

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD

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Investigation of: *

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FIRE ONBOARD *SPIRIT OF NORFOLK* *

NEAR NORFOLK NAVAL STATION, *

Accident No.: DCA22FM022

VIRGINIA ON JUNE 8, 2022 *

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Interview of: GEORGE ELEY, Mate
Spirit of Norfolk City Cruises

United States Coast Guard
Sector Virginia
4000 Coast Guard Blvd.
Portsmouth, VA 23703

Thursday,
June 9, 2022

APPEARANCES:

MICHAEL KARR, Investigator in Charge
National Transportation Safety Board

DAVID FLAHERTY
National Transportation Safety Board

LT [REDACTED] [REDACTED] Investigator
U.S. Coast Guard

CWO [REDACTED] [REDACTED]
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I N T E R V I E W

(10:25 a.m. Eastern)

1
2
3 LT [REDACTED] All right, it is 10:25 on June 9th. We are here
4 to conduct an investigation regarding a fire on the *Spirit of*
5 *Norfolk*. We'll kind of go around with the introductions and I'll
6 ask you to introduce yourself. I'm Lieutenant [REDACTED] [REDACTED] I'm an
7 investigator with the Coast Guard.

8 MR. KARR: And I'm Mike Karr, I'm the investigator in charge
9 with the National Transportation Safety Board.

10 MR. FLAHERTY: I'm David Flaherty; I'm an investigator with
11 the National Transportation Safety Board.

12 CWO [REDACTED] Chief Warrant Officer [REDACTED] with the Coast
13 Guard investigations here in Sector Virginia.

14 MR. BURTS: Gregory Burts with Phelps Dunbar, here
15 representing Captain Ryan.

16 MR. DENLEY: I'm Eric Denley, in-house counsel for City
17 Cruises.

18 LT [REDACTED] Give your name and your --

19 MR. ELEY: George Eley, mate on the *Spirit of Norfolk*.

20 MR. FLAHERTY: H-e-a-l-y?

21 MR. KARR: H-l-e-y.

22 MR. ELEY: E-l-e-y, sir. E-l-e-y.

23 MR. FLAHERTY: H-e-l-e-y, okay.

24 MR. ELEY: No H.

25 MR. FLAHERTY: Oh, Eley.

1 MR. ELEY: Yeah, just E-l-e-y.

2 MR. FLAHERTY: Oh, okay, thank you.

3 INTERVIEW OF GEORGE ELEY

4 BY LT [REDACTED]

5 Q. All right. So the way it's going to work, we'll ask you some
6 basic questions, I'll ask you to give an account of every -- all
7 the events that happened on that day, starting from, you know,
8 when you boarded the vessel all the way up until the end of the
9 day, basically. But first of all, I'll ask you some basic
10 questions. So I have your name. Can I have your phone number?

11 A. Sure, it is [REDACTED].

12 MR. DENLEY: So when this transcript's published on the
13 Internet, is that redacted?

14 MR. KARR: Yes.

15 MR. FLAHERTY: Yeah, we do a whole redaction process.

16 MR. KARR: Yeah.

17 BY LT [REDACTED]

18 Q. Can I have your address?

19 A. [REDACTED].

20 Q. Is that in [REDACTED]?

21 A. [REDACTED]. Do you need the zip?

22 Q. What's that?

23 A. Do you need the zip code?

24 Q. Sure.

25 A. [REDACTED].

1 Q. And how long have you been with the *Spirit of Norfolk*?

2 A. About one week.

3 Q. How many cruises have you been on with them?

4 A. The last one was my third cruise.

5 Q. What's your experience in the maritime industry prior to
6 that?

7 A. I was a deckhand for McAllister Towing during last summer.
8 And I was a launch operator for WeatherFlow, on and off, over the
9 past two years, occasionally.

10 Q. For WeatherFlow?

11 A. Yeah, I was a -- kind of like contracted to transport weather
12 station, or the guys that worked for the weather company to the
13 various weather stations out on the -- in the harbor.

14 Q. You said you worked as a deckhand on McAllister during the
15 summer, is that kind of like between school or something?

16 A. Yeah, between school.

17 Q. All right. So like I said, starting from when you boarded
18 the vessel kind of through the event and then post-accident.

19 A. Okay, so --

20 Q. What time did you get on board?

21 A. Let me think. I believe the departure time was set for
22 11:00, which would mean I would arrive at the boat at -- I think
23 it was 8:00 a.m., was like the arrival time. The mates have to
24 arrive first, so the mate, assigned mate on the boat, as well as
25 me, would arrive, because I'm new so I'm still going through the

1 training process and so they would still have the actual mate on
2 board and I would be kind of shadowing him around, learning how to
3 do everything. So I would arrive first, along with the mate on
4 the boat.

5 Q. So you arrived around 8:00 a.m., you said. Who was the mate
6 that you arrived with?

7 A. That was Bob. That was my first time working with Bob.

8 Q. Okay. All right, so you arrive at 8:00 a.m. What comes
9 next?

10 A. Well, I would go up to the wheelhouse with Bob and we start
11 the -- I guess the preparations for the cruise, we'd go down to
12 the engine room and test the generators and get the generators
13 going and the -- you know, check all the systems and get the air
14 conditioning running and cold before the crew arrives, so the
15 boat's nice and cool for the crews.

16 LT [REDACTED] I'm sorry. Do any of you all want to take up a
17 question? I'll be right back.

18 BY MR. KARR:

19 Q. So if you would, first, you know, I'm interested in having a
20 picture painted based on what you actually did, you know, I'd like
21 you to be able to describe everything that you did. So
22 personally, you know, pick up, describe what you observed, what
23 you may have done in the engine room and then what -- you know,
24 tell me what you did after you left the engine room and, you know,
25 just walk me through.

1 A. Just during the initial checks, when we -- shortly after we
2 arrived on the ship?

3 Q. Yes.

4 A. Or, I guess, the pre-cruise setup process. So we're on the
5 boat, mainly I'm just following -- following Bob around like a
6 lost puppy the whole time because he was -- he had been on the
7 boat for a long time, so he knew everything there was to the boat.
8 So he was showing me a lot of things that I hadn't seen yet and he
9 was making sure he was telling me the proper correct way to do
10 everything, from his own experience, I guess.

11 So we get on the boat, we would go to the wheelhouse, get all
12 our radio gear so -- well, actually, no, we wouldn't do that yet,
13 we'd wait until we get our uniforms ready before the cruise. But
14 as we would be going around doing the engine checks, the other --
15 some of the other of the marine crew would be arriving, like the
16 deckhands, and they would start the cleaning process and so -- let
17 me think. We'd go in the engine room.

18 Let's see, we would open the -- yeah, we would open the water
19 valves for the air conditioning systems and we'd -- I think we
20 would test run the generators. The ship would still be on shore
21 power at the time, so I think it would be -- I don't recall if we
22 left the generator running, but I believe, I believe we shut it
23 off because we were still connected to shore power, so there was
24 no reason to leave it and running, but I think we would test run
25 the generator is what we did and we would not -- we wouldn't start

1 the main engines and we -- we would, you know, go through the
2 engine room with the -- just to make sure everything was in order.
3 The main focus of the pre-cruise stuff is the air conditioning
4 systems, making sure that those are properly running, no issues
5 with them, because we need to get the ship as cool as we can
6 before the guests board because at that point it would be too late
7 to cool the ship down properly if everybody's on board running
8 around generating heat. So we would also perhaps take on
9 additional fresh water for the -- the water tank for all, like,
10 for the sinks and water stuff, we would top off the water tanks
11 and then --

12 Q. Did you do that that morning?

13 A. I did not do that that morning. Every time I've been on the
14 boat, I would also -- because I was brand new, I would also be
15 following some of the deckhands around occasionally. So if Bob
16 was checking with somebody on something that was like, you know,
17 some broken part or something, he would be having a conversation
18 with somebody regarding something and I could then, you know,
19 follow a deckhand around and then like the senior deckhand could
20 show me some other things, because as a mate, typically people
21 would start on the boat as a deckhand and because I was starting
22 on the boat as a mate, I -- I had catching up to do in terms of my
23 familiarity with the boat and the senior deckhands were really
24 helpful in like, you know -- because the mate's in charge of
25 coordinating the deckhands and in order to do that, I need to

1 understand what the deckhands' duties are and how they do them
2 exactly, so I know how to make sure that they're doing them
3 correctly. And so I was -- I had conversed a lot with Jeremiah,
4 who was telling me, you know, all the ins and outs of cleaning the
5 boat and not just him, you know, the other deckhands, as well,
6 were -- I was talking with them on, you know, the cleaning and
7 doing the floors and things like that.

