

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: PAYTON HOLMES, Deckhand
Desperado

On board the *Desperado*
Louisiana

Wednesday,
February 22, 2023

APPEARANCES:

LUKE WISNIEWSKI, Investigator
National Transportation Safety Board

■ ■ ■ ■ Investigator
United States Coast Guard

I N D E X

ITEM

PAGE

Interview of Payton Holmes:

By ■ ■

4

By Mr. Wisniewski

25

I N T E R V I E W

(10:21 a.m.)

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2
3 ■ ■ All right. Good morning. It is 22 February 2023.
4 Coast Guard and NTSB are here conducting a 46 CFR Part 4 joint
5 investigation into the fire aboard the ITV *Desperado* which
6 occurred on 17 February 2023. Time on deck is 10:21 currently.

7 We're going to go around, please, and say all of our names.
8 I'm going to start. This is ■ ■ ■

9 MR. WISNIEWSKI: Luke Wisniewski with the National
10 Transportation Safety Board.

11 MR. HOLMES: And Payton Holmes.

12 ■ ■ All right. Thank you, sir.

INTERVIEW OF PAYTON HOLMES

13
14 BY ■ ■

15 Q. And what is your role on the vessel?

16 A. Deckhand.

17 Q. Okay.

18 A. Do whatever needs to be done.

19 Q. Gotcha. Got that. How long have you been on board?

20 A. A little before Thanksgiving is when we started as a whole
21 like doing whatever, getting it ready.

22 Q. Gotcha.

23 A. But we've only been underway -- this was our eighth job, so
24 like a month and a half, probably, we've actually been going on
25 the water.

1 Q. Okay. Do you have any previous maritime experience?

2 A. No, sir.

3 Q. What about any other working experience?

4 A. Yes, sir.

5 Q. What did you do?

6 A. Worked on -- actually he used to own a camp. I worked there,
7 like a RV park.

8 Q. Yeah.

9 A. But I didn't work for him. I worked for the people he sold
10 it to. And then whenever I graduated high school, I moved to
11 Tennessee and was working on a sawmill where I ran an edging
12 machine.

13 Q. Okay. Great. If I pause for a minute, I'm just taking
14 notes, so --

15 A. Yes, sir.

16 Q. Edging machine at sawmill. All right. Great.

17 Okay. So I think at this time -- actually let me do this
18 before we get started. I just want to confirm that I have your
19 correct information and then we'll get started. So can you please
20 confirm that's your name, number, email, and age?

21 A. Yes, sir.

22 Q. All good there? Okay. Perfect.

23 All right. So at this time we'll just kind of let you take
24 it away and tell us what happened and what you did on the vessel
25 during the fire.

1 A. All right. So when it started, I was down here, I was
2 washing dishes. Then I heard the alarm go off, so I ran up these
3 stairs right beside you, into the wheelhouse. As I was getting
4 into the wheelhouse, I saw my captain. He was kind of already out
5 the door, so I ran down there. Well, saw smoke from whenever I
6 walked up into the wheelhouse, so I ran down there. And got down
7 there by the back door to the entrance of the engine room, like I
8 was beside it, and saw that there was a fire. He told us to close
9 the hatch. I closed -- which the two hatches were already closed,
10 so our ventilation system on the starboard side, on that back pole
11 we showed you all, I closed that. And then he said go and turn
12 off the fuel on the front deck. So I closed two, I know for sure
13 that I can remember, I closed two of those. And then at that
14 time, he -- I heard, get a radio, so I ran upstairs, I grabbed a
15 radio, then I ran back downstairs and gave it to him.

16 And by that time, I seen the other boat. And then we ran
17 back upstairs. He grabbed the logs. I -- oh, he grabbed the logs
18 and I have a little bin -- because I sleep in the wheelhouse, I
19 have a bin with all my clothes and I have a backpack that I keep
20 my money in -- well, my wallet, my money, and extra phone charger,
21 and some clothes, just -- because when we're on the water I keep
22 some stuff in there just in case something happens. So I grabbed
23 my book sack, threw it on, and ran down the stairs and we hopped
24 onto the crew boat with Devin and the other dude.

