared. And then as soon as we got back  
2 downstairs the *Miss Jess* was there, that fast.

3 Q. Okay. That's what I'm trying to ask. Like and tried to pull  
4 out -- did you grab like your life jackets?

5 A. We had life jackets, yes.

6 Q. You already had them on?

7 A. We had them on, yes, on -- when we was on deck we had them  
8 on, yes.

9 Q. When you were on deck you had them on. Okay. Did you have  
10 any other like floatation? Did you -- like a life ring or  
11 anything that you were going to bring with you if you had to jump  
12 over the side or --

13 A. No. It's actually on the roof. If we wouldn't have seen a  
14 crew boat, that was the -- the plan was to get the life raft in  
15 the water and then get the EPIRB and activate it. That would have  
16 been the next step.

17 Q. So you didn't have --

18 A. No, sir. Didn't have to --

19 Q. -- you didn't activate the EPIRB because --

20 A. Right.

21 Q. -- *Miss Jess* was already alongside?

22 A. Yes, sir.

23 Q. All right. You indicated, I guess, one of the deck officers  
24 did the dry chem. Did you instruct him to grab that dry chem to  
25 put that extinguishing agent into the supply or --

1 A. No, I did it myself.

2 Q. Oh, you did it yourself?

3 A. Yeah, I did it. Yeah, I took the cover off of it and I  
4 sprayed it in the -- the dry chem, yes.

5 ■ ■ What were they doing at that time, the two  
6 deckhands?

7 MR. SOILEAU: Panicking.

8 ■ ■ Yeah. Were they holding stuff open for you?  
9 Like --

10 MR. SOILEAU: It's hard to remember exactly all what was --  
11 we was all in panic.

12 ■ ■ Um-hum.

13 MR. SOILEAU: We was all in panic.

14 ■ ■ Moving quick, I'm sure.

15 MR. SOILEAU: Yes, sir.

16 BY MR. WISNIEWSKI:

17 Q. Okay. So you did both the portable, semi-portable, and the  
18 dry chem?

19 A. No, just the dry chem.

20 Q. Just the dry chem.

21 A. Yeah, just -- yeah, just the wheeled --

22 Q. So it was one --

23 A. One big one, yes.

24 Q. -- one large dry chem that you actually used?

25 A. Yes. Yes, sir.

1           ■   ■   And that was the only one you used?

2           MR. SOILEAU: The only one that -- one of the boys had the  
3 one -- took the one from the engine room and had it -- brought it  
4 down there, and he had it down there because we found it  
5 afterwards and I didn't even realize it. I don't know which one  
6 it is, but we had another, a small one that he had brought --  
7 thought about on his own to bring another one there. But we  
8 didn't -- it wasn't -- we didn't use it because the big one was  
9 still spraying and we just closed everything up.

10          BY MR. WISNIEWSKI:

11 Q.    Okay. So when you got off the -- off onto the *Miss Jess*,  
12 when did you come back or -- because what I'm curious is did you  
13 spud down the vessel? Who -- how did it make its way to where it  
14 was, right?

15 A.    We got on the *Miss Jess* and then we just stood away from the  
16 boat for, I don't know, 15 -- 10, 15 minutes, and then they was  
17 telling me that there was pipeline guys, that they had some  
18 pipelines in their area that they worked for and they was -- and I  
19 mentioned take me back to the boat and putting the spuds down, and  
20 we actually waited -- there was a line of PVC pipes that where the  
21 pipeline was -- the boat was actually crossing over the pipeline.

22 Q.    Okay.

23 A.    So waited a few more minutes till the wind blew the boat past  
24 the pipeline and then he dropped back off on the boat and I went  
25 to spud down. And then we got back --

1 Q. Who was the one that told you that there's PVC pipe there?  
2 Do you recall?

3 A. The guys on the crew boat. But that's what they was doing,  
4 was watching their pipeline because a tow had -- a big tugboat  
5 had, that same day, had broke tow or something right there in the  
6 area and had knocked down a beacon and I think some pilings or  
7 markers for their pipeline.

