

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 \*

\*

\* \* \* \* \*

Interview of: CHRISTOPHER JAMES BROWN, Vessel Operator/Captain  
*Spirit of Norfolk City Cruises*

United States Coast Guard  
Sector Virginia  
4000 Coast Guard Boulevard  
Portsmouth, VA 23703

Wednesday,  
June 8, 2022

APPEARANCES:

MICHAEL KARR, Investigator  
National Transportation Safety Board

DAVID FLAHERTY, Investigator  
National Transportation Safety Board

LT [REDACTED] [REDACTED]  
United States Coast Guard

CWO [REDACTED] [REDACTED]  
United States Coast Guard

ERIC DENLEY, Deputy General Counsel  
Hornblower Group

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Phelps Dunbar  
Attorney for Ryan Nadeau

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I N T E R V I E W

(2:50 p.m. Eastern)

1  
2  
3 LT [REDACTED] All right. Time is now 14:50 on June 8th. I'm  
4 Lieutenant [REDACTED] [REDACTED] and we're going to go around and do  
5 introductions. Let's start with yourself, sir.

6 MR. BROWN: Okay, Christopher James Brown.

7 LT [REDACTED] Okay. And just say briefly who you're with and --

8 MR. BROWN: Okay, new hire for the *Spirit of Norfolk*, new  
9 captain hire.

10 MR. KARR: And I'm Mike Karr with the National Transportation  
11 Safety Board.

12 MR. FLAHERTY: I'm David Flaherty with the National  
13 Transportation Safety Board.

14 CWO [REDACTED] I'm Chief Warrant Officer [REDACTED] with Coast  
15 Guard Sector Virginia

16 MR. DENLEY: I'm Eric Denley, Deputy General Counsel,  
17 Hornblower Group.

18 (Crosstalk)

19 MR. BURTS: I'm sorry, go ahead.

20 LT [REDACTED] Go ahead, again, please.

21 MR. BURTS: Okay, sorry. Gregory Burts standing in for  
22 Adam Davis for Captain Ryan.

23 LT [REDACTED] Okay, thank you. I think I forgot to mention that  
24 I'm with the Coast Guard, this is Lieutenant [REDACTED] [REDACTED] Do we  
25 have your permission, Mr. Brown, to record this interview?

1 MR. BROWN: Yes, yes.

2 LT [REDACTED] Okay. And --

3 MR. DENLEY: Yeah, just for the record, the owner/operator  
4 objects to the recording of the -- recording of the interview,  
5 again, based on the NTSB practice of publishing -- publishing the  
6 interview.

7 LT [REDACTED] All right, thank you. Before we get started, do  
8 you have any questions for us?

9 MR. BROWN: No, no.

10 LT [REDACTED] So the way it will work is I'll ask you a couple  
11 questions, recount your -- give your account of what happened that  
12 day, yesterday, of the incident and then we'll kind of go around  
13 the room, we'll ask questions and then we'll wrap up, okay?

14 INTERVIEW OF CHRISTOPHER JAMES BROWN

15 BY LT [REDACTED]

16 Q. All right. How long have you been -- well, you kind of just  
17 stated it, but how long have you been with the *Spirit of Norfolk*?

18 A. One day.

19 Q. One day, all right. Okay. And what was your background  
20 prior to that?

21 A. Thirty years Coast Guard, retired warrant, bosun.

22 Q. All right. Can I get your phone number?

23 A. Yeah, [REDACTED] [REDACTED] 1.

24 Q. And your address.

25 A. [REDACTED].

1 Q. All right. All right, sir, so beginning from the start of  
2 the day when you first arrived at the vessel, through the  
3 incident, and post-casualty.

4 A. Okay.

5 Q. Can you give your account of it?

6 A. Yeah. So yesterday was my first day with the company, came  
7 in at 10 o'clock to meet with Captain Ryan to have the initial  
8 conversation of expectations, scheduling, uniforms, it was kind of  
9 an in-dock day. Met with him on the pier, walked on board, went  
10 up to the bridge, had a short conversation with him about those  
11 topics, the scheduling and expectations and what he was looking  
12 for, and talked a little bit about each of the boats that they  
13 have there and then, as we got closer to him getting underway for  
14 his scheduled trip, he asked me if I wanted to go for the ride and  
15 I said absolutely, I'd love to go for a ride and see what it's  
16 about.