25 Q. Okay. What was the crew boat's name? Do you know?

- 1 A. I think it was *Miss Jessica* or something like that.
- 2 Q. *Miss Jessica*.
- 3 A. Um-hum. I'm not too --
- 4 Q. Gotcha.
- 5 A. -- absolutely sure.
- 6 Q. Okay. And you said you jumped on with who?
- 7 A. The dude who was driving the boat, his name is Devin.
- 8 Q. Okay.
- 9 A. And we jumped on with him.
- 10 Q. Oh, I see what you're saying. *Miss Jess*, you mean?
- 11 A. Yes, sir.
- 12 Q. Okay. Gotcha. The crew boat captain?
- 13 A. Yes, sir. He was --
- 14 Q. Gotcha.
- 15 A. It was him and an older man. I can't remember what his name
- 16 is though.
- 17 Q. Okay. Awesome. All right. So just to clarify, washing
- 18 dishes, ran up topside here to the pilothouse.
- 19 A. Um-hum.
- 20 Q. Saw smoke and then kind of captain took over at that point
- 21 and directed you where to go?
- 22 A. Yes, sir.
- 23 Q. Okay. And you said you went and shut the starboard side
- 24 ventilation intake, correct?
- 25 A. Yes, sir.

- 1 Q. Okay. And then you ran --
- 2 A. No, I'm sorry, the port side. I'm sorry. The port side.
- 3 Q. So you ran -- the port side, okay.
- 4 A. Yes. I'm sorry.
- 5 Q. No problem. No problem. That's why we clarify. I'll write
- 6 that down. So -- all right, port side. Okay. And then you ran
- 7 up forward and you had two shutoff valves --
- 8 A. That I can remember for sure that I shut was two of them.
- 9 Q. Now how did you --
- 10 A. I know all four got shut, but I can't remember exactly how
- 11 many I shut off.
- 12 Q. Yeah. Okay. How did that work? Did he just tell you both
- 13 to go up or did you just know what to do?
- 14 A. Well, he said shut off the fuel valves, and I knew what he
- 15 was talking about, so I ran up there and started shutting them
- 16 off.
- 17 Q. Now did the other deckhand shut them as well?
- 18 A. I think he shut -- he shut off at least one.
- 19 Q. Okay.
- 20 A. That I can remember.
- 21 Q. But you're sure all of them got shut off?
- 22 A. Yeah, positive, 100 percent.
- 23 Q. Okay. Gotcha. Okay. Let me go back to my notes.
- 24 All right. So, okay, what type of work does the vessel do
- 25 typically?

1 A. Whatever they need us to do. Mainly we've moved supply
2 boats, we've rig tended, we've used our crane while rig tending.
3 Really, we could do whatever. We have a crane, we could push
4 barges, we can assist other boats, and we can transfer fuel and
5 diesel. So, it could do whatever. So this boat really could do
6 whatever.

7 Q. It seems to me, because it's got two spuds, you know, on port
8 and starboard, which is interesting, and then it's got a crane on
9 the port side. That's pretty unique, so -- and then what was it
10 doing during this specific job?

11 A. What? The vessel?

12 Q. Yes.

13 A. We was rig tending. We was -- before it happened, we
14 actually -- I'm not sure if they were still -- they were still on
15 here whenever you came the first time. Remember, we had the four
16 big gasoline tanks on the front deck?

17 A. Yes. Yep.

18 Q. We had actually -- we went to shift a barge, but the barge
19 was stuck. So then we picked up those and was on the way back to
20 Tidewater because we had to stand by and wait on a barge to be
21 loaded and ready.

22 Q. Okay. So those gasoline tanks are just something that you
23 don't typically keep on, you were just --

24 A. Oh, yeah. No, that's not something that stays on our boat.
25 No, sir. We was just -- we was actually bringing those to

- 1 Tidewater.
- 2 Q. Gotcha. Okay. All right. Let's see.
- 3 All right. And then any other -- I forgot to ask the other
- 4 deckhand -- is there any other vessels or is this the only vessel
- 5 in the company?
- 6 A. The only one.
- 7 Q. Only one? Okay.
- 8 A. Yes, sir. He's the owner/business man/captain.
- 9 Q. He does it all. I gotcha.
- 10 A. Jack of all trades.
- 11 Q. Okay.
- 12 A. Mechanic. Whatever he needs to be, he does.
- 13 Q. Okay. Perfect. Tell me about the types of fire
- 14 extinguishing methods on board.
- 15 A. We have the big one, we have one in the wheelhouse -- I mean,
- 16 they're just the normal just spray --
- 17 Q. So you're talking about portables and semi-portable?
- 18 A. Um-hum.
- 19 Q. The one on wheels --
- 20 A. Yes, sir.
- 21 Q. -- so that's what we call semi-portable, any -- so you have
- 22 semi-portable, just one, right? The big one?
- 23 A. Yes, sir. We only have one big one.
- 24 Q. And then you have how many portables on board; do you know?
- 25 A. Okay. We have one that was in the engine room, but of course

1 we can't get to. We have one in the wheelhouse. I want to say we
2 got another one but I'm not exactly sure. I know for a fact we
3 got three.