8 BY LT [REDACTED]

9 Q. So is it safe to say that every time you've -- you know,
10 you've been with the company a week, every time you've been on
11 board the vessel kind of working, you've been in kind of a
12 learning mode, training?

13 A. Yeah, very much a learning mode.

14 Q. Training mode?

15 A. Yeah.

16 Q. Whether that be what the deckhands do or what's in the other
17 positions to do?

18 A. Yeah, yeah, and because I -- this was my first time ever
19 working on like a passenger vessel of some kind. I mean, I worked
20 on the tug, but that's a totally different atmosphere on that
21 thing and, you know, there were different standards and procedures
22 and things of that nature. And so we -- that day, we took on
23 fuel. The fuel truck was running a little on the late side, so I
24 recall -- no, I had not put my uniform on while they were doing
25 the process for the fuel and typically, we would put our uniforms

1 on like 30 -- we would want to make sure everybody's standing
2 outside waiting for guests before the official boarding time in
3 case there was people that arrived early, so you want to get your
4 uniform on to be outside, you know, waiting for everybody and, you
5 know, get the gangways ready and things like that.

6 And so I had not put my uniform on because I needed to -- Bob
7 was showing me the fueling process, but once it got going, it was
8 going to take some time to fuel up the boat, so Bob continued --
9 Bob left me at the fuel dock to continue doing Bob things and that
10 was the first time I had been on the boat while we were taking
11 fuel and so I was sitting there monitoring everything, making
12 sure, you know, there was no leaks or nothing, nothing happened,
13 basically, keeping an eye on the fuel going in the boat.

14 So I was just sitting right next to the fuel truck watching
15 the hose during the fueling process and because of that, I
16 couldn't put my uniform on. So everybody else had their uniforms
17 on and so at the last second I had to -- when the fuel was done,
18 at the last second I had to go run quickly and put my uniform on.

19 Q. Just back up a little bit. The position that you were kind
20 of training for was to be referred to as a mate on board?

21 A. Yes.

22 Q. But you're not a licensed mate, are you?

23 A. I have my hundred-ton master's license.

24 Q. Okay.

25 A. So --

1 Q. You are.

2 A. Well, while I have the license to operate as one on that
3 boat, I do not have the experience to actually operate as one on
4 the boat --

5 Q. Got it.

6 A. -- because --

7 Q. You're trained.

8 A. Yeah, and I would only want to even probably be a mate if I
9 knew absolutely every nook and cranny of the boat like the back of
10 my hand because I wouldn't have a second mate to help me out if I
11 was the only one on the boat. So I was very -- I was very, I was
12 very interested and focused on training and learning as much as I
13 could while on the boat.

14 BY MR. KARR:

15 Q. When you left the -- so you left the engine room, so before
16 you were fueling the vessel, you'd been in the engine room and you
17 left it.

18 A. Yes.

19 Q. So when you left the engine room, from what you told us, I
20 think the only thing that was running was the AC.

21 A. Yes, the AC is not controlled from the engine room, but the
22 water valves for the -- that supply the air conditioning units are
23 controlled from the engine room on the other side and so you would
24 need to go in there and make sure that all the water valves were
25 on so you don't overheat any of the AC units when they turn them

1 on, on the thermostats and so -- and depending on the size of the
2 cruise you may not have all the AC -- all the ACs running, so you
3 wouldn't need to open all of the water for the ACs, but I can't
4 remember if we had all of them or only half of them running
5 because it was only a -- it was only a single-day cruise. So
6 because of the amount of people that were coming on the boat, we
7 had no reason to run all of the ACs, although we may have had all
8 the ACs running, I don't remember specifically how many units we
9 had going on.

10 Q. And I'll take you to the port engine. When you did your
11 rounds of the port engine with Bob, can you recall any specific
12 comments and training Bob gave you on the port engine?

13 A. I mean, when you first arrive in the morning, you check the
14 oil and everything, so he was showing me, you know, where the
15 dipsticks are in the engines. And the other people who had -- the
16 other mates that I had been with the previous couple cruises had
17 also done the same thing, but I was more than happy to see the
18 process again in case, you know, somebody does it different or
19 there's like a better way to do it or anything.

20 So he was showing me, you know, the proper way to check all
21 the engine's oil and, you know, the generator's oil and going
22 through the -- I guess the sort of pre-cruise checklist. We
23 didn't test run any of the engines or anything. We may have
24 tested the generator, but if we did test it, we would've shut it
25 off shortly afterwards because we were still on shore power.

1 Q. And when you -- again, I'm looking through what you actually
2 did or what you actually observed, so can you recall how you, you
3 know, went around the port engine? Did you completely go around
4 it or --

5 A. Actually, yes, I believe I did actually walk around the port
6 engine, but I saw nothing, nothing I can remember that was any
7 different from the previous cruises.

8 Q. All right.

9 A. Nothing stood out, I guess.

10 Q. And as far as in your mind, what you're looking at when
11 you're looking at it, can you recall and tell us what you were --
12 you know, what you -- when you looked at the engine, what you were
13 looking for?

14 A. Well, I was looking -- like before the cruise, since nothing
15 had been running for a while overnight, then I was mainly looking
16 to see if, you know, there's any leaks or anything that had like
17 dripping or anything. Being on a tugboat, it was a lot leakier
18 and drippier than the *Spirit*, so the -- I was looking for, you
19 know, anything like oil dripping on the floor or anything where I
20 would need to put an oil rag down, but everything just seemed
21 totally in order during the whole pre-cruise engine room things.

22 MR. DENLEY: So just to be clear, your comment about the
23 condition of the engine room, the *Spirit of Norfolk* was cleaner or
24 was more in order than other vessels that you've worked on?

25 MR. ELEY: Well, it was significantly nicer than the tug I

1 had worked on and the tug's a lot older than the *Spirit*, but it's
2 also a tug, so it's generally going to be a lot rougher on the
3 inside. But I was very impressed with the -- the thoroughness of
4 the engine checks. I mean the engine checks, now I'm referring to
5 the -- like during the cruise, like the main engine room checks
6 that you would do regularly, I was pretty -- a little intimidated
7 at first by how in depth they are or were, but the -- it was a lot
8 more detailed and, I guess, official from the engine checks that I
9 -- that I had while on the tug.

10 MR. DENLEY: Thank you.

11 BY LT [REDACTED]

12 Q. Can you walk us through what those engine checks looked like
13 and --

14 A. Oh, sure.

15 Q. -- did you need anything to do them?

16 A. Sure. I guess I'll skip to while we were on the cruise.
17 Once you start up the main engines and get everything running for
18 the actual cruise, get ready to board, then we've got the -- the
19 -- I completely lost my train of thought.

20 Q. I think you were going to talk about while the vessel's under
21 way on a cruise.

22 A. Right.

23 Q. You were going to talk about the engine checks.

24 A. Yeah, and I think I forgot to mention the bow thruster engine
25 is also one of the engines that we checked during the pre-cruise

1 stuff. But as far as the main engine room is concerned, the
2 typical engine check, we would -- you would walk in the engine
3 room door, you always close the door behind you whenever you're in
4 the engine room and you would -- there is a clipboard on the right
5 just as you walked in and it had all of the engine -- it was like
6 the engine checklist or engine check board, and you take that and
7 you -- you'd have all of the -- all of the checkable items in the
8 engine room listed on this sheet with an empty table for filling
9 in numbers and data on what it is.