17 So I agreed to that, we left the bridge, I basically just  
18 followed him around, we went from the bridge down to the engine  
19 room, went back into the engine room, main -- or the generators  
20 were already running, so we went back and looked at the mains, he  
21 just pointed out the fill locations, coolant levels, how to start  
22 using the computer system to start the mains, started the Number  
23 1, waited for it to come up to speed, checked drippings at the  
24 shaft, just looked for any drippings around the engine, went over  
25 to the starboard side, same routine, looked around it real quick,

1 I just looked at the exhaust and how everything was running or how  
2 it was going to be running, started the boat, started everything  
3 up, got it running, walked around it, looked at it, went forward,  
4 looked at the piping for the fire main system, and looked at the  
5 air conditioning system on board, showing me where the different  
6 pumps were for lighting off the air conditioning for the boat.

7 And then we went forward, came out, and went back all the way  
8 up to the bridge. Prior to going up, we stopped at the main deck  
9 level, he went down to use the head real quick, I waited at the  
10 doorway, came up, went up to the bridge, and just talked a little  
11 bit more about the cruises and the captains and the schedules and  
12 while we were talking, he started preparing the ship to get under  
13 way.

14 I kind of just -- I just kept my mouth quiet and I was just  
15 kind of watching him get everything lit off and he was talking as  
16 he was doing it, you know, like come over here and light this off,  
17 that piece of equipment off. Then he checked, you know, made a  
18 couple calls to the team on the dock in preparation for getting  
19 under way, see how many more people we had to board, we were  
20 waiting for one person, one group to show up so we were a little  
21 bit delayed getting under way, but they showed up and once we did,  
22 lines were singled up and he asked me if I wanted to drive to get  
23 under way, I said absolutely, I'd love to do that. So went  
24 through the control systems again, I went through them so I  
25 understood transferring controls, how to operate everything, and

1 he had the radio and I basically had the conn. So once the people  
2 were on board, where I was dropped, we had already singled up and  
3 he said okay, we're ready to go, deck crew had been told that  
4 we're getting ready to get under way, so started backing up, took  
5 in the line, continued backing out, spun, headed outbound at about  
6 four and a half knots and *Victory Rover* overtook us by Lambert's  
7 Point, turned on the straight-of-way Elizabeth River, headed out,  
8 picked up speed a little bit to catch up on a little bit of time,  
9 and once we got off of the Navy piers, he had told me that we're  
10 getting to a spot, we can start slowing down and preparing to turn  
11 the boat around so we can start heading back in.

12 So we were outbounds with the river right off -- basically  
13 off Pier 4 and I noticed a power reduction, so I looked down and  
14 noticed -- Ryan came over, too, he noticed it, but Captain Ryan  
15 came over at the same time he noticed, I said hey, something's  
16 going on, he goes yeah, we lost port engine and I said yeah, I  
17 agree.

18 At the same time an alarm went off on the panel that he  
19 identified was a smoke alarm and at that time I started smelling  
20 the smoke. So we went over to the portside window, I went first,  
21 he followed right behind me, I looked out and I said yeah, we have  
22 smoke coming out the port stern and actually, there was flame  
23 coming out, as well. So he kind of pushed me to the side, looked  
24 over, saw it, and I said it's your ship at that -- well, I wanted  
25 him to have control back, that I'm --you know, he needs -- it's an



1 emergency situation, it's my first day, I don't have everything I  
2 need to know to take command of control, so I said it's your ship,  
3 I'm backing away, he said yeah, no problem. I said if you need  
4 anything, let me know and I just kind of stood back, he went to  
5 the starboard side, looked out to see if there's any smoke out  
6 there, went back over to the port side, looked to see if there was  
7 smoke there and went to the VHF FM radio on 16 and called for any  
8 tug in the area to assist and one came up right away, he was super  
9 close by, I don't remember the name of it.

10 But he ended up showing up on scene at the same time he  
11 called the -- right after that, he had called the Coast Guard, let  
12 them know that we had a situation and what our location was and  
13 then we realized that we had no power on the starboard engine, so  
14 we had no power at all; the bow thruster was still on, I did  
15 notice that, so he did try to push our bow over to try to get us  
16 into the wind.