8 Q. So that's why they were there?

9 A. That's why they were there. Yes, sir.

10 Q. Oh, okay. Got it.

11 A. Yes.

12 Q. All right.

13 A. In fact that tugboat -- I don't know the name if it, but they  
14 was the one who actually called the *Miss Jess* and told them to  
15 assist us. They heard it. Yeah.

16 Q. Oh, okay. Good. All right. That clears that up for me.

17 ■ ■ Yeah. So the vessel was on fire, you get on the  
18 Jess -- *Miss Jess*, and then they drop you back off on the boat --

19 MR. SOILEAU: Yes. Yes.

20 ■ ■ -- to spud down. Was it still on fire at that time?

21 MR. SOILEAU: No. We waited till --

22 ■ ■ It was out?

23 MR. SOILEAU: -- it was out. No more smoke or anything at  
24 all.

25 ■ ■ Okay. I gotcha. Gotcha.

1 MR. SOILEAU: Yes.

2 BY MR. WISNIEWSKI:

3 Q. How long was that fire? How long do you think it was from  
4 start to finish?

5 A. Probably 10, 15 minutes probably. It even felt like 2 hours  
6 but it probably was 10, 15 minutes, maybe less. I don't really  
7 know.

8 BY ■■■ ■■■■

9 Q. So when you jumped on board, the fire -- had the fire  
10 department already been there?

11 A. No. They --

12 Q. No?

13 A. No. They hadn't got there till we was halfway back to the  
14 dock.

15 Q. Okay. So you jumped back on, you spud down. Were you able  
16 to look around and see the damage at all or not really?

17 A. No. Everything was closed.

18 Q. Okay.

19 A. Everything was --

20 Q. So you just spudded down because it's exterior, you just --

21 A. Yes. Yes. And then I got off. I just wanted to get off  
22 quick as I can, get back away from it because I didn't know what,  
23 you know --

24 Q. Extent of the damage?

25 A. Yes, sir.

1 Q. Yeah.

2 BY MR. WISNIEWSKI:

3 Q. Which spud did you spud down?

4 A. The one on the port side. The other one stopped working  
5 earlier that day. It stopped working.

6 Q. Port side?

7 A. Yes, sir.

8 Q. Okay. Port side spud. And you said the other one did not --

9 A. Had stopped working.

10 Q. Stopped working earlier that day?

11 A. Yes, sir.

12 Q. And without people on it, is it safe to just have one spud  
13 down or what's your --

14 A. They're good spuds. I mean, it depends on the bottom. You  
15 know, if you -- I guess if you're in hard sand bottom they may  
16 drag. I've never had it drag before, but I've heard people say  
17 that if you spud down on hard sand bottom then it won't hold very  
18 good in wind and waves. And I don't really know what kind of  
19 bottom they had in the area. So, but it did held because we came  
20 back the next day and the boat hadn't moved.

21 Q. Same spot? All right.

22 A. In the same spot.

23 Q. That's good.

24 ■ ■ This is ■ ■ with the Coast Guard.

25 BY ■ ■

1 Q. So just to recap again, I want to make sure I get the story  
2 right here. So the fire is suspected to have started because of  
3 the hydraulic line that was on the port side steering pump, right?

4 A. Yes, sir.

5 Q. And then once that busted, the hydraulic fluid came up and  
6 hit the hatch cover, which would have went, estimated, onto the  
7 turbo, right --

8 A. Yes, sir.

9 Q. -- causing that fire? So when that happened, you guys -- the  
10 hatch was closed. The only other hatches to the engine space or,  
11 I guess, entry points in the engine space would've been the two  
12 air intakes and the aft hatch door, right?

13 A. Yes, sir.

14 Q. Okay. So you guys proceeded to close all of that up, shut  
15 off the fuel shutoffs, and emptied the dry chem semi-portable, all  
16 of it, into that space?