10 And so each column was a 30-minute slot, so you'd write down
11 the times for the cruise and say, you know, like 1400 to 1430,
12 1500 and, you know -- and then you'd go down again as you went
13 back into the engine room and filled in all the data. So you'd
14 check the -- first you'd go in and you'd check the
15 -- let's see, let me think. Okay, you check the portside
16 generator would be the first thing, you know, like coolant
17 temperature, RPMs, you check the expansion tanks on it and make
18 sure those were full with the indicators that you have on there.

19 Then you'd go to the electrical panel in the middle and you
20 check the -- the frequency, the amps and the volts and make sure
21 all that -- because the sheet also lists the appropriate range for
22 the values so you would have a reference if something was out of
23 place or wrong. And then after that, from that you would move to
24 -- from the electrical panel, which was in the center, you'd move
25 then to the portside engine and check the port engine and since

1 the engine at that point would be running, you would -- you would
2 be -- you wouldn't be checking the oil, but you would be going to
3 the -- they're a little, like, fancier, they're like computer
4 controlled, like scanning those, and you go there and you'd look
5 on the screen and it would tell you all the information on the
6 engine, so you would put down -- the same as the generator, you'd
7 put down RPMs, coolant temperature, the current throttle input
8 from the bridge you can see on the screen, and as well as like
9 engine hours and things, you'd be jotting those down, as well.

10 And then you'd go over to the starboard engine and repeat the
11 process, then check the air tank, check the steering box and then
12 go around and check all the AC, the AC lines, and make sure that
13 the AC pipes that are the coolant or the water, to make sure that
14 they're cold, because if they weren't, then that would suggest the
15 AC either was not turned on or it was not working properly.

16 Q. Okay. How long does one of those typical rounds take you?

17 A. I mean, I'd say probably five minutes. I didn't keep track
18 of the time while I was down there, but I'd say initially it took
19 a little longer because, I mean, I'd be down there with the mate,
20 so they'd be also showing me like certain things, so it would take
21 longer than if they were just going through with the sheet and
22 they already knew everything to do, but I'd say probably five
23 minutes.

24 Q. Okay. All right, so one of the things that's kind of helpful
25 to us is to build a timeline. So I'm going to kind of work with

1 you to kind of build a timeline from when you got there to exactly
2 kind of what happened after that.

3 A. Okay.

4 Q. So I think you said that you arrived around 8:00.

5 A. Yes, and another thing is this, one day I happened to forget
6 my watch --

7 Q. Okay.

8 A. -- into my bag, so -- and that was -- that was pretty
9 annoying that I didn't have that on me because it's very useful to
10 know what time it is without having to -- you know, like without
11 your phone, because that doesn't look good just staring at your
12 phone even for a second because, you know, it looks like you don't
13 really care what's going on. But yeah, so we arrived at, I guess,
14 8:00. Yeah, actually yes, it was 8:00 because the cruise had been
15 moved up or moved earlier an hour.

16 Q. Okay.

17 A. The previous evening I had gotten notified by the captain
18 that the cruise had been pushed, pushed earlier by one hour, which
19 meant that they've gone from like a 12:00 to 2:00 to an 11:00 to
20 1:00. And so because of that, the arrival time for all the crew
21 would also be pushed earlier, so instead of arriving at 9:00,
22 which is what the original plan was, we arrived at 8 o'clock.

23 Q. Okay, no problem. And we know that the boat got under way
24 around 11:00.

25 A. Yeah.

1 Q. So between 8:00 and 11:00, can you give me some general time
2 stamps on the things that you were doing? So right after you got
3 there, what were you doing?

4 A. Right after I got there, I was -- let's see, I was -- let me
5 think. I would clock in at the stern and then get with Bob and,
6 you know, we would greet anybody that was already on the boat, you
7 know, and be polite and stuff. The first main thing we would do
8 after you drop your stuff off in the wheelhouse, like whatever,
9 your clothes and bag and all that, you put it up there and then I
10 think the first thing we did was go around and turn the AC units
11 on.

12 Q. Okay. And how long did that take you? Rough estimate, it
13 doesn't have to be --

14 A. Maybe 10 minutes.

15 Q. Ten minutes.

16 A. Ten, fifteen minutes, just because, you know, we may have
17 stopped and like, you know, talked with another member of the crew
18 for a couple minutes during the checks or talked to the restaurant
19 manager, that kind of thing.

20 Q. Okay.

21 A. But I would say it probably took about 15 minutes.

22 Q. Okay. So let's say you got there around 8:00 and by around
23 8:20 you're done doing AC checks.

24 A. Yeah.

25 Q. Is that right?

1 A. The ACs have been problematic recently with like, for some
2 reason it's warm on this deck, figure out what it is and the AC is
3 like not blowing as cold as it should be or something like that
4 and so -- but that day, all of them seemed to be working perfectly
5 fine and we would go around and check all the AC units because you
6 had to manually -- you had to manually activate each individual
7 thermostat --

8 Q. Okay.

9 A. -- which are in various places around the ship, in order to
10 turn them on. And then when it's time to get under way, they go
11 to like a different system that is all like centralized or
12 something like that and so you'd like have to like turn them on
13 first. It was something I was still in the process of learning.

14 Q. Okay. Yeah, no problem.

15 A. Yeah, we did the AC and we would -- he was walking me around
16 showing me like, you know, following behind the deckhands and, you
17 know, saying, you know, like things, like checking the bathrooms'
18 things or, you know, everything that the deckhands were doing,
19 they were doing, make sure that they were doing it correctly and
20 checking the -- the -- like I said, you'd go ahead and make sure
21 that whatever the deckhands had been doing was done properly.

22 Q. So would you characterize, between 8:00 and 11:00, pre-
23 underway normal checks?

24 A. Yeah.

25 Q. And that included things like making sure cleaning was done,

1 turning the AC on and doing your primary engine checks, is that
2 right?

3 A. Yeah, yeah. It would be -- because at some point we would
4 switch power, which would be when you're disconnecting from shore
5 power and you start up the generators, run the generators, then
6 you go to the breaker and shut everything down, switch it over to
7 generator power and then turn everything back on.

8 Q. Okay.

9 A. And I don't -- I can't recall when we switched power, but I
10 would -- previously it had been like an hour and a half before the
11 cruise or something like that.

12 Q. Okay, the same this time, roughly?

13 A. Yes, roughly, but I can't remember specifically when we
14 switched power. The fuel truck was there, as well, and because I
15 was sitting there watching the fuel, I wasn't following Bob around
16 on the boat at that time. And so I was probably watching fuel for
17 like 45 minutes, I think we took on 2,300 gallons.

18 Q. And was that before or after the boat was switched from shore
19 power to generator power?

20 A. I cannot remember. Actually, wait, I remember the engines
21 were started while I was out there because it was very quiet and
22 then it got much louder when the -- because I was sitting right by
23 the, I think, the intake for the engine, so the -- on the port
24 side where the fuel thing is.

25 Q. Okay. How long before you got under way did the fuel stop?

1 A. I was thinking that they were just going to push the fuel
2 until later because it was getting -- it was getting, you know,
3 worryingly close to when guests might be arriving and we didn't
4 want to have a big fuel truck sitting there with a refueling
5 operation going on, but we were able to fuel up and we were ready
6 at, I guess, like 10 o'clock or 10:30 for the -- for like the
7 actual, like, pre-boarding preparations for the guests.

8 Q. So would it be fair to say the fueling took place between
9 9:30 to 10:00, 10:15?

10 A. Somewhere around there. I believe it was done before --
11 yeah, we didn't have a gangway out or anything, so it would
12 probably be like somewhere around 10:30 would be the fueling
13 operation.