4 Q. Okay.

5 A. I think -- yeah, there's one in the generator room as well,
6 I'm pretty sure.

7 Q. Okay. So three smaller portables --

8 A. Yes, sir.

9 Q. -- one bigger one. And then any other methods that you
10 can --

11 A. We have that firehose on the starboard side.

12 Q. You have a fire pump with hose; is that right?

13 A. Yes, sir.

14 Q. Great. And did you use that during this fire?

15 A. No, sir.

16 Q. So the only one that was utilized was the semi-portable, and
17 then how was that utilized to fight the fire?

18 A. He -- well, my captain, by the time we got down there, he had
19 already had it -- well, by the time I got down there, he already
20 had it unstrapped and he was spraying it into the doorway, but
21 there was flames shooting out the doorway. And at that point --
22 I'm pretty sure he sprayed it every last bit that he had in the
23 tank.

24 Q. But he did that through the door or through the intake?

25 A. Through the door.

- 1 Q. Through the actual door?
- 2 A. Yes, sir.
- 3 Q. Okay, through door. All right.
- 4 Okay. And how were you notified of the fire again?
- 5 A. Fire alarm.
- 6 Q. So the fire alarm. So --
- 7 A. At first I thought it was just a general alarm because like
- 8 he don't slave drive us or nothing like that. We work about 2
- 9 hours a day and then do what needs to be done, if something needs
- 10 to be worked on. And then of course whenever we're at a rig or
- 11 tie up to a barge or going to put the barge lights out, we'll go
- 12 do something then. So we was down here. I was washing dishes.
- 13 Q. Yeah. Gotcha.
- 14 A. And when he needs our attention he normally just -- he flicks
- 15 the general alarm and then we go up. But this time the alarm went
- 16 off and it didn't stop, so I was like, oh, shit.
- 17 Q. Gotcha. So -- and where is that detector at; do you know?
- 18 A. There is one in the -- I think we have two. I'm pretty --
- 19 yeah, we do. We got one in the engine room and we have one in the
- 20 generator room.
- 21 Q. So obviously the one in the engine room --
- 22 A. Um-hum.
- 23 Q. -- set the alarm off. Okay. All right.
- 24 And then tell me about any type of training you've done on
- 25 the vessel since you've been on board.

- 1 A. We did a -- we've done man overboard, fire drill.
- 2 Q. When did you do those, roughly?
- 3 A. We trained before our Coast Guard test.
- 4 Q. Okay.
- 5 A. Well, our COI test, whatever you want to call it.
- 6 Q. Yeah. Right, right. So your initial certification?
- 7 A. Um-hum.
- 8 Q. So about how long ago was that last time you did drills?
- 9 A. We did -- we actually did some not too long ago. I can't
- 10 remember which ones.
- 11 Q. Yeah.
- 12 A. My mind's blank.
- 13 Q. Rough estimate on date? Week, 2 weeks ago?
- 14 A. Probably about a week, week and a half, 2 weeks ago,
- 15 something like that. I can't give you an exact date.
- 16 Q. No, that's okay.
- 17 A. I can't remember. On this boat I lose track of time. I
- 18 can't even tell you what today is, to be honest with you.
- 19 Q. I gotcha. No problem. All right. Well, thank you for that.
- 20 And then any -- so when you first got on board the vessel --
- 21 so he hired you to come on board, what type of training did he
- 22 give you or information about the vessel or anything like that?
- 23 A. Well, when we first got here, we -- I didn't know this, that
- 24 this was going to be long term.
- 25 Q. Right.