17 A. Yes, sir.

18 Q. Okay. At that point the *Miss Jess* came and picked you up,  
19 you kind of back off with the -- you and the deckhands were on  
20 there, you backed off until the smoke was completely out. You had  
21 the *Miss Jess* bring you back in, dropped one of the spuds, and  
22 then proceeded inbound?

23 A. Yes, sir.

24 Q. Okay. And the *Desperado* stayed there overnight?

25 A. Yes, sir.



1 Q. How long did the *Desperado* stay overnight? You know, walk me  
2 through that situation.

3 A. The next day I borrowed a crew boat from a guy we worked for,  
4 Lance Parker. He had a -- he said -- I contact him that day and  
5 let him know what was happening because his -- one of his tugboats  
6 was working on the job with us and I let him know that they needed  
7 another boat for the job and that -- I let him know what happened.  
8 And he said that he had a crew boat that was off the job the  
9 following day, that if I needed it for anything that I could use  
10 it get back out to the boat, to the *Desperado*, which I did. The  
11 next morning, we got up -- we stayed in my office at Fourchon, my  
12 camp. And then we went on his crew boat in -- behind Galliano,  
13 which is about an hour boat ride to the *Desperado*. So we got  
14 aboard and we went -- I'm guessing it's probably 9 o'clock a.m.  
15 when we finally got back to the *Desperado*.

16 And we opened up the hatches and examined everything. And  
17 that's we found that it wasn't as bad as we thought it was. We  
18 thought it had been really bad or worse. So we tried to find the  
19 cause of it and we just -- we spent several hours there and we  
20 finally seen that one engine was still workable. The generator  
21 cranked up. The boat was still -- all the electronics were still  
22 working and lights, you know, everything was still working.  
23 Except the one engine that was burnt, everything else was pretty  
24 much normal. And that's when I was in contact with you all.

25 Q. So -- okay, so you came and inspected the vessel, you called

1 the Coast Guard at that time and gave them a report, hey, not as  
2 bad as we thought, so we'd like to go ahead and come in.

3 A. Yeah.

4 Q. Walk me through that situation, who you spoke to, if you have  
5 that, and everything. So --

6 A. I spoke to [REDACTED] [REDACTED]

7 Q. So that's me. I'm the investigator, yeah.

8 A. Yes. Yes.

9 Q. Do you speak to anybody else?

10 A. A guy named Robert.

11 Q. Okay.

12 A. But he was -- there was a supervisor or someone above him  
13 that I didn't get his name, but he was also involved in it.

14 Q. Was that the inspections crew you're talking about now? The  
15 domestic inspection guys, or who was that?

16 A. I'm not really --

17 Q. If you don't know, it's okay.

18 A. I don't really know that, no.

19 Q. No problem.

20 A. But I asked for permission to take the vessel in on one  
21 engine and it was denied. And I was told that it had to be moved  
22 with another towing class vessel that was documented and licensed.  
23 And then about an hour later, we spotted a boat coming through  
24 that area, so we took the crew boat and went to meet them and  
25 talked to them, the captain on it. And we end up calling -- I

1 called the owner of the company and he said the boat was heading  
2 toward Houma, which would've -- just 15 miles away, would've  
3 passed right -- it would've passed right where we needed to go.  
4 And he -- I offered to charter the boat, to hire him to tow me to  
5 Tidewater Dock, and he agreed, and then I guess stood by with us  
6 for about 4 hours, I guess 3 or 4 hours. And that boat was the  
7 *Sea Cat*. And I believe it was Robert who wanted the official  
8 number and checked out the boat, made sure it was an inspected  
9 towing class vessel. And after waiting several hours, they told  
10 us that they would not allow us to come in with that other boat.

11 Q. Did they give you a reason?

12 A. They said they needed to come on board the boat because they  
13 was worried about safety. It was the safety of environmental  
14 and -- environmental safety and personnel, I guess.