17 By that time the tugs had already -- the tug had already come  
18 alongside port side and he already communicated with them as far  
19 as the tug was saying do you want us to come alongside and put a  
20 line on and he said yes, absolutely, so put a line on, started  
21 pulling us around and then Ryan gave me the -- gave me a radio, an  
22 internal radio, and said I'm going to go down below and check on  
23 progress. So I said okay and I stayed on the -- I said I'll take  
24 coms on the bridge, coms with the Coast Guard, coms with tugs in  
25 the local area and maintain kind of a bridge watch up here. So

1 that's what I did. He left, I don't know where he went, I don't  
2 know what -- oh, prior to him leaving the bridge, we did have one  
3 gentleman come up the starboard side, for the life of me, I cannot  
4 remember his name. He's been there for years, he's been there the  
5 longest out of anybody. He came up the starboard side, opened the  
6 door and said what's going on and I said I believe we have a fire  
7 in the engine room, we need somebody to get down below and check  
8 it out and see what we have, so he said okay, I'm on it and he  
9 left. I never heard back from him again.

10 So I'm not sure what the internal communications were other  
11 than I know Ryan, they all have these radios with little ear  
12 pieces and they're all -- I don't have all that stuff, so I don't  
13 know who's communicating to who. But he left and went away and  
14 then Ryan left and went down below.

15 I took over the bridge, I took the opportunity when we had a  
16 moment to call the Coast Guard again, just give them a quick  
17 update on where we are, what the current situation was, that we  
18 had -- you know, everything that we had going on and then -- and  
19 then we had -- so my sequence order, sequence of all the tugs and  
20 boats that were there, I don't honestly remember, there was a lot  
21 going on. But I know at one point I know *Victory Rover* got a hold  
22 of us, he was right there with us the whole time and he said he  
23 would be willing to come over and help us get passengers off  
24 whenever we were ready. So I know he held off just for a little  
25 bit while he made sure that the fire back there, flames were

1 coming out so we didn't want anybody coming alongside. A couple  
2 of other tugs were calling me and I just asked them to stand off  
3 because we already had a tug controlling us. And then Ryan came  
4 back up again and I briefed him on what we -- what I had had going  
5 on, that I already communicated to the Coast Guard, told them what  
6 we had going on, I told them the position of the tugs that we had  
7 because two more had come in on port and starboard side, while I  
8 was doing the stuff up here, they had just come in.

9       So I pointed to them and he went over and looked, looked on  
10 the port and starboard side and we cut a quick -- he -- we were  
11 talking about getting people off and I don't remember at what  
12 point they called in the boat, but he came out alongside and I  
13 guess he was communicating with the crew and started the  
14 disembarkation of people getting off. Now, I didn't see any of  
15 that, I was in the center of the bridge, Ryan was on the port  
16 bridge way, so I didn't see any of the people leaving or the boats  
17 alongside, per se, but I know it was happening.

18       And after everybody got on the boat, I did call the Coast  
19 Guard again, I think, twice, about every four minutes I called and  
20 just gave an update on where we were still, what actions were  
21 taken, who was around us and that crew was being disembarked, and  
22 I did call and let them know when everybody was off. Ryan had  
23 checked with one of the mates who was making sure everybody got  
24 off and I guess he had told him that everybody was off. I said is  
25 everybody off, do we have full accountability for everybody and he

1 said yes, everybody is off but you and I, and he said C.J., you  
2 can go and I said no, I'll stay here, we need to have a couple of  
3 people on here, so I'll stay here with you and he said okay. Sent  
4 the *Victory* away and we sat on there I don't even know how long,  
5 it wasn't very long, and Ryan looked at me and said we need to get  
6 off, there's nothing else we can do, systems are down, we have  
7 tugs controlling it so let's go ahead and get off of here and I  
8 said all right.

9 So we made our way down to the exit area on the port side,  
10 there was a small crew boat waiting, stepped over onto the crew  
11 boat, pushed away, I kept the radio, the VHF radio, I did call the  
12 Coast Guard. Once we pushed away I called again and let them know  
13 that the two personnel that remained on board are now off, we are  
14 off the boat on board whatever boat the name was, I forget now.