1 A. Because me and Michael, the other deckhand, we actually --
2 we've been buddies for -- we've known each other all our lives
3 because we come from a small, little town and we went to school
4 together and everything. But we've been good friends for about 4
5 years. And I was doing roofing and then the dude that I was
6 working for, and then we had another helper, so I text him and was
7 like, hey, we need another hand, would like to come? He's like,
8 yeah, for sure. And then our boss there broke his leg, and so I
9 text him, I was like, when we going to work? Blah, blah, blah.
10 He didn't know. So he test Warren and Warren said, come on, I got
11 some stuff for you all to do. So we just came -- at first, we was
12 just painting everything, painting all the pipes and all that, so
13 not really a whole lot of information was given about the vessel.
14 Of course, when I asked he told.

15 Q. Yeah, yeah.

16 A. And he's told me stuff, but I can't remember precise
17 anything --

18 Q. Okay. What about before you guys got underway on your first
19 trip, was there like a safety brief or anything? Did he walk you
20 through a drill, a safety brief, all that?

21 A. Um-hum. We went through drills of what to do, like man
22 overboard and stuff like that.

23 Q. And that was before you first got underway?

24 A. Um-hum.

25 Q. Okay. Gotcha. Perfect. Did drills, all right. Sorry. I'm

1 just writing.

2 A. And he just told us always be listening and always be ready.

3 Q. Understood. That's great.

4 Okay. Tell me about maintenance, who does the maintenance,
5 is maintenance logged, how often, stuff like that.

6 A. We log maintenance every time we do something. Like -- I'm
7 pretty sure he logs it up there. I'm not -- I don't do the like
8 paper logs. I just -- I fill out like the computer paperwork.
9 He's not too good with computers. That's the stuff I do.

10 Q. Okay.

11 A. But either one of us, whoever's not busy, me or the deckhand,
12 when we're underway, we'll go check the engine room about once an
13 hour. We'll go look around, make sure there's no oil leaks,
14 whatever -- if there's anything that looks out of the ordinary we
15 let him know what it is, what's happening. But like when we're
16 not underway, he'll go look, of course, and we assist him with
17 helping.

18 Q. Okay. What type of things are you looking for when you're
19 doing those rounds?

20 A. Well, we check the stuffing boxes, make sure there's not a --
21 the pumps are working, they're draining the water that comes in.
22 We're looking -- we check around the engines, make sure there's no
23 oil leakage. We check under the engine, make sure nothing under
24 the engine's leaking, make sure just they're running good. Walk
25 through the generator room, since we have the pipes that run all

1 the way through to the engine room from the generator room, all
2 the way across, and go check those, because those was leaking at
3 one point on our first job and we had to get those fixed. So I
4 always check them when I go down there just to make sure they're
5 not leaking. And -- yeah.

6 Q. What about did you look at the port side steering pump or
7 hoses or anything on your round?

8 A. Yes, sir. We check that every once in a while. I go down
9 there, we have -- there's a little circle thing and it's got a
10 full or a -- I think it's full and empty. I know for a fact it
11 says full. I can't remember what it says at the bottom. I check
12 that and make sure there's -- honestly, I can't tell you what kind
13 of oil goes in there or anything.

14 Q. Yeah. But anything out of the norm during that round at all?

15 A. Uh-uh.

16 Q. No?

17 A. Everything looked good.

18 Q. Okay.

19 A. Which it probably happened 45 minutes or a hour after we
20 checked. It was getting about that time. I was actually going to
21 go check it once I got done washing the dishes because I knew it
22 was about that time to go look.

23 Q. Okay.

24 A. And then it happened.

25 Q. Okay. All right. Tell me about -- so you've known the other

1 deckhand for a long time.

2 A. Um-hum.

3 Q. So walk me through the crew dynamics, your relationship with
4 him and the captain and all that. How do you guys work together?

5 A. Oh, I mean, we work good as a team. He really -- he's
6 captain, of course, he's like do this and we do it. Or we'll see
7 something that needs to be done and it's like, if I know how to do
8 something, I'm going to do it without asking him, hey, can I do
9 this? I'm going to do it and then mention it to him, and he'll be
10 like okay. But we work good together. We all get along well.
11 Honestly, I don't even look at my boss as my boss. He's like a
12 friend.

13 Q. Great.

14 A. He's a good dude.

15 Q. Awesome. So never had any conflicts with either one?

16 A. No. Me and him, like --

17 Q. Well, you're friends.

18 A. Yeah. Well, I mean, we argue every now and then, but like
19 serious problems, no, sir.

20 Q. Okay. Gotcha. Cool. All right. Excellent.

21 Okay. Let's see. So tell me about when the *Miss Jess* took
22 you off, is that when the fire rescue boat came or how did that
23 tie in? How did that work?