15 Q. Okay. So what happened after that? So at that time who was  
16 left on board? Where -- like how long did it take until you  
17 finally got in and how did that work?

18 A. Originally I was told they would be out -- they would get a  
19 ride, they would be on board my vessel at 1:30. And several hours  
20 went through and it was getting later in the evening, and that  
21 crew boat has a radar -- it does -- I didn't think it had a radar,  
22 but it does have a radar but it's like an all self-contained with  
23 a GPS, and I don't know how to operate --

24 Q. Um-hum.

25 A. I'm not really great with different kind of computers that

1 I'm not familiar with, and I didn't want to run his boat after  
2 dark and I knew his boat had to be back in because it had a job  
3 the following day. So after -- you know, it was getting late in  
4 the evening so I decided, the Coast Guard had never showed up, I  
5 was going to take Lance's boat back -- Parker's boat back to the  
6 dock. And at that time Robert said him and the other gentleman  
7 would meet me at the landing at Mercer Road. So I took the boat  
8 back to Galliano and got in my truck. Took me an hour ride to get  
9 back to my truck and then about a 10-minute ride to get from  
10 Galliano back to Larose by truck to meet with those fellows at the  
11 Mercer Street landing.

12 Q. Okay. Then was it the next day that the vessel got towed or  
13 when did the vessel make it in?

14 A. Four days after the initial fire.

15 Q. So 4 days had passed. Four days after made it in. And  
16 that's where we're currently at --

17 A. Yes.

18 Q. -- at your shop here?

19 A. Yes, sir.

20 Q. So when it was left out there for a day or two, who was left  
21 on board? Was it always tended? Was somebody on board?

22 A. The first night it wasn't.

23 Q. First night because you guys --

24 A. Yes.

25 Q. -- yeah, had gotten taken off that night, right.

1 A. And then the second night the boys stayed on it while I took  
2 a ride to Ponchatoula. I went to Ponchatoula to pick up another  
3 sport boat that I own so I could have my own transportation to get  
4 back out to the boat.

5 Q. Okay.

6 A. And then the next morning I went back. I went out to the  
7 boat and then I stayed with the boys on the boat until we was --  
8 got towed in yesterday.

9 Q. Gotcha. Did you ever feel it was an unsafe situation leaving  
10 the vessel out here and --

11 A. No. Yes, it was very -- we were unsafe, yes, because it was  
12 right near a channel where they pass heavy tows with a lot of  
13 bottom suction and there is a lot of wind. It's the open of Lake  
14 Salvador, which the wind blows sometimes 30, 40 miles an hour, and  
15 3 to 4 foot seas the day the accident happened. Yes, I feel that  
16 it was unsafe leaving it there with only one operational spud and  
17 no pilings to tie it to, no trees to tie it to. I did feel that  
18 it was more dangerous than towing it in on one engine or getting  
19 it towed by the *Sea Cat* the day that the accident occurred, yes.

20 Q. Yeah. And did you mention all this to the Coast Guard,  
21 explain your situation and how you felt about that?

22 A. Yes, I did.

23 Q. Okay. I think -- just a question I like to ask really on all  
24 marine casualties, but, I mean, what do you think could have been  
25 done to prevent this from happening?

1 A. To prevent the fire?

2 Q. Yeah.

3 A. Should be better protection around the steering system so if  
4 a hose ruptures it doesn't spray on the engine. I think any kind  
5 of wall, rubber wall or steel, aluminum, anything to stop hoses  
6 from rupturing would help a lot.

7 Q. And the last question I think I have is just -- let's see how  
8 I phrase this real quick. So basically is there anything further  
9 you'd like to mention that can help us in our investigation?  
10 Anything at all that you want to mention?