15 Told them we were off and at that point we just transferred  
16 from the crew boat to a towboat, I guess Ryan knew the gentleman  
17 who, I guess, was the captain on board, transferred over on to  
18 there and we sat there for a few minutes. Coast Guard called me  
19 and asked for our names, so I relayed our names and then  
20 Bart Gilbert (ph.) had asked us to come down, come over to the  
21 pier when we could so that he could get some information, Ryan  
22 could give some information about the boat itself with the efforts  
23 to put it out and take care of the matter. So we went over to the  
24 pier, at the end of the pier while they were still bringing it in,  
25 disembarked up onto the end of the pier, went down the pier, I

1 looked for Bill, ran into a couple of different people, ran into  
2 you, as well, there was a bunch of people, and completed a couple  
3 of interviews. And that's pretty much it. And I stayed there, I  
4 think, until a little after 4:00. I told Ryan if you need me,  
5 I'll stay, but if you're good, I'll go and he said no, you can go  
6 ahead and take off, so I went ahead and left. I went back home  
7 and then came back this morning and went down to the boat just to  
8 check it out, went back down to the pier just to kind of look  
9 around and see where we were at, talked to the sector commander  
10 and just caught up on some stuff and then came over here for the  
11 meeting.

12 Q. Can you elaborate a little bit, the captain said something  
13 about a smoke alarm?

14 A. Yeah. So when we noticed the engine was out, the thing --  
15 the thing I'm not -- all the alarm systems up there, it was my  
16 first day, so there was a lot of beeping and alarming going off on  
17 the bridge between -- I don't even know what all of them were but  
18 I'm sure it was a shutdown for the mains, maybe a fire alarm or a  
19 smoke alarm.

20 But he called on the radio, on the handheld radio down, I  
21 don't know who he called, I don't know who he was talking to, but  
22 -- but he had mentioned that I have a smoke alarm going off.  
23 That's the only piece I caught, listening to the radios and  
24 everything else, I imagine. I don't know what he was doing with  
25 it, but he was talking to somebody else on the other end that we

1 had a smoke alarm on the bridge.

2 Q. Did he mention any other types of alarms?

3 A. Not that I heard.

4 LT [REDACTED] Okay.

5 BY CWO [REDACTED]

6 Q. What engine did you say they lost?

7 A. Port. Port main.

8 Q. I thought you said it started earlier or something --

9 A. Oh, no, just during the initial walk-through, we went to the  
10 port engine first, did a walk-around, started it, went over to  
11 starboard engine, did a walk-around, showed me the starting  
12 procedures, started it and then we went forward, but it was port  
13 main.

14 Q. Got you. (Indiscernible).

15 A. The initial loss was port main.

16 CWO [REDACTED] Okay.

17 BY MR. KARR:

18 Q. Sir, you witnessed the start of the engines.

19 A. I did.

20 Q. Anything unusual?

21 A. Not to me. But I don't know what usual is for --

22 Q. Any leaks, noises?

23 A. No, saw -- no.

24 Q. Vibrations?

25 A. Saw nothing. Nothing that stood out to me, either. It was

1 loud in there and I didn't have my ear -- my protection on, but  
2 the start-up I've seen hundreds of times, saw -- and I did look in  
3 the bilges, I did look at the side of the engine, the block, I did  
4 look out back by the shafts because that's what I always do, the  
5 same, the same rounds on everything and I saw nothing.

6 Q. What kind of a start was it? Air, hydraulic, electrical?

7 A. I'm going to be honest with you, I do not know what kind of  
8 start system it was, but I know that just -- if you're facing  
9 forward in the engine -- well, yeah, if you're facing forward in  
10 the engine room, just to the left of the port engine there's a  
11 hole (ph.) there and the electronic pieces there and the key and  
12 all that's there.

13 Q. Okay.

14 A. And that's what I saw. I mean, like I said, it was a very --  
15 it was a quick, it was my first quick -- I was just shadowing him,  
16 but I did -- I mean, he went down and did a quick look-around --  
17 well, I won't say quick. He did a look-around, we walked over to  
18 the key, to the pad there and I just watched him pushed the pad so  
19 it would start up, turn the key to, I guess, accessory or partial  
20 start position. The screen came up, I don't even know what he  
21 tapped, to be honest with you, and then he turned the key and it  
22 started. And then we just waited a minute, came up to speed --  
23 well, came up to a speed, and just did a quick walk-around. He  
24 had his flashlight, I was kind of following, looking in there, I  
25 didn't bring a flashlight so I was following him and looking, but

1 didn't see anything on either engine that looked out of the normal  
2 at all. And I guess the generators were already running, we just  
3 kind of -- we walked by those, looked at the RPM gauges and he  
4 showed me the cooling tank levels so I'd be aware of that. Yeah.