24 A. Well, actually, we was on the way back -- so what we did is
25 we smothered the fire -- well, closed the hatches, which it

1 insinuated the smothering of the fire.

2 Q. Sure. Yep.

3 A. But yeah, we was on there and we pulled -- we kind of pulled
4 off. We was still like in seeing distance, like visually of the
5 boat, and we sat there and watched it for a minute and then we
6 headed back. We actually passed the fire rescue and stuff
7 whenever we was on the way back.

8 Q. Okay.

9 A. Because we --

10 Q. So did you call them, do you know, the fire rescue boat, or
11 was that the Coast Guard that --

12 A. I reckon the Coast Guard. Because the Coast Guard, they
13 actually sent a helicopter out, but we was already -- we had been
14 off the boat probably at least 5 minutes, at least, and we seen
15 them. And then we was on the way back and I saw the boat and I
16 got -- I can't remember who flagged the boat down, but we got them
17 to flag them down as we was passing and they pulled in. We was
18 like, hey, we was on the boat, everybody's good. But I -- if I
19 remember correctly, only one -- there was a couple boats that was
20 headed out there, I think three, and only one could get there
21 because the water had been rough that day because of the wind and
22 the --

23 Q. Right.

24 A. -- weather and --

25 Q. Okay. So they passed you in the Intracoastal Waterway,

1 right --

2 A. Um-hum.

3 Q. -- when you were coming in and the fire boat was going to the
4 *Desperado*? And then what did they tell you about what they found?

5 A. They said that they touched on the deck, the deck wasn't hot.
6 This is -- they didn't tell me nothing personally.

7 Q. Yeah.

8 A. They told my captain. I'm trying to remember what he said.
9 I think they didn't go in the engine room, if I remember
10 correctly, but they did touch the deck, make sure the deck wasn't
11 hot.

12 Q. Okay. And then, you know, you're -- you said you're a ways
13 off on the *Miss Jess*, right?

14 A. Um-hum.

15 Q. You saw it go out or you think it went out, right?

16 A. Yes, sir.

17 Q. So what -- in your mind at that time, how bad did you think
18 this was? Like or what do you think the potential was?

19 A. Well, what I figured happened was, I figured that the fire
20 didn't -- well, of course, it ain't going to smother as soon as
21 you do it, but I figured as it was going -- because it looked a
22 lot worse, because, like I said, there was flames shooting out of
23 the doorway.

24 Q. Right.

25 A. I figured that -- because we have buckets of oil in our

1 engine room. But like behind our engines we got probably like 4,
2 5 foot of space and we keep our buckets of oil and stuff and our
3 lube back there.

4 Q. Okay.

5 A. So what I figured happened was that that fire got to that oil
6 and lit up and it spread. And then I kind of figured it was going
7 to get to the generator room, but --

8 Q. Yeah.

9 A. -- it really -- it just stayed on the port side mainly.

10 Q. Okay. Great. All right.

11 A. More electrical damage than anything.

12 Q. Yeah, right. All right. So do you happen to know what the
13 plans now are for the vessel?

14 A. Well, today we are -- we got to run to, I think it's called
15 Maritime. We got to bring back that fire -- the one on wheels,
16 get it refilled. Then we got to go to Houma and get a few parts.
17 And then everything that we can manage -- well, he could do the --
18 our captain could do the electrical work, but he doesn't want to.
19 So I think they're -- they're coming out either this evening to
20 look at it or tomorrow to look at it, and they're going to do that
21 tomorrow. But everything that we -- most of the stuff that we
22 could do that needs to be done for the boat to get underway again,
23 we're going to finish that today -- well, we'll try out best to
24 finish it today. And then me and my buddy, the other deckhand,
25 we're headed home for the weekend.

1 Q. Okay. So basically get it running as quickly as you can and
2 get back to work; is that kind of the gist?

3 A. Hopefully we'll have the people, whoever, Coast Guard
4 folks --

5 Q. Yeah.

6 A. -- come look at it next week, early next week. I mean, we're
7 hoping we'll be back on a job, if not late next week, early the
8 next week.