14 Q. When it was done?

15 A. Yes, but that's a guess because --

16 Q. Okay.

17 A. -- I didn't have my watch.

18 Q. No problem. All right. So then the passengers, what time
19 did the passengers start boarding?

20 A. Passengers, we would want to have the boat completely ready
21 for passengers 30 minutes before the cruise actually started, so
22 that would be -- that would be 10:30, so --

23 Q. And what time do the passengers show up?

24 A. They would kind of start trickling in onto the pier around 11
25 o'clock, like around -- or not around 11 o'clock, like before 11

1 o'clock because, you know, 11 o'clock was the set departure time,
2 so people would be arriving earlier.

3 Q. Okay. Between 10:30 and 11:00 passengers arrive?

4 A. Yeah. And I think the fuel truck was probably -- probably
5 done earlier than that. It might've been like 10 o'clock or
6 something like that because that was done and gone by the time we
7 did all the passenger stuff --

8 Q. Okay.

9 A. -- and getting ready.

10 Q. All right. So 11 o'clock you guys leave the dock, you're
11 under way.

12 A. Well, actually not 11 o'clock because two people were late,
13 so we ended up being --

14 Q. To clarify, these were guests?

15 A. Yes. Yeah, so there were two guests and we'd been waiting on
16 the guests and there was like -- or wait, hold on. Now I'm
17 thinking, I might be -- I might be confusing the two people being
18 late with another cruise. Okay, yeah, I was. Okay, so that was
19 not this cruise. This cruise, we left pretty much on time, I
20 believe, and the -- yeah. And so the -- both groups of students
21 and their parents arrived and we would get them on the boat, take
22 a cute picture on the gangway by the photo -- I forgot, I think
23 it's Photogenic was the photo people that would take pictures, and
24 so they would take all the cute pictures on the gangway and then
25 get them on board and --

1 Q. All right. And what was your first responsibility after the
2 vessel was under way, what were you doing?

3 A. Let me think. We get on board and make sure everything's --
4 everything's good. I think I got on and -- well, the mates are
5 directly involved in the cast-off process, the lines, so while I
6 had done the -- they take all of the lines off the boat first and
7 -- except for the spring line, so he just puts it in gear forwards
8 and holds it against the dock and then when it's time to leave, he
9 just takes the power and backs up and then you can take the spring
10 line and hook it on this hook that's on the dock.

11 Q. What were you doing, though?

12 A. That, I was basically -- I threw over the -- the -- I helped
13 do the bow lines, I helped cast off with the bow lines and they
14 have these big long tag lines on, so you kind of pass out the tag
15 line and the deckhands will be on the boat and the mates will be
16 on the dock.

17 And so the deckhands will pull in the docking line and then
18 when the docking line's all the way up on the boat, then you kind
19 of toss over the tag line and rinse and repeat for the second bow
20 line and then you go back and do the stern line, which works
21 similarly, and then -- then you get ready to remove the gangway
22 from the -- from the mid-ship, like, main boarding area and then
23 once that's off, then you hop on and you pull out of the dock and
24 as you do that, you take the spring line off --

25 Q. Okay.

1 A. -- of the mid-ship.

2 Q. All right, so you're all under way and lines are back. What
3 was your first -- from what we understand, you have watch
4 positions, right? Something to that nature?

5 A. Yeah. So I would -- it would still be the same, the same
6 just for me personally, just because I would be following Bob
7 around, but the --

8 Q. Were you following Bob throughout the whole cruise?

9 A. For the most part. Mainly pre-cruise I was -- he was showing
10 me a lot of specific things. During the cruise, Bob would be
11 doing Bob things, like he would be going around and, like,
12 checking on something somewhere or doing that sort of thing and I
13 would either be with him or I would be up in the wheelhouse with
14 the captain watching what he was doing.

15 Q. Okay. Were you on watch at all on the third deck during the
16 cruise?

17 A. Yes.

18 Q. Okay, what time was that around?

19 A. That was -- let's see, let me think. So I had gone -- this
20 is while we're approaching the Navy base.

21 Q. Okay.

22 A. I had been -- let's see, I was in the wheelhouse and -- or
23 not actually, I had just gotten into the wheelhouse and somebody
24 knocked on the door and it was this mother and her kid who I
25 didn't know, but they had talked with the captain previously

1 because the kid wanted to see the wheelhouse. And so I almost
2 closed the door on the poor guy, but then the captain said oh, no,
3 no, let him in, so the -- because I thought they had just walked
4 around confused, not knowing which door was the exit door in the
5 -- like to get out on the third deck where all the other kids
6 were, but -- so we let him in and, you know, that was when the
7 *Victory Rover* was about to pass us because he was like doing --
8 like looking at things and he wasn't touching anything, he was
9 pretty timid about it, but the --

10 Q. Who was timid?

11 A. The little kid. He was one of the -- he was one of the
12 younger kids, like the kindergarteners.

13 Q. Um-hum.

14 A. So he thought it was pretty cool and the captain let him hit
15 the horn and things like that. Then the *Victory Rover* was passing
16 and I went over and I opened the window and let him look out at
17 the *Victory Rover* as it passed by us because they were kind of
18 slowly passing us.

19 And then after that, then I left the wheelhouse, walked
20 outside on the third deck where Jeremiah was out standing watch on
21 the third deck, looking at all of them and I went and stood next
22 to him, he was over by the foosball table where all the kids were
23 and, you know, we kind of talked about how -- I kind of joked with
24 him a little bit about how much he must be enjoying sitting there
25 next to all the screeching children, because they were all going

1 nuts on the foosball table just like doing -- just doing, you
2 know, little kid -- little kids having fun. But he has to make
3 sure whatever they're doing was safely, although -- then after
4 that, I go back in the wheelhouse for a little bit and then I come
5 back out and Jeremiah had moved to the stern, so I --

6 Q. On the third deck?

7 A. Yeah, on the third deck. The majority, like the parents,
8 were in the chairs, but the kids were all around the foosball
9 table because that was the cool thing to play with, I guess, and
10 so -- so I walked back there and was talking with him and it was
11 when I was talking with him that then the issue happened.

12 Q. Okay.

13 A. So I was talking to him, you know, just briefly, just when we
14 were kind of just sitting there, you know, just watching everybody
15 and things like that and he had relieved -- I think he had
16 relieved some of the other people so they could go like get lunch
17 and so the -- so I was kind of talking with him and we could hear
18 all this bleeping noise on the radio.

19 For some reason I don't get it, but like when you're on third
20 deck specifically and somebody is in like, for instance, the
21 galley was communicating with you, sometimes you wouldn't hear the
22 audio but you would hear like the bleep on the radio, that they
23 were talking. And so we heard that a bunch of times and then we
24 started talking about that and how annoying that was, because like
25 you could hear it happen fine because he's on the same deck as

1 you, but then when, for some -- like I don't understand the issue
2 with that, but the -- we were talking about like the -- how, like,
3 weird it is that you couldn't hear some, you could hear one person
4 but you couldn't hear another person or something like that and
5 that was when we noticed the smoke coming up off the starboard
6 side of the ship.