5 Q. How did the bilges look?

6 A. I'm going to be -- I didn't really look, I didn't really -- I  
7 was more looking up at him and I'd never really been down there,  
8 so I was following him, looking at him, pacing him so I wasn't  
9 really looking down too much at the bilges, but I mean, they  
10 looked fine to me.

11 I mean, I didn't -- I couldn't see into the bilge, I mean,  
12 under the mains I could and there was nothing under the mains, the  
13 mains looked clean, but you can't see underneath the rest around  
14 the bilge itself, so I don't know what's underneath or behind  
15 those. But I do look at the bilges, I look at the collection  
16 plates under the engines to see if there's any drippings or  
17 anything, there was no rags, there was no drippings, there was  
18 nothing. Nothing at all.

19 BY CWO [REDACTED]

20 Q. So this is your first time on this boat?

21 A. It is.

22 Q. The general overall cleanliness, engine room presentation,  
23 like it didn't look run down, like the oil cap, it looked good/not  
24 good, in your opinion?

25 A. That's a tough one for me, I'm a pretty -- my levels are



1 really, really, really high, so you know, I mean, it didn't look  
2 dangerous, nothing stood out to me that this is a dangerous engine  
3 room, like we need to get it cleaned up before we go, there's oil  
4 everywhere. Could it have been cleaner? Yeah, maybe. I mean,  
5 that's my -- you know.

6 Q. Nothing, no oil like was just dripping all over it?

7 A. No.

8 Q. You got little spots (indiscernible)?

9 A. Absolutely not.

10 Q. Okay.

11 A. And no, I didn't see any rags, I saw no drippings on the  
12 engines, I saw no dirtiness on the engines. Actually, the engines  
13 looked really good, you know, but around the deck plates and stuff  
14 like that, could they have been cleaner? Maybe. But there was --  
15 in my opinion, there was no danger, there was nothing on the  
16 decks.

17 BY MR. FLAHERTY:

18 Q. So you were actually at the helm there for a bit.

19 A. I was.

20 Q. How did it handle, in your opinion?

21 A. Awesome. I was pretty excited. Yeah, no, it handled really  
22 well. Engine control was great, we got under way, you know,  
23 obviously -- we're getting under way, I had each throttle control  
24 individual so I could operate getting out and then once I started  
25 heading out, I synced it up so just more control, to control

1 both --

2 Q. Right.

3 A. -- control of the RPMs. Very responsive, spun really well,  
4 rudder worked really well.

5 Q. So no noticeable delays or --

6 A. I did not. In fact, I talked to Ryan about that at the  
7 beginning about delays, I said, you know, what kind of system do  
8 we have, is it cable, is it electrical, it's electrical. I said  
9 any delay at all on there, and he said no, he goes it's pretty  
10 quick. And I was on the *Spirit* three years ago when they had the  
11 older system on there because I was going to be on board and  
12 working, but after I retired, but life changed, I did something  
13 else.

14 Q. Right.

15 A. And there was a noticeable delay in the older system, so  
16 that's why I asked him, you know, what kind of delay you got, I  
17 mean, it's really unnoticeable. We went through the RPMs and  
18 control and how much responsive it is, so I noticed nothing and  
19 even when I got under way and tried it and it was like -- like a  
20 second delay, it was super quick. Forward, back.

21 Q. And then when the alarm started to go off and there was an  
22 indication that there was a problem, but just prior to that, any  
23 indication, again, noise, a sudden noise, a loud --

24 A. Absolutely nothing, absolutely nothing. And for me,  
25 honestly, the thing for me was how quickly this evolved, you know,

1 it went from we were cruising to, I requested -- yeah, I said what  
2 kind of speed do you want me to slow, he goes well, you know,  
3 three knots is a good speed to get down to before we start our  
4 twist on here, I said perfect, that sounds good, that seems like a  
5 reasonable speed. So I was slowing, slowing, slowing, took a  
6 little bit, never heard anything, nothing was wrong at all, and  
7 then I was just getting ready to actually split it and turn when  
8 that's when I noticed I don't have a port engine and I'm like we  
9 have no RPMs, and he's like -- and he pretty much stepped up at  
10 the same time and said yeah, we have no port main, and I said  
11 okay.