9 Q. Right. So walk me through again -- so you're on the vessel,
10 you all are ready to get it towed in, you know, get it fixed it,
11 right? Coast Guard -- what happened with the Coast Guard? Walk
12 me through that dynamic, what happened?

13 A. Being wishy-washy.

14 Q. Yeah. So just walk me through you guys reported it, you
15 know, got on the *Miss Jess*. So the fire went out of control and
16 you got on the *Miss Jess*, you're coming in. Walk me through what
17 happened after that.

18 A. Well, the next -- we went back to -- well, we went and got
19 food once we got back on land. And then we went in my boss's
20 camp, because we recently just cleaned it so there wasn't no food
21 because it's for sale on the market.

22 Q. Um-hum.

23 A. We went there and went to sleep. Woke up that morning, went
24 and got Lance Parker's crew boat. I couldn't tell you where we
25 got it from. I can't remember. Not too, too far, probably about

1 45 -- on like traveling on water about 45 minutes from the crew
2 boat to our -- to the vessel. We -- well, we got there and then
3 we saw a boat, another towboat. It was called --

4 Q. The *Miranda*, right?

5 A. Uh-uh.

6 Q. No?

7 A. This was a different boat --

8 Q. Oh, okay. I'm sorry.

9 A. -- that just happened to be passing by. I can't remember the
10 name of it.

11 Q. Okay.

12 A. But we flagged them down because Coast Guard told my captain
13 all you need is a certified --

14 Q. I'm sorry. *Sea Cat*?

15 A. *Sea Cat*, that's it.

16 Q. That's the boat. Yeah, sorry about that. Okay.

17 A. The *Sea Cat*, that is it.

18 Q. Okay.

19 A. We flagged them down and was like -- my boss said, can I
20 contact your higher-ups and see if I can put you on payroll?
21 Because they was headed back towards Houma so they had to go
22 through the ICW right here by --

23 Q. Right.

24 A. We was going to get them to tow us back. The Coast Guard,
25 they only -- all they said is we need another vessel, a towing

1 class vessel with a COI and all that to tow us back. Well, we get
2 that -- and we probably wait at least 4 hours, they're sitting
3 beside us and my boss is paying them to just sit there to tow us
4 back and the Coast Guard's like, well, blah, blah, blah, can't do
5 that.

6 Q. What reasoning did the Coast Guard give, do you know?

7 A. I can't remember, honestly.

8 Q. Okay.

9 A. A dumb one.

10 Q. Yeah. Gotcha. And then so you guys are waiting there, you
11 go ahead and tell the *Sea Cat* -- the captain tells the *Sea Cat* to
12 go on.

13 A. Well, he wasn't there at the time. He had to bring Lance's
14 boat back because he didn't know how to -- not the AIS, but he
15 didn't know how to work the radar, so he wanted to get it back
16 before dark. So he called me and said -- told me that he had to
17 meet with, not you, but the other people.

18 Q. Okay.

19 A. So I got on the radio and told them they could leave. He
20 told me to do that.

21 Q. Okay. Great. So *Sea Cat* leaves, you know, you're sitting
22 here on the vessel. You're trying to get approval, right, from
23 the Coast Guard, but they don't authorize it that day; is that
24 correct?

25 A. Yes.

1 Q. Okay. And then how did you feel in that moment? I mean, the
2 vessel's here, you're kind of sitting there, it's getting dark,
3 did you guys feel unsafe at that time?

4 A. No. I felt -- I mean, I wouldn't say unsafe. It definitely
5 wasn't probably the smartest decision, but then again, I put too
6 much time in this boat to leave it and watch something happen to
7 it.

8 Q. Yeah.

9 A. It drift away. So I didn't personally want to leave it at
10 all. Because I -- if he would've said we could leave, I'd have
11 told him I'd rather stay. I mean, we got plenty of food and
12 plenty of water down there in our freezer. Our freezer's still
13 working. All of our generators, everything worked, like
14 everything besides the -- I can't even remember what messed up; my
15 mind just went blank -- but what messed up, because like our
16 starboard engine was fine. We got the port engine to crank. And
17 they said something about us being a dead ship, which we wasn't a
18 dead ship because everything was working, because we could've got
19 back in on one engine.

20 Q. Yeah.

21 A. And he -- I know him. He would -- our captain would not put
22 us in no harm's way.

23 Q. Yeah.

24 A. Intentionally, intentionally he wouldn't.

25 Q. Sure. Sure. And then, so but when did you guys end up

1 coming in?