7 Q. And at this point you're still on the stern of the third
8 deck?

9 A. Yeah, we were still -- we were sitting there, standing right
10 at the right side of the top stairs, just kind of in the center of
11 the boat, standing there next to each other talking and then that
12 was when we started seeing the faint like light kind of smoke come
13 up from the starboard side, because initially I had -- I thought
14 it was steam because I had been told of a -- of a coolant issue
15 they had previously and I think it was either -- it was like a
16 month maybe, maybe two months previously, to where there was some
17 kind of coolant leak or something on the -- on either an engine or
18 a generator or something like that and they had -- it made a lot
19 of steam and I remember them talking about how some of the guests
20 were worried that it was smoke, but it ended up actually being
21 just steam because like there was a coolant line leaking or there
22 was a coolant pump issue of some kind or something like that. So
23 my initial thought is oh, that must be steam and the same problem
24 must be happening again, but then it turned darker and you could
25 smell it and it was definitely smoke coming out of the starboard

1 side, like --

2 Q. About how long did it take for the smoke to turn from kind of
3 the -- you called it, you know, kind of lighter --

4 A. It was much lighter, it was --

5 Q. How long did it take to turn from that lighter to the darker
6 that you just talked about?

7 A. While the smoke was coming out of the starboard side, like it
8 was like you would get a little like, like -- because it was all
9 like moving, so you would see a little, a little gray in the smoke
10 and you'd maybe see a little more and then it would like -- but
11 for the most part, when I was coming on the starboard side, it
12 started off very light, like it may -- it looked like it was steam
13 or something, but -- and then it got darker and --

14 Q. How long?

15 A. That was within --

16 Q. My question was how long did it take to go --

17 A. -- 60 seconds.

18 Q. Okay.

19 A. Like it was within a minute it had gone from light in --
20 light to a darker.

21 LT [REDACTED] Thanks.

22 BY MR. FLAHERTY:

23 Q. What did it smell like?

24 A. I don't know, I've never -- I don't recall ever smelling that
25 smell before.

1 Q. But it did have a different smell to it?

2 A. Yeah, it wasn't like -- it wasn't a super-strong smell, like
3 it didn't immediately make you like, like jump away or anything,
4 like it didn't hurt your nose, really, but you know, if you
5 breathed it in, I mean, you'd be coughing but it wasn't a -- it
6 wasn't like camp fire smoke or anything like that.

7 Q. This is like when it was light or --

8 A. Well, originally it was -- I guess it wasn't really thick
9 enough to like -- like cause like problems, mainly because the
10 wind was blowing, I think the wind was blowing towards the Navy
11 base, so it was getting blown away from the ship when it was on
12 the starboard side, but then --

13 Q. I'm sorry. When you saw the smoke, was it the port or the
14 starboard side?

15 A. It was the starboard, initially.

16 Q. Okay.

17 A. The starboard side is where I first noticed it because I was
18 looking, talking to Jeremiah, you know, I was facing the Navy base
19 and that's when we could see like the faint-like smoke start
20 coming up on the starboard side. And so I thought it was --

21 Q. Is that before or after the vessel had turned around?

22 A. The vessel never really turned around, at all.

23 Q. I think that would be the port side.

24 A. Like we were -- while I had poked my head in the wheelhouse,
25 the *Victory Rover* was on the starboard side ahead and they were

1 going, they were going really slow because they were doing like
2 the Navy base, like talking about the Navy base or something like
3 that, like doing the tour or whatever and the -- so the captain
4 had mentioned that he wasn't going to -- I asked about it and he
5 said he wasn't going to pass them because we were about to turn
6 around anyways.

7 And so he was kind of -- it seemed like the ship was kind of
8 like coasting or slowing down and that's -- after that's when I
9 walked out to the deck and was talking to Jeremiah about it and we
10 just didn't -- we didn't really go anywhere, like the ship didn't
11 -- the ship hadn't really turned around yet, we were just kind of
12 sitting there going slowly and then that's when we saw the smoke
13 start coming up, before the ship had actually turned around.

14 Q. If you could, the smell of the smoke, what would you
15 associate it with?

16 A. It didn't smell like a camp fire or anything, like it didn't
17 like -- like it wasn't like really like hurting your eyes a lot,
18 initially at least, but it smelled like -- like almost like, like
19 oily or like some -- it wasn't like burning rubber or plastic or
20 anything that makes a really nasty smell. It didn't smell good,
21 but it didn't smell like, you know, like -- like something really
22 like -- like it didn't smell like something like really bad or
23 anything, but it smelled like -- I mean, it didn't smell like
24 diesel fuel, but it smelled like, like an oily, fuel-ly sort of
25 industrial kind of smell.

1 Q. Is that smell you're describing while the smoke was still
2 visibly light, lighter in color?

3 A. I didn't really -- I don't remember if it smelled any
4 different when it was light because, I mean, it was kind of --
5 some of it was coming on the deck, some of it was kind of spilling
6 over onto the deck, but most of it was getting blown towards the
7 Navy base, I think that was the direction the wind was blowing,
8 but the -- I don't recall the smell ever changing to something
9 different.

10 It may have had that smell and it was just kind of fainter,
11 because it was only later you could really smell it, but the --
12 after it had started coming up off the starboard side is when it
13 suddenly started coming up on the port side and at some point
14 after that, Jeremiah told me to keep an eye on the guests up on
15 the top deck and he went down to -- or he went -- yeah, he went
16 forward to --

17 Q. If you could put an X where you were located when you first
18 saw the smoke?

19 A. Sure. Let's see. Okay. I'm looking here. So that's the
20 second deck.

21 Q. Yeah, so you were on the third deck, so it was above --

22 A. So the third deck was above me, so assuming this is the third
23 deck --

24 Q. Yeah, I think that's the second deck. Yeah, that's the
25 second deck, so --

1 A. Okay, is there --

2 MR. FLAHERTY: We don't have one with the pilot?

3 (Off microphone conversation.)

4 MR. FLAHERTY: All right, we'll see if we can get one that
5 has the appropriate --

6 MR. ELEY: Okay.

7 MR. FLAHERTY: Sorry about that.

8 MR. ELEY: No problem.

9 BY LT [REDACTED]

10 Q. So you said Jeremiah left the third deck and where did you go
11 to?

12 A. Well, he went forward to talk to the captain about what was
13 going on.

14 Q. Okay.

15 A. I can't recall the radio chatter on the radio at the time,
16 you know, I was kind of focused, I was focused mainly on the
17 guests. I mean, I still had my radio and the radio was still on
18 and -- but I can't remember what was said on the radio or what the
19 captain said on the radio or anything like that, but the -- we
20 started like putting the fire like -- like a response through, so
21 we would -- we hadn't -- I hadn't yet been through one of the
22 proper fire drills, we had -- the previous cruise I had been on
23 two days previously, we had a talk about fire, about like the fire
24 like procedure, like emergency procedures and things like that
25 while we were sitting in the wheelhouse talking about that, but I

1 hadn't been through like a proper fire drill yet, we just hadn't
2 had one yet. So I wasn't a hundred percent familiar with the
3 actual, like, procedures on what to do and things like that, so --
4 which I believe is the reason why, one of the reasons why Jeremiah
5 wanted me to stay up and do traffic control on the guests.

6 And one of the reasons I stayed up there is because I -- they
7 knew what to -- everybody else knew what to do already and I -- as
8 far as like, you know, where like the fuel shutoffs are and things
9 like that. And so I stayed up on the third deck with the guests,
10 primarily focusing on that while everybody else was mainly -- was
11 doing whatever they were doing to the fire-related stuff.

12 Q. Okay. Did you ever do an engine check while you were under
13 way?

14 A. Yes.

15 Q. Around when was that or how long after you --

16 A. Yeah, that was -- let's see, I don't -- I can't remember the
17 amount of engine checks we did.

18 Q. Does the engine check, while under way, look similar to the
19 pre-underway check or is it different?

20 A. The check I described in detail was the check you would do
21 while the ship's under way.

22 Q. Okay.

23 A. Because you wouldn't really need to check the engines other
24 than just looking at them to make sure nothing was wrong if they
25 weren't running.

1 Q. Okay. Did you participate in an engine check while under way
2 on the cruise --

3 A. Yes.

4 Q. -- that you're describing now? At a time before the incident
5 happened?

6 A. Yes.

7 Q. Okay, what was the condition of the engine room when you did
8 that engine check?

9 A. Perfect.

10 Q. Okay.

11 A. Jeremiah and I -- Jeremiah took me down to do the engine
12 check, so the two of us were down there and I believe that was --
13 we were pretty much the last people in the engine room before the
14 incident happened.

15 Q. Okay.

16 A. And so we went down there, I don't remember what Bob was
17 doing, but Jeremiah came down to do the engine check with me and
18 this was like 11:30.