12 Q. Sure. So did the alarms grab your attention or there was a  
13 response?

14 A. There was -- no, the alarms. Everything happened like  
15 simultaneously, like really quick. I mean, you know, north coast,  
16 in the -- in my other experiences, we got plenty of alarm systems  
17 that hit first, you get a high jacket wire, lube oil, high temp,  
18 engine room high alarm, all these different things before you get  
19 a fire.

20 Q. Right.

21 A. And that did not happen, this was all -- I got no -- I didn't  
22 get any engine -- I did not recognize, let me say that, I did not  
23 recognize any alarm that would indicate an engine failure. I'm  
24 not saying it didn't, like I said, the nuances of the alarm  
25 systems on these things are new, I don't know what all of them

1 stand for, what they could be, so -- but I don't -- I didn't --  
2 there was no alarm that went off, everything was just fine. Until  
3 I looked down and noticed no RPMs and I'm like oh, we have no  
4 RPMs, he's like yeah, we lost our port and I'm like oh, okay, what  
5 are we going to do now? So I just thought it was a loss of main,  
6 you know, main.

7 Q. Right, right.

8 A. Not a big deal, it happens all the time, you know, something  
9 shut off, I don't know. And then that's when an alarm went off on  
10 the dash --

11 Q. Right.

12 A. -- an audible alarm. And probably a couple of them went off,  
13 I don't remember them all, but I know an alarm went off and that  
14 alerted me and at the same time I smell alpha (ph.) fire, you  
15 know, like a paper smell, which I was like okay and the first  
16 thing I said to him, do we have a trash fire back in the trash,  
17 because I don't know if they have a trash bin back there or  
18 something, I'm like it smells like an alpha fire, like is there --  
19 this is before I went and looked, I just said it smells like paper  
20 burning.

21 So that's when I went over and looked out and he followed me  
22 over and looked out and said no, we got -- we got a lot of -- a  
23 lot of smoke and flame coming out back there. And again, I'm not  
24 super familiar with the venting system and everything that goes  
25 on, so I didn't even know where it was, I still thought maybe it

1 was a trash -- something back there burning, I don't know. But he  
2 said no, that's coming out of the exhaust, so we have an engine  
3 room fire and I was like -- but that smell was, you know, the  
4 initial smell was a typical -- like it was the insulation on the  
5 bulkhead burning, you know, and then came like an electrical smell  
6 and then kind of a darker smoke smell and smell.

7 MR. FLAHERTY: Right.

8 BY LT [REDACTED]

9 Q. Could you hear the DJ music where you were at?

10 A. No, not at all. I heard nothing outside of that -- all that  
11 I heard was in the pilothouse, that was it. Nothing.

12 Q. Did you witness any of the firefighting activities that would  
13 lead up to the firefighting --

14 A. I did not. I did not. In fact, for me, I mean, I know they  
15 did their job, obviously, the crew did their job in the form that  
16 they should have, but the uncomfortable part for me is I have no  
17 communication, like I don't know what's going on, you know. I  
18 just know in -- looking afterwards and seeing what happened that  
19 actions were being taken, but I could not hear anybody  
20 communicating because Ryan was on a channel communicating  
21 differently, they use a different channel to communicate as a crew  
22 than the one he had to communicate with just me, I was on Channel  
23 1, just him and I, so I don't know what he was talking to  
24 everybody else about, although hearing other people talking, they  
25 were communicating on the other channel, you know. But what they

1 said, that would be speculation, but --

2 CWO [REDACTED] Do you know what channel they were on?

3 MR. BROWN: I don't.

4 CWO [REDACTED] I was just curious.

5 MR. BROWN: I really don't. He handed me one of the radios  
6 and turned it on to 1. He had two radios on him, I think, he had  
7 one on 1 and one on another one. Well, the one he's talking to  
8 the crew, I would imagine, but he grabbed one, handed it to me  
9 after we -- after I said hey, I got the radios, I got the bridge  
10 up here, I'll handle communications and stand by up here and  
11 that's when he handed me a radio and said okay, I'll be on 1. I  
12 said are you going to be on here with me or is it everybody, he  
13 goes no, this is you and me, just talk to me on here if you need  
14 me. So he left and then I don't know where he went when he left  
15 out of there, but --

16 BY LT [REDACTED]

17 Q. Did he ever return to the bridge after that?

18 A. He did, yeah. Oh, he returned multiple times. He was moving  
19 around, yeah. He would leave, come back up, check the bridge,  
20 look around, get on the radio, talk to the tug, check the right,  
21 check starboard, check port, and then he would leave again and  
22 then come back. At one point I'm like where are you going, just  
23 tell me where you're going so I know. He's like I'm going down  
24 below to check the egress route to see where everybody's going.