11 A. I think the captain should have a say-so of what's safe and  
12 what's not safe. I mean, he's the master of the ship, he knows  
13 the ship better than anybody else. And someone with many years at  
14 sea like myself, I've got over 5,000 days at sea since I was -- my  
15 childhood and a lot of experience with mechanical and with vessels  
16 of all different types. I think we should have known if it's safe  
17 to travel in on one engine or not. I think the master should have  
18 some kind of say-so what's -- you know, if it's safe or not safe.

19 I mean, we have insurance, which -- but, I mean, of course we  
20 didn't want the boat to catch on fire again, but the fire was out  
21 and the other engine was working fine, and I think it could have  
22 been taken in on its own power safely or taken in that same day  
23 with the other towing class vessel, you know, watching it or  
24 pushing it, it could have been drive safely.

25 Q. Okay. Well, thank you for that.

1           █ █ Luke?

2           MR. WISNIEWSKI: Yeah. Luke, NTSB.

3           BY MR. WISNIEWSKI:

4 Q.    Just a couple more, Captain. When you were going ahead at  
5 1200 rpm and the alarm went off, what went off first? Was it the  
6 fire alarm?

7 A.    Yes -- yeah, the fire alarm went off and then I believe --  
8 the system's all tied in together, it's one alarm. So I don't  
9 really know if the low hydraulic level alarm triggered. I don't  
10 know which one went off, but they both went off at the same time.  
11 It's the same alarm.

12 Q.    Okay.

13 A.    But I don't know what -- but if the oil spurted, which would  
14 have caused the low hydraulic oil alarm to go off, and the smoke  
15 detectors picked up the smoke. So both alarms went off probably  
16 around the same --

17 Q.    Pretty much simultaneously?

18 A.    Yes, sir.

19 Q.    Okay. And did you shut down the main engines right away?

20 A.    I immediately shut down the main engines, yes.

21 Q.    Locally or up in the engine room or up --

22 A.    No, I have -- we have --

23 Q.    -- at the wheelhouse?

24 A.    We have remotes on the bridge.

25 Q.    Okay.

- 1 A. Yes.
- 2 Q. So you secured them right there at the bridge?
- 3 A. Yes, sir.
- 4 Q. And so then you were just left to the wind and the current at  
5 that point, right?
- 6 A. Yes.
- 7 Q. You were drifting?
- 8 A. Right. Yes, sir.
- 9 Q. Were you in an open portion of Lake Salvador?
- 10 A. We was right at the mouth of Lake Salvador in the  
11 Intracoastal and Bayou Perot, right at the intersection.
- 12 Q. Okay. So no incoming/outgoing traffic you had to contest  
13 with or --
- 14 A. Not at the time, no.
- 15 Q. No one you had to alert?
- 16 A. No, sir.
- 17 Q. Okay. That's good. Yeah, I think that's all I have.  
18 Appreciate your detailed account of this and, yeah, we'll look  
19 into -- if there's anything else you want to reach out to us with,  
20 please do.
- 21 A. Okay.
- 22 Q. You have my card.
- 23 A. Yes, sir.
- 24 Q. And you have [REDACTED] information. Please let us know  
25 anything else if we can help out with this. So we appreciate your



1 today.

2 ■ ■ Yeah, absolutely. Appreciate your time. Thankful  
3 you and your crew are safe.

4 MR. SOILEAU: Yes, sir.

5 ■ ■ And thank you for the detailed account.

6 It is 11:55 and we are concluding the interview.

7 MR. SOILEAU: Okay. Thank you.

8 (Whereupon, at 11:55 a.m., the interview was concluded.)

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CERTIFICATE

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


IN THE MATTER OF:           ENGINE ROOM FIRE ABOARD TOWING VESSEL  
                                  *DESPERADO* ON LAKE SALVADOR NEAR  
                                  NEW ORLEANS, LOUISIANA ON  
                                  FEBRUARY 17, 2023  
                                  Interview of Warren Soileau

ACCIDENT NO.:               DCA23FM018

PLACE:                        On board the *Desperado*

DATE:                         February 22, 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.

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Kay Maurer  
Transcriber