19 Q. Okay. How often do you do underway engine checks?

20 A. Every 30 minutes.

21 Q. Okay.

22 A. Until we end the cruise.

23 Q. Okay.

24 A. And so during -- while the cruise is ongoing, you do an
25 engine check when you leave and then every 30 minutes during the

1 cruise you go and do additional engine checks. And so --

2 Q. And you didn't notice anything out of the ordinary?

3 A. No. And I was looking for things out of the ordinary, as
4 well, because I had heard of the issues, so that -- or the issue
5 like with the coolant sort of things, so I was looking for any
6 steam or any leaks or anything like that. Plus, I was new and I
7 didn't want to take any chances, so I was like looking all around
8 for any issues at all. But Jeremiah was there with me and he was
9 making sure I was doing everything right. I was doing the actual
10 engine checks and Jeremiah was following behind my back making
11 sure I was doing everything properly.

12 Q. Okay.

13 A. Because I had been through -- I had been shown previously
14 like the actual proper procedure to do everything and things like
15 that, and so I was able to go through and do the actual engine
16 check, but Jeremiah was actually making sure I was doing it
17 properly.

18 Q. I got it.

19 A. Accurately.

20 Q. Were you involved in any of the firefighting discussion or
21 talk, laying out any hoses, picking up an extinguisher or anything
22 like that?

23 A. Yeah. When I was being shown around the boat --

24 MR. DENLEY: Are you talking about the incident or are you
25 talking about --

1 LT [REDACTED] Yeah, the incident, sorry. Yeah.

2 MR. DENLEY: Can you maybe clarify the question?

3 LT [REDACTED] Yeah, sure.

4 BY LT [REDACTED]

5 Q. So after the radio chatter and Jeremiah left the third deck
6 area where you were located after you saw the smoke, were you
7 involved in -- did you pick up an extinguisher or did you see
8 somebody else pick up an extinguisher?

9 A. No. There is a fire hose on the third deck. We would use it
10 to -- but it's not -- I don't -- I don't believe it is connected
11 to the fire suppression system, like at the fire pump or anything.
12 It's connected to the -- I know it is connected to the old lube
13 oil port down where the fuel and water ports are and although it
14 says lube oil, it's really a pipe that goes up to the third deck
15 which you can use for hosing the boat off and things like that.

16 The new engines don't have like a big lube oil tank or
17 anything, so I think that was repurposed for the use of hosing the
18 boat down and things like that. I don't know if it is connected,
19 though, to the fire system at all, but I do not think.

20 BY MR. FLAHERTY:

21 Q. So you saw the fire, you saw the smoke. What did you do,
22 what was your evacuation, how did you participate in the
23 evacuation?

24 A. Okay. Well, after the smoke had initially come from the
25 engine room exhaust fan, because the intake is on the port side,

1 the output of the air is on the starboard side, so initially the
2 starboard side is where the smoke was seen, where it originally
3 came out of, and then like a minute or maybe after that, then all
4 the smoke started coming out of the port side, which I believe was
5 when the captain shut the ventilation system off, because without
6 the fan to push the air in, the smoke would go to the closest, I
7 guess, available exit.

8 So the smoke was significantly thicker coming out of the port
9 side than it had been initially from when it started on the
10 starboard side and it was much darker gray smoke coming out of the
11 portside intake vent and after -- during the next few minutes,
12 then flames were also visible coming out of the portside intake,
13 as well as the smoke.

14 Q. And so when you saw the smoke the first time coming out of
15 the starboard side, did you or the other person you were with --
16 was it Jeremiah?

17 A. Yes.

18 Q. Did you guys sound the alarm or how did the vessel find out
19 that there was an emergency?

20 A. The captain had seen a smoke alarm of some kind in the engine
21 room.

22 Q. And that was prior to you seeing the smoke?

23 A. That was shortly before we saw the smoke.

24 MR. FLAHERTY: Okay.

25 BY LT [REDACTED]

1 Q. How do you know that, did the captain tell you that?

2 A. That's not -- like because I can't remember specifically what
3 was said on the radio, I can't say for certain when that was or
4 what specifically he said.

5 Q. Well, you heard that from some other person?

6 A. Yes.

7 Q. Okay. The captain didn't tell you that and you heard that --

8 A. No.

9 Q. -- from some other person?

10 A. Yeah.

11 LT [REDACTED] Okay.

12 MR. KARR: When we ask you these questions, you know, we're
13 focused on what you heard, not --

14 MR. ELEY: Okay.

15 MR. KARR: -- what you may have heard --

16 MR. ELEY: Okay.

17 MR. KARR: -- in a conversation afterwards --

18 MR. ELEY: All right.

19 MR. KARR: -- because, you know, we're talking to everybody.

20 So the facts, you know --

21 MR. ELEY: Got you.

22 MR. KARR: The facts that we want from you are what you
23 actually saw, what you actually heard.

24 BY MR. FLAHERTY:

25 Q. So when you saw the smoke, you were with Jeremiah on the

1 third deck?

2 A. Yes.

3 Q. Okay. All right, then what happened next?

4 A. He told me to stay, he told me to keep an eye on the guests
5 on the third deck and he went forward to -- into the wheelhouse to
6 speak with the captain and I did not see him again until the --
7 like the evacuation process was going on.

8 Q. And then what were you told to do next, after that?

9 A. Well, I wasn't told to do anything, there was nobody else up
10 there as part of the marine staff, I was the only marine staff
11 member on the third deck. Other people may have come on, but I
12 don't remember that, if they did.

13 Q. And then how were you directed or did anyone direct you,
14 okay, start doing this?

15 A. I had been instructed previously that the third deck is the
16 evacuation point on the ship in case of an emergency. So as far
17 as I was concerned, that was the safest place for all the guests.
18 Some of the guests were confused and they wanted to go back
19 downstairs and I made sure that they stayed up on the third deck
20 as much as possible. Some people were already down lower on the
21 ship, but the majority of the guests on board were up on the top
22 with the kids.

23 Q. Okay.

24 A. I guess with their kids because they were parents. So the --
25 yeah, yeah, so --

1 Q. Okay. And then how did -- so how did you get involved? What
2 was your position during the evacuation?

3 A. My position, I was primarily doing just crowd control and
4 speaking with the guests during the majority of the operation.
5 The actual, like as far as getting lifejackets or anything like
6 that, that was other people. I remained with the guests on the
7 third deck the entire time --

8 Q. Okay.

9 A. -- pretty much until we were -- we got everybody off the
10 third deck.

11 Q. Okay. And at what point did you put on a lifejacket?

12 A. I put on a lifejacket as we were -- as the guests were in the
13 process of being transferred over with their lifejackets onto the
14 *Freedom Elite*, I went down and somebody handed me a lifejacket and
15 I put one of the uncomfortable ones on.

16 Q. Yeah. And then at what point did you leave the vessel?

17 A. I left the vessel, I was -- other -- let's see. I was one of
18 the last people to leave the vessel. The marine crew were the
19 last ones on the ship. The kitchen staff and the restaurant, the
20 restaurant staff were all on the *Freedom Elite*.

21 Q. Um-hum.

22 A. When it was time for us to get off, I got off. Like
23 originally, we were planning on just staying on the ship to
24 possibly help the captain with anything or just, we were -- we
25 were wanting to stay on the ship and the -- but the captain

1 ordered everybody off the ship.

2 Q. Okay.

3 A. And that's when we left and I was -- I think it was like
4 Glory and Jeremiah and it was me and Bob and Bob was the last, was
5 the last one off, because he had gone up to talk to the captain
6 about something and he was the last one, other than, of course,
7 the captain and C.J. were the last ones on the boat.