2 A. It was yesterday.

3 Q. Yesterday. So how many days -- that was --

4 A. We was out there, let's see, the day it happened, then we
5 went back --

6 Q. So it happened on the 17th, correct?

7 A. It did. What's today?

8 Q. And then you guys came in on the --

9 A. I don't even know what today is.

10 Q. Today's the 22nd.

11 A. So we came in on the 21st. So 18th, 19th, 20 -- 4 days.

12 Q. Okay. Gotcha.

13 A. And we just cleaned up, got everything ready.

14 Q. Okay.

15 A. The more we did there, the less we had to do here.

16 Q. Gotcha.

17 A. And we was using the Sea Hunt out there to travel back and
18 forth.

19 Q. Okay. Gotcha.

20 ■■■ I'm going to pass it over to Luke with the NTSB if
21 he has any other questions.

22 MR. WISNIEWSKI: Yes.

23 BY MR. WISNIEWSKI:

24 Q. Luke, NTSB. So just go through -- you said you're washing
25 dishes. What clothes did you have on? Do you have your work vest

1 on? What did --

2 A. No work vest. Did not have my work vest on because he
3 doesn't -- because, you know, some companies make you wear them,
4 some don't. He doesn't enforce it. If we're on the barges, like
5 getting off of this boat onto something else, even at docks and
6 stuff, we have our work vest on, he makes us. But when it
7 happened, no, sir, I did not have nothing on.

8 Q. So would you have pants on, shorts?

9 A. Pants and --

10 Q. Boots?

11 A. Pants, short-sleeves, and my steel-toes, right there.
12 Because like he's not strict on what we wear. He likes us to wear
13 boats and some sort of pants. He's not like a straight blue
14 jeans, button-up shirt, work shirt, nothing like that.

15 Q. And when you started walking around securing, you said, the
16 fuel shutoffs, did you grab a work vest? Is there one that you
17 had ready to go?

18 A. Oh, whenever we -- because I keep my work vest up here. So
19 we ran back up here to grab the logs and, like I said, I grabbed
20 my book sack because I have my personal items in there.

21 Q. Okay. So when you grabbed your --

22 A. I put on my work vest.

23 Q. You put on your work vest then. All right.

24 A. We all three --

25 Q. I might have missed that.

1 A. We all three had a vest on when we got onto the crew boat.

2 Q. Fantastic. All right.

3 A. I actually -- I mean, if you all need proof, I have a picture
4 on my phone.

5 Q. No -- so I'd be curious, you know, did you take any pictures
6 of when the -- when you got safely onto the work boat, when you
7 were pulling away, you can see the fire?

8 A. Well, you couldn't see the fire at that point, because by the
9 time I took the pictures I presume the fire was smothered by then
10 because it was a couple -- it was probably about 5 minutes after.

11 Q. Okay.

12 A. Something like that. Because like the outside of the boat
13 looked perfectly fine besides daggone near directly under us where
14 our breathers are by the washer and dryer. Right there is the
15 only place you could really -- visually from the outside, is the
16 only place you could tell that it was burnt a little.

17 Q. All right. Yeah, show those to me when -- after we're done
18 the interview. But, okay, and what other items did you look at
19 or -- you know, you went through and gave us a very good detail
20 here, but was there anything else that you looked at, did, that we
21 didn't bring up at this point in time?

22 A. Let's see. Run down, closed the port side vent, shut the
23 fuel off, came up and -- no, sir. Just grabbed my personal
24 belongings, what I could, what I already had together.

25 Q. All right. And at the time you grabbed your personal

1 belongings, you were fine in here? There was no smoke or --

2 A. No smoke.

3 Q. -- anything in here? It was good?

4 A. A little hard to breathe from breathing in all the smoke down
5 there, but --

6 Q. Yeah.

7 A. -- besides that, no, sir, everything was good.

8 Q. Okay. And then just with the shutoff valves again, which
9 ones do you think you closed?

10 A. I know for a fact I cut the two on the starboard side off. I
11 know for a fact.

12 Q. So on the starboard, all right. Did you look or did you
13 double check the port side or --

14 A. Oh, I double checked all of them before we got off.

15 Q. You double checked all of them?

16 A. Yes, and they were all closed.

17 Q. Okay. All right. So you closed the first two -- your first
18 two on the starboard side and then you did the forward or aft one
19 first and they were -- checked that they were closed?

