

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD

\* \* \* \* \*

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: JEREMIAH PERRY, Senior Deckhand  
*Spirit of Norfolk City Cruises*

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

Thursday,  
June 9, 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

GREGORY BURTS, Esq.  
Phelps Dunbar  
Attorney for Ryan Nadeau

I N D E X

<u>ITEM</u>	<u>PAGE</u>
Interview of Jeremiah Perry:	
By LT [REDACTED]	5
By Mr. Flaherty	12
By Mr. Karr	12
By LT [REDACTED]	13
By Mr. Flaherty	14
By LT [REDACTED]	16
By Mr. Karr	18
By Unidentified Speaker	18
By Mr. Karr	19

I N T E R V I E W

(12:29 p.m. Eastern)

1  
2  
3 LT [REDACTED] All right, great. I'm Lieutenant [REDACTED] [REDACTED] I'm  
4 a marine casualty investigator with the Coast Guard, I'm out of  
5 Sector Virginia right here in this building. Can you state your  
6 name, sir?

7 MR. PERRY: Yes, Jeremiah Perry.

8 LT [REDACTED] Okay. And do we have your permission to record  
9 this interview?

10 MR. PERRY: You do have my permission to record.

11 LT [REDACTED] Okay, thank you. And then we'll go around the  
12 room and give introductions.

13 MR. KARR: So I'm Mike Karr with the NTSB out of Washington  
14 D.C.

15 MR. FLAHERTY: I'm David Flaherty with the NTSB.

16 CWO [REDACTED] I'm Chief Warrant Officer [REDACTED] investigating  
17 officer, Sector Virginia.

18 MR. DENLEY: I'm Eric Denley; I'm in-house counsel with City  
19 Cruises.

20 LT [REDACTED] Greg, if you want to go ahead. You're probably on  
21 mute.

22 (No response.)

23 LT [REDACTED] Okay. Well, on the line is Greg -- Burts, is his  
24 last name? He's the counsel for --

25 MR. DENLEY: I don't know if he's on line or not.

1 MR. KARR: He's away from his phone.

2 LT [REDACTED] On line and away from his phone. I think we'll  
3 just go ahead and start. He is the attorney for Captain Ryan.

4 INTERVIEW OF JEREMIAH PERRY

5 BY LT [REDACTED]

6 Q. All right, so what we're going to ask, sir, is just to get  
7 your recollection of the accounts of the day, you know, we're  
8 going to ask you questions for that, so before we get started,  
9 I'll just ask you some basic questions. How long have you been  
10 with the *Spirit of Norfolk*?

11 A. A little over four years.

12 Q. Four years, okay. And do you hold a Coast Guard merchant  
13 mariner credential?

14 A. No, I do not.

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

16 A. Senior deckhand.

17 Q. And how long have you been senior deckhand for?

18 A. Approximately two and a half years.

19 Q. All right. Okay, if you could start from when you arrived at  
20 the vessel that morning and just kind of run us through everything  
21 you did that day.

22 A. Okay. Well, I go in there like I normally do, we go in, I  
23 had a cup of coffee and I was drinking my coffee and I clocked in.  
24 Went upstairs to the wheelhouse to get the information for the  
25 day, you know, what we -- you know, we always have a procedure and

1 process that we do every day, so you know, I wanted to --

2 Q. Can I stop you right there? I apologize. Before we start  
3 the interviews, I always like to mention what we're here for. So  
4 as marine casualty investigators, we try to determine what  
5 happened, that way we can implement recommendations for this thing  
6 not to happen again, but obviously the incident could've been much  
7 worse, you had a lot of passengers on board, so we all have an  
8 interest in making the maritime community safer and so we really  
9 appreciate your contribution to that by giving this interview. So  
10 anyway, sorry to interrupt you, please move forward.