8 Q. Okay. And then when you were on the *Rover* and it pulled
9 away, what did you see? Did you look at the vessel?

10 A. Yeah. I mean, it was just smoke billowing out of the intake,
11 you could see the --

12 Q. On which side?

13 A. It was the portside --

14 Q. Okay.

15 A. -- engine intake vent or engine room vent. It was just smoke
16 billowing out, you could see flames coming out of it and lots of
17 smoke, but that was the only location where there was flames that
18 I saw. The first deck had smoke on it, but because that's the --
19 like that's where the stairwell is to go down to the galley, which
20 has the engine room door in it, I wasn't overly concerned because
21 the second deck had nothing and you couldn't even smell smoke on
22 the second deck, it was as if there wasn't even a fire on there.
23 And when the smoke got really bad up on the third deck, we got
24 everybody down onto the second deck and by the time that process
25 was finishing up, the *Rover* had already pulled up and we were

1 getting people ready or I guess they were getting people ready to
2 transfer over onto the other boat.

3 MR. FLAHERTY: Okay. All right.

4 BY MR. KARR:

5 Q. So when you were up on the third deck, just give me two
6 examples of interaction you had with passengers.

7 A. Well, I was mainly concerned about the kids because I didn't
8 know if any of them were asthmatic or anything. A lot of fifth
9 graders were totally fine, they were -- I mean, they had their
10 cell phones, so they were like going to TikTok and all of that
11 other stuff, so -- but some people were scared, some people were
12 fine, everybody was a bit nervous.

13 Q. Did anyone talk to you or ask you questions?

14 A. Yeah. Well, I went around talking to as many of the people
15 as I could.

16 Q. Just give me two examples of what you said.

17 A. Well, going like how are you feeling, are you all right, you
18 okay, you coughing at all or things like that, and I got a lot of
19 questions asked of me, I mean, I was the only marine staff on the
20 deck. So people wanted to know what it was, was it an engine
21 fire, I said it appears to be, but you know, everybody's trained
22 for this sort of thing, the people down there know what they're
23 doing and we'll make sure everybody's as safe as they can be and
24 stuff like that.

25 Q. Thanks. And another member of the crew told us that, you

1 know, when they went to the *Rover*, everybody was lined up in the
2 stairwell. So my question to you is do you recall how the
3 passengers learned that they should line up in the stairwell, were
4 they given instructions?

5 A. I don't know. Like I said, I remained on third deck pretty
6 much the entire time and I was one of the last people off of the
7 deck.

8 Q. So when you were on the third deck, was everybody in a line
9 or were they all over the third deck?

10 A. Well, on the third deck, initially because of the way the
11 boat was rotating left, slowly, and so the direction of the smoke
12 was changing.

13 Q. Okay.

14 A. So initially I was trying to get people to move away from the
15 smoke on the deck, but eventually everybody ended up roughly
16 around the enclosed area where the pool table is and everybody was
17 kind of gathered there. And then when it came time to go down, I
18 saw the -- what was her name? It was the restaurant manager poked
19 her head out the door and gave the green light to go downstairs to
20 where the air was clearer and at that point we got everybody to
21 walk down and it was -- there was no -- there was no panic or
22 anything, everybody was very helping as they went down, everybody
23 was relatively calm. Some of the kids were crying or upset like,
24 you know, nobody was running and everybody went downstairs safely
25 and I was going down the stairs when I -- at some point going down

1 the stairs, following like the line of people slowly going down is
2 when I started to see lifejackets being put on.

3 Q. Right. So I just want to confirm one of the things I think I
4 heard you say. So you were directing people where to go on the
5 third deck --

6 A. Yes.

7 Q. -- to get away from the smoke. Okay. And a question for
8 you. When you were doing your engine room round at 11:30, you
9 talked about looking for a lot of things, you were looking for any
10 issues. In your own mind, were you putting together a work list
11 of things that might have to be done?

12 A. Could you elaborate what you mean, like you mean like in
13 terms of like how to repair a problem, if a problem happened?

14 Q. If you saw something. So you're a new employee, you're going
15 through the engine room, you're looking for things out of order,
16 you said you're looking for any issues, are there -- you know, in
17 your own mind are you saying oh, I'll make a note of this, this is
18 something that we might want to work on later?

19 A. Oh, you mean like did I notice anything that -- any like non-
20 critical issue that could be fixed at a later point, maybe?

21 Q. Yeah.

22 A. Okay. No, I didn't. And Jeremiah was down there with me and
23 if I -- had I seen something that I thought could be a problem, I
24 would've pointed it out to him and had him look at it.

25 Q. How about housekeeping-wise?

1 A. For the engine room?

2 Q. Correct.

3 A. Well, I didn't know what the drawers -- what was in the
4 drawers or where different items were, but there wasn't -- there
5 wasn't like tools lying around, there wasn't really anything loose
6 on the floor. When it came time to check the drive shafts or
7 steering or reduction gears or whatever the drive shaft goes into,
8 when you check that on the list you get the temperature gun, the
9 little laser thing, and you read that and look at the temperature.

10 The only thing during the entirety of the check that stood
11 out to me even the slightest was that the starboard drive shaft
12 thingy was five degrees warmer Fahrenheit than the portside one,
13 but that was the only thing that even stuck in my mind.
14 Everything else was totally normal, engines were like 90 percent
15 throttle or something like that, but then again, that was 30
16 minutes before the incident, so I don't know what they were set to
17 during the actual thing.

18 Q. All right. And then I'm capturing, my last question, I'm
19 capturing the details of how people actually got off the boat, so
20 can you describe how you literally went from the *Spirit of*
21 *Norfolk*, over the rail to the *Victory Rover*?

22 A. Well, the *Victory Rover* had been pulled in extremely tight
23 onto the ship, they were basically being like just sandwiched
24 together, there was no gap in between them. So it was like there
25 was no way you could get caught in between because there's

1 nothing, there was no gap, you couldn't get caught in there and I
2 think they could've been using like their bow thrusters or
3 something to hold them on the ship. And so there was the railings
4 and, you know, the kids, the kids were being lifted over the
5 railings and placed down and people would, you know, make sure
6 everybody's -- there was multiple people on either side. The
7 *Rover* crew were on their side helping people --

8 Q. And this is what you actually saw?

9 A. Yes.

10 Q. Okay.

11 A. Yes, this is when I got downstairs to first deck, everybody
12 was -- everybody was down there in their lifejackets and when I
13 put my lifejacket on, that's when I was in the stairwell area
14 watching people get offloaded onto the *Rover* and people were being
15 extra careful with loading the kids and things like that, but it
16 was a pretty high railing, too high for the little kindergarteners
17 to get over. So nobody was like -- nobody was getting from one
18 ship to the other without somebody there to help them, I guess.

19 Q. And how did you get over?

20 A. I went over the railing. I recall one of the --

21 LT [REDACTED] Put your stuff on mute.

22 MR. BURTS: Oh, yes, thanks.

23 MR. ELEY: One of the *Rover* crew's -- one of the *Rover* crew
24 people was there to like, I guess, you know, lend a hand as I
25 hopped over the railing, but it was not a -- it was not a sketchy

1 transition at all.

2 MR. KARR: All right.

3 MR. ELEY: It was like the two were like docked together.

4 BY LT [REDACTED]

5 Q. I have one clarification question and then no more questions,
6 that's all I have for you. Did you say that at some point the
7 passengers that were congregating on the third deck, following the
8 smoke being visible, moved to the second deck or --

9 A. Yes.

10 Q. Okay.

11 A. Because of how thick the smoke was and I wasn't -- like I
12 said, I don't remember any of the radio chatter.

13 Q. Um-hum.

14 A. But at some point people were kind of congregating, there was
15 a lot of concern about the smoke, that was the main thing I was
16 worried about, some people were coughing, so I was worried, you
17 know, I didn't want the kids to be constantly breathing in the
18 smoke and I didn't want -- well, I wanted to keep everybody on the
19 third deck because that's where the emergency point is on the
20 boat.

21 Q. Um-hum.

22 A. And I didn't know if the boat was taking on water or anything
23 or what the damage was. The smoke was getting -- was thick enough
24 to where I couldn't see the stern of the boat from standing by the
25 -- in the front section where the door is to go down the

1 stairwell. Then the restaurant manager poked her head out and
2 said the second deck is clean, there's no smoke in the second
3 deck, and that's when everybody started walking down the stairs to
4 the second deck.