25 Q. Um-hum.

1 A. And then after everybody left, I said the same thing, he  
2 started leaving, I said where are you going, it's just you and I  
3 in here, you can't leave. He's like, I know.

4 BY MR. KARR:

5 Q. When you were doing the walk around the engine room before  
6 getting under way --

7 A. Yes.

8 Q. The port side of the main engine has come up in  
9 discussion.

10 A. Okay.

11 Q. How close did you get to the port side of, you know, the port  
12 engine port side, I imagine between the hull and the port side of  
13 the main --

14 A. Yeah, I was right next to it.

15 Q. So you and the captain would walk by that?

16 A. Yeah, absolutely. The port side of the port engine,  
17 absolutely. The starting button's on that side, so we did.

18 Q. Where's the starting -- the starting button in relationship  
19 to the engine?

20 A. Maybe three feet away and up on a post.

21 Q. Three feet.

22 A. You could touch the engine and do the start button at the  
23 same --

24 Q. And is that three feet from the aft portion of it?

25 A. Yes, it's aft, it's on the aft portion of the main.

1 Q. And can you remember, did you guys look at the engine and --

2 A. We did. We did look at the engines, just habit to do that,  
3 anyways. I don't know what he -- I don't honestly know what he  
4 was looking at when he was looking, but I know I just do a quick  
5 scan. He had start -- I watched him start it, we looked over at  
6 the engine, he had his flashlight, so when he was putting it down  
7 in there, I kind of oh, and he's got a flashlight and I could kind  
8 of see him scan.

9 And then we moved forward and did the same, looked at the  
10 inboard side of the main and then went around to the starboard,  
11 did the same thing, went up to the starboard, started it up, it's  
12 on the outboard side of the starboard, but in the same position,  
13 aft part of the engine, started it up, did the same thing. I  
14 didn't -- I didn't inspect it like super, super quick. I can tell  
15 you, nothing stood out to me. I mean, I looked at it, nothing  
16 stood out that you'd be like oh, you got drips here, you got stuff  
17 hanging down or there's paper in the bilge or a rag or something.

18 Q. Well, can you -- is there anything you -- you can remember  
19 from your scan, you know, you looked at any particular hoses and  
20 pipes going into the engine?

21 A. No.

22 Q. No.

23 A. Just did a general scan going aft as we moved, yeah.

24 BY LT [REDACTED]

25 Q. Did you notice anything stored in that general area, that you



1 mentioned an alpha fire, to your recollection is there anything of  
2 that nature that was --

3 A. No.

4 Q. -- in that area?

5 A. I didn't pick up on anything stored in that engine room other  
6 than tools on the back bulkhead and there's a shelving unit and  
7 there were some tools back there. Other than that, I don't -- I  
8 did not pay attention to anything else being stored around that  
9 area, uh-uh.

10 MR. KARR: Any missing exhaust lagging or exhaust insulation?

11 MR. BROWN: Not that stood out to me, no, not that stood out  
12 to me. Again, it was my first time on there so I wouldn't know  
13 what was missing, if it was, other than generally speaking,  
14 knowing about lagging being placed in certain areas, but I don't  
15 know. I can't recall that.

16 BY CWO [REDACTED]

17 Q. So when you guys went into the engine room, what kind of  
18 hatch is that to get into the engine room? Do you remember?

19 A. Yeah, it's quick acting.

20 Q. Quick act. When you opened it up, what can you see from like  
21 the door?

22 A. Yeah. When you open, when you crack it, you can see the  
23 generators, as you're going in, the portside generators are on  
24 your right, obviously I was on the other side, and then you go  
25 back after that and then the mains are outboard of that, it's

1 behind it but outboard, they're kind of offset a little bit.