11 A. Okay. Like I was saying, we go in and then we check in with  
12 the mate to see what is actually on tap for the day, you know, who  
13 we're -- you know, what groups we're having, how many people to  
14 expect, and we go then and begin to get our preparations done for  
15 that day. Can't exactly remember all the preparations, I'm trying  
16 to remember exactly what I was doing that day. I think I was  
17 working on getting the floors, you know, cleaned and all of that  
18 stuff.

19 Approximately 10:30, before 10:30, I'm trying to think  
20 exactly what time it was, it was approximately 9:30 or so, you  
21 know, we're done with our duties of getting the ship prepared and  
22 we're ready to open the main gangway to, you know, get ready to  
23 board our passengers. We don't normally board our passengers  
24 until the restaurant manager tells us it's okay to board, but we  
25 are out there on the gangway ready to go when they say it's really

1 time to board. Boarding was normal, no issues, per se, as far as,  
2 you know, getting people on the vessel. We did have to wait a  
3 little bit longer than expected departure because someone was  
4 coming from Newport News and they had to find someplace to park  
5 and they got caught in traffic coming from Interstate 64, so  
6 Captain Ryan waited for them to, you know, board the vessel, so I  
7 think we pulled out maybe about 10 minutes behind schedule.

8 Q. Were these guests or crew members that were late?

9 A. These were guests. These were guests of -- on the vessel.

10 Q. Got it.

11 A. Once we got under way, well, before we got under way,  
12 Captain Ryan mentioned that one of the -- the bow thruster high  
13 water log was going off up in the wheelhouse, so myself and  
14 George, who was a mate in training, he and I, after the boat got  
15 under way, we went to the bow thruster to check the water level in  
16 the bilge and it was fine, there was no high water in there  
17 whatsoever.

18 So then we come out of the -- come out of the bow thruster  
19 area and, you know, we're just doing our normal observations on  
20 the deck, on the first deck, students are out there having a good  
21 time on the dance floor, you know, the parents, chaperones, they  
22 were eating food. Approximately 11:35 or so, George and I go down  
23 to the engine room to do an engine check, we do engine checks on  
24 the vessel approximately every 30 minutes where we check various  
25 parameters of the engines and the generators that we currently

1 have running. We go down there and everything appears to be  
2 normal as far as, you know, nothing's off the charts that would  
3 say okay, okay, this number doesn't look right, you know, it could  
4 be an issue, nothing of that sort happened. And then after that,  
5 George and I, we go upstairs to the third deck and relieve the  
6 other deckhands that are up there so they could go down to the  
7 first deck because we rotate on a 30-minute basis on the vessel.

8       Approximately, I want to say maybe 11:00, you know, so George  
9 and I were on the deck and we were talking, you know, just small  
10 talk while everyone is on board the third deck and then I noticed,  
11 out of the corner of my eye, that there was white smoke coming  
12 from the starboard exhaust and as I see that, I turned my head and  
13 I see dark gray smoke coming out of the port engine exhaust.

14       So I immediately go to the wheelhouse and let Captain Ryan  
15 know, hey, Ryan, I see smoke coming out of both exhausts on the  
16 vessel and he said yes, I'm aware, I do have a smoke alarm going  
17 off in the engine room. He said that Bryan, one of our deckhands,  
18 was already down there with Glory, who is our other deckhand, they  
19 were down there investigating it.

20       So at that time, I proceeded to go back onto the main deck  
21 area on third deck where some of the parents were with their  
22 children, playing games. We have a giant Jenga tower, they were  
23 doing Jenga, we have foosball available as well as Connect Four,  
24 so -- and, you know, some parents were just sitting at the table,  
25 was talking to their children.



1           By that time, you know, we had radio communications ongoing  
2 between Captain Ryan and the rest of the crew and it was  
3 determined that we needed to get all of the passengers upstairs to  
4 the third deck. So I immediately then tell George, stay here to,  
5 you know, do crowd control and then I'm going to go downstairs to  
6 the first deck and start seeing what I can do to, you know, help  
7 mitigate the situation.