5 Q. Okay, so everyone was congregating on the third deck, the
6 smoke comes, then you push everyone and everyone congregates on
7 the second deck and then they exit the vessel?

8 A. They don't exit the vessel while on the second deck, but I
9 think the two, the two -- the two operations of moving people down
10 to the second deck and moving people down to the first deck to get
11 lifejackets and get off the boat, they kind of blended together.
12 So while people were still going down the stairs towards the
13 second deck, people were also going to the first deck to get
14 lifejackets.

15 Q. Okay.

16 A. I mean, people were --

17 Q. Are any lifejackets located on the third deck?

18 A. Yeah. Well, all the decks have lifejackets.

19 Q. Okay. So did most passengers get their lifejacket from the
20 third deck?

21 A. No. Most passengers got their lifejackets on the -- on the
22 first deck and some of the crew were going to the second deck,
23 going up to the second deck, getting extra lifejackets there,
24 because some of the kids -- like we ran out of kids lifejackets or
25 something on the first deck, so we had to get additional kids

1 lifejackets from the second deck and -- because there were adults
2 and kids ones on all the different decks.

3 Q. All right. After the incident, I believe you all were taken
4 to Town Point Park on the *Victory Rover*.

5 A. Yes.

6 Q. Did you have to submit to any drug or alcohol testing?

7 A. Yes, but not at the park. That was done at the -- that was
8 done at the office, the company office. And then that was long
9 after everybody was off the boat and everything, like it was hours
10 after that because we had to wait for the drug people to get to
11 the office, so we were sitting around there for a little while.

12 BY MR. KARR:

13 Q. You said you're going to school? Are you going to school?

14 A. Yes. I'm hoping to go to ODU this fall.

15 Q. All right. So have you been enrolled in ODU before or --

16 A. No.

17 Q. Oh, what were you going to school for?

18 A. Well, I was going -- I was going to school at Tidewater --

19 Q. Okay.

20 A. -- Community College and it's long and weird, but the -- I
21 had -- I was getting my associate's degree at Thomas Nelson and
22 then going to ODU to get my bachelor's degree.

23 Q. All right. And have you chosen a major yet?

24 A. Yes, I'm getting my bachelor's in mechanical engineering
25 technology with a specialization in marine systems.

1 Q. All right, good luck. And then you also mentioned you have a
2 hundred-ton license.

3 A. Yes.

4 Q. How did you obtain that? I guess my choices are, you know,
5 did you go to a school?

6 A. Yes, I went to Mid-Atlantic Maritime down here.

7 Q. All right. And so how long did that course run? How does
8 that work?

9 A. I can't remember the exact length of the course. It was
10 probably a week or two weeks. I think it was like a week-long
11 course where, you know, you go in there for that session of the
12 course for the day and go home and rinse and repeat for maybe a
13 week and a half, two weeks, something like that.

14 Q. So when you graduate you get your hundred-ton license?

15 A. It depends on what you're there for. They have different
16 courses for different license ratings. So initially, what I had
17 gone there for, when I originally got my MMC and my license was I
18 was getting a 25-ton license because I didn't have the sea time
19 requirement for a hundred ton, so I got a 25 ton and after I got
20 that 25-ton license, which was in the 100/200 ton course, but
21 because it was a hundred-ton license with a 25-ton restriction on
22 it, so it was limited to a 25 ton because I didn't have the sea
23 time. And so after I got that license, that is when I was working
24 for the weather company doing that, because then I could legally
25 like carry paying passengers on the boat, once I had that license

1 and then afterwards is when I upgraded it to the hundred ton after
2 I had worked on the tug.

3 Q. So was it the weather company boat or was it the tug that got
4 you --

5 A. Oh, no, it was a personal family boat, it was this old
6 Aquasport center console boat and the weather company was -- I
7 don't remember how I got in contact with him, but I got in contact
8 with him somehow and then occasionally, when they needed to do
9 servicing in the -- on the weather stations they had in the area,
10 then they'd come over and we'd get on the boat early in the
11 morning and head out to the weather stations and buoys.

12 Q. So my question was about how you went -- how you took your
13 license from 25 tons to 100.

14 A. Basically --

15 Q. And from what you said, I'm assuming it was your sea time on
16 the G.M. McAllister that --

17 A. Yes.

18 Q. -- allowed you to do that.

19 A. Yes.

20 Q. So is that correct?

21 A. Yes.

22 Q. Okay, good.

23 A. And so the -- I didn't -- you didn't have to go do the course
24 again to get the upgrade because you're -- because my license was
25 a hundred-ton license, so all that was required was contacting the

1 Coast Guard and going through God knows how long of a -- like
2 waiting for them to hear back and things like that and then, like
3 you send them your information and your sea time letters and
4 things like that and eventually they send the new sticker thing
5 for your MMC.

6 MR. KARR: All right.

7 BY MR. DENLEY:

8 Q. So how long did it take from the time you submitted your sea
9 time to the Coast Guard national -- or to the Coast Guard to try
10 to get the restriction removed on your license, how long did it
11 take for you -- for the Coast Guard to get back in touch with you?

12 A. Well, it was at least a month. I don't recall the exact
13 amount of time, but it was a long time, it felt like a long time,
14 but I can't remember the exact amount of time. It was over a
15 month, I think, to actually get it.

16 Q. Thanks.

17 A. If I recall.

18 BY LT [REDACTED]

19 Q. To your knowledge, was the *Spirit of Norfolk* hiring you
20 because of your credential?

21 A. Yeah. I'm confident that that is one of the reasons I was
22 hired.

23 Q. Was that a part of the pre-employment requirements?

24 A. No, actually, not for mate, but for captain it is. And
25 because I had that license, I was -- license-wise, I was sort of

1 overqualified for the position of mate and so they were -- the
2 company was very interested in part-time captains and they saw --
3 I guess they saw me as an easy way to get somebody to a part-time
4 captain position relatively quickly because I had already had the
5 license, I was going for a mate position and from there, then you
6 can transition from mate to a part-time captain position.

7 LT [REDACTED] Anybody else? Greg, do you have anything, any
8 questions?

9 MR. BURTS: No, we're good to go on my end.

10 BY CWO [REDACTED]

11 Q. I have one, actually. I just got one simple one. What
12 channel radio -- what channel were you guys on?

13 A. We're on Channel 1.

14 Q. Is that whole crew's on Channel 1?

15 A. Yes. Not the whole crew, not the entire crew has radios,
16 only the marine crew and the captain as well as like the
17 restaurant manager has a radio, but I can't think of any
18 additional position. I'm pretty sure it was just the marine crew
19 and the restaurant manager had the radios so you could, you know,
20 coordinate and communicate with anyone on Channel 1.

21 CWO [REDACTED] That's it, thanks.

22 LT [REDACTED] Okay, if we're all good here, that concludes the
23 interview. Do you have any questions for us?

24 MR. ELEY: I don't think so.

25 LT [REDACTED] All right, we really thank you for your

1 cooperation. If you think of anything else that could help in the
2 investigation, please give me a call, and thanks again.

3 MR. ELEY: All right.

4 MR. KARR: All right, 11:45.

5 (Whereupon, at 11:45 a.m. Eastern, the interview concluded.)
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CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the attached proceeding before the

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD

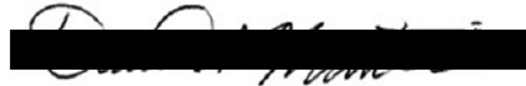
IN THE MATTER OF: FIRE ONBOARD *SPIRIT OF NORFOLK*
NEAR NORFOLK NAVAL STATION, VIRGINIA
ON JUNE 8, 2022
Interview of George Eley

ACCIDENT NO.: DCA22FM022

PLACE: Portsmouth, VA

DATE: June 9, 2022

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.



David A. Martini
Transcriber