2 Q. So can you just --

3 A. Yeah.

4 Q. The generators, can you not -- can you see the mains? Or do  
5 you have to go in behind the walls, so it's like generators --

6 A. You would -- you probably could if you looked, but if you're  
7 generally walking in, the generators are -- yeah -- if you're  
8 walking in, the generators are right there. Yeah, I don't -- you  
9 can probably see the edges of them as you're walking, but as you  
10 get closer, it starts opening up and you can see the mains.

11 Q. Okay.

12 A. But they do block a direct vision to the mains, those  
13 generators.

14 Q. Okay.

15 A. You can't get a good look if you're looking at that door  
16 until you start walking back and then they start coming into view.

17 Q. Okay.

18 A. Maybe not that far offset, I may be exaggerating a little  
19 bit, but they are not in line with the generators.

20 Q. Not like a straight generator to main --

21 A. No, generators and then mains.

22 Q. Got you.

23 A. Yeah.

24 CWO ██████ That's it for me.

25 MR. KARR: I have no more. Anything else we haven't asked

1 about that you'd like us to know about?

2 MR. BROWN: No, no.

3 MR. KARR: Just give me a second to think --

4 MR. BROWN: Yeah.

5 MR. KARR: -- if there's anything else I have.

6 (Pause.)

7 BY MR. KARR:

8 Q. You observed -- I'm looking for actual observation of what we  
9 saw.

10 A. Okay.

11 Q. So what were the fire -- what were the boats who were -- what  
12 were the boats using to apply the water and where were they  
13 putting it?

14 A. Okay, so we had one boat on port aft, a tugboat. There  
15 might've been more. I observed one pretty good sized tugboat,  
16 port side aft, using their fire monitor, spraying directly into  
17 the vent on the port side, port aft. Starboard side, there were  
18 two tugs back there, I do remember that, and they were spraying  
19 into the starboard vent.

20 Q. And when they were spraying into the starboard vent, did  
21 anything -- did you observe anything, or what did you observe?

22 A. Just them pumping the water into there and lots of smoke  
23 billowing out.

24 Q. Smoke billowing.

25 A. Yeah.

1 Q. No flames. Did flames ever come out?

2 A. Yeah. Oh, yeah.

3 Q. When the water was going in, did flames ever come out?

4 A. Okay, that I don't -- that, no, I do not know. I do not  
5 know. I know initially there was fire coming out of there, so  
6 yes, when they sprayed water initially in the port side, because I  
7 was looking out, yes, there were still flames, so it did come out  
8 a little bit.

9 But after that, I don't know when they actively involved  
10 after that if flame was coming out. I did look out each side  
11 every so often, but I only saw smoke billowing out, especially on  
12 the starboard side because we had the wind on the port, so --

13 Q. Yeah. What color smoke was it?

14 A. It started out white, whitish-gray, and then it turned into a  
15 darker dark gray, black smoke later on. But the initial out the  
16 back was a whitish smoke. It wasn't -- in my opinion, from  
17 seeing, it wasn't fuel, it was like an -- it was insulation or  
18 something burning, that's what it seemed like and it smelled like  
19 it, so I keep associating that to that, but -- but then as time  
20 went on, it turned darker and it was a gray billowing smoke coming  
21 out.

22 MR. KARR: I have no more questions.

23 LT [REDACTED] Okay, that concludes our interview, do you have  
24 any questions for us?

25 MR. BROWN: No.

1 LT [REDACTED] Greg, are you on the phone?

2 MR. BURTS: Yeah, I'm still here. (Indiscernible) just  
3 finish the interview, could you please repeat your name for me?

4 MR. BROWN: Yeah, it's Christopher Brown.

5 MR. BURTS: Christopher Brown.

6 MR. BROWN: Yeah.

7 MR. BURTS: Okay, thank you very much.

8 MR. BROWN: Yeah.

9 LT [REDACTED] Do you have any questions you'd like to ask?

10 MR. BURTS: I have no questions.

11 LT [REDACTED] Okay. All right, the time is 15:26 now and that  
12 concludes our interview. Thank you again for your cooperation.

13 MR. BROWN: Yeah.

14 LT [REDACTED] I really appreciate --

15 (Whereupon, at 3:26 p.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 Christopher James Brown

ACCIDENT NO.: DCA22FM022

PLACE: Portsmouth, VA

DATE: June 8, 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.

A thick black horizontal bar redacting the signature of Karen D. Martini.

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Karen D. Martini  
Transcriber