20 A. Yes, sir.

21 Q. Okay. Which order? First the forward one or the aft one,
22 can you remember?

23 A. Well, if you're coming from the stern, I checked the one
24 closest and then got to the one closest to the bow.

25 Q. Okay. The forward one, all right. Good deal. And then you

1 indicated that you didn't use the fire pump or the hose reel off
2 on the starboard side, which is referred to as fire hose 1 --

3 A. Yes, sir.

4 Q. -- on the stern there. Was that just something that the
5 captain never brought up or did you guys -- was there any
6 discussion that you had with the captain, hey, should we use this
7 or no, or --

8 A. Well, by the time we saw that it -- because it got -- it was
9 getting bigger because there was so much oxygen being fed to it
10 from the door being, still being open. Because the wind was
11 blowing hard and the way it was blowing, it was blowing against --
12 like we was course going -- I can't tell you what, like southwest,
13 I can't tell you none of that, but the way we was going the wind
14 was pushing into the door, so it was, you know, constantly feeding
15 the fire.

16 Q. Okay. So your wind was off the stern --

17 A. Uh-huh. Yes, sir.

18 Q. -- blowing onto the vessel. All right. And you said the
19 door was open, though? When did the door hatch finally get
20 secured?

21 A. After he had -- honestly, I can't -- I'm pretty sure it
22 was -- if I remember correctly, it was closed but he opened it to
23 spray in there, if I'm remembering correctly. This might not be
24 100 percent true.

25 Q. Okay.

1 A. But we -- after he had emptied out the fire extinguisher on
2 wheels, then he closed it.

3 Q. He closed it then. All right.

4 A. Because I -- he -- I didn't close that door. He closed it.

5 Q. Okay. That's all I really have unless -- is there anything
6 else you want to share with us regarding this that you'd like
7 to --

8 A. Honestly --

9 Q. -- see from a safety improvement?

10 A. -- I think the Coast Guard should learn when you have a
11 captain with experience, I feel like his word should -- could be
12 taken. Especially because he knows more, he's on the boat, it's
13 literally his boat. He knows his boat, you know, he knows the
14 conditions it was in. Because I read a email that they sent and
15 we was threatened felony -- all three of us were threatened with
16 felony charges if the boat was moved. You know, me personally, I
17 feel like that's kind of ignorant because we know this boat better
18 than the Coast Guard does. Of course, I can't tell you the rules
19 like they can, but I could tell you that the boat was definitely
20 safe enough. Especially in my -- I feel like it was safe enough
21 for us to move it on our own without a support vessel. But
22 especially if we have another boat that was willing to tow us in
23 or put us on their -- help or just push us, I feel like we should
24 have been able to do that the day we had the *Sea Cat* out there. I
25 feel like that'd been the smartest decision.

1 Q. Now were you directly involved with any of the correspondence
2 back to the Coast Guard or --

3 A. No, sir.

4 Q. -- is that something we can talk more with the captain with?

5 A. Um-hum. Because I, like I said, told you all a minute ago, I
6 run the -- well, I don't run the computer, but like he'll tell me
7 like when we're doing -- when I'm -- because after we do -- after
8 every day, I have to fill out a log paper and send it to the
9 company, and then at the end of the job I have to -- he tells me
10 what to put and he'll tell me what our rate was and all that and I
11 have to fill out a invoice, and I send those, but -- and so I do
12 send the emails there. But I don't personally like look at the
13 emails and go through his email, read none of those. But I did
14 happen to see that one because he told me about it and I was like,
15 oh, I want to read that.

16 Q. All right. Appreciate it. Is there anything else you'd like
17 to share?

18 A. No, sir, that's it.

19 MR. WISNIEWSKI: ■ ■

20 ■ ■ Okay. Well, we certainly appreciate you, you know,
21 giving us a detailed account and everything, and very thankful
22 that you're okay.

23 MR. HOLMES: Yes, sir.

24 ■ ■ It could've been much worse.

25 MR. HOLMES: Appreciate it. It could have been.

1 ■ ■ And let me get the time here. We're going to go
2 ahead and conclude the interview. It is 10:50, 22 February 2023.

3 (Whereupon, at 10:50 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 Payton Holmes

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 M
Transcriber