8           I go downstairs. As I'm making my way down the stair tower,  
9 the deckhands on the first deck are getting people to come  
10 upstairs to the third deck and I'm helping to guide them, I'm  
11 saying you have one more flight of stairs to go. Once everybody  
12 cleared the first deck as far as the passengers, then the wait  
13 staff and the galley staff, they started making their way  
14 upstairs, as well.

15           During that time I did ask Captain Ryan if he wanted me to go  
16 ahead and do the emergency fuel shutoff, which we have located  
17 inside the first deck dining area and for a moment, he said not  
18 yet because he wanted to -- you know, he didn't want to lose  
19 propulsion, you know, what the case may be, and I said okay, very  
20 well, we won't do that just yet but I did have the preparation,  
21 I'd opened the valve covers to do that and maybe, I'm not sure of  
22 the time, but maybe 15 to 20 seconds after he said that, the  
23 emergency lights go on and then that's when I figured okay, we  
24 just lost our generator. So I went and he said go ahead and cut  
25 the fuel off to the -- you know, everything downstairs in the

1 engine room, so I'm turning fuel off on both the port and  
2 starboard fuel lines. During that time, after that happens, we  
3 have the tugboats coming, you know, on either side of our vessel  
4 to, you know, assist any issue and I step out to the bow and see  
5 if there's anything I could assist Bryan with as far as getting  
6 the tug or the tugboat secured to the port side, portside bow and  
7 -- but there was nothing that we could do there because Bryan had  
8 handled it, so I went back inside and began giving life vests to  
9 some of the people who had started standing on the stairs.

10 But during the time that I was cutting fuel off, it was  
11 determined that the *Victory Rover* was going to come in and  
12 evacuate the passengers. So once that decision was made, I  
13 started helping give lifejackets to people who had congregated in  
14 the stair tower, we had the adult lifejackets as well as the child  
15 life vest and then once I made sure everybody had theirs on, then  
16 that's when we started to, you know, start moving people over.

17 I then go back upstairs to the second deck and I assist other  
18 passengers who had a little bit of difficulty getting their vest  
19 on, making sure their vests were tight and secure, also making  
20 sure that they, you know, were in a good state of mind because,  
21 you know, when we have children up there, some of them, you know,  
22 were not necessarily, you know, cool or calm and collected  
23 because, you know, it was a lot going on for them, so I did my  
24 best to also keep the children and the adults in a nice state of  
25 mind, to, you know, try to keep them calm as possible, also at the

1 same time while making sure that they -- everybody's life vest was  
2 secured. Once we did that, you know, we started -- and once all  
3 passengers eventually evacuated the vessel, the galley staff and  
4 the restaurant staff followed after that and then we did a final  
5 sweep of the vessel, in the restrooms and other places around to  
6 make sure that there was no other people on board, you know,  
7 whether you were a passenger or an employee.

8 After that was done, we radioed Captain Ryan to let him know  
9 that the entire boat was clear and I believe I was the last person  
10 to get off the boat and into the *Victory Rover*. Do you need  
11 anything else after that?

12 MR. KARR: Well, getting off the *Victory Rover*, can you tell  
13 us how you personally got off? I'm interested in how folks got --  
14 moved from the *Spirit of Norfolk* onto the *Victory Rover*.

15 MR. PERRY: Okay, well, we opened the mid-ship door and the  
16 *Victory Rover* pretty much kissed right up on the *Spirit's* rub  
17 rail, so there was literally no gap between the *Spirit* and the  
18 *Victory Rover*. However, people did have to either climb across or  
19 some of the younger children were picked up and brought across a  
20 guard rail which may have been maybe three, three feet, three and  
21 a half feet, perhaps.

22 BY LT [REDACTED]

23 Q. And just to be clear, the guard rail was from the *Victory*  
24 *Rover*?

25 A. Was on the *Victory Rover*, correct.

1 BY MR. FLAHERTY:

2 Q. So the generators went off first. How do you know that?

3 A. Because the emergency lights came on around the boat.

4 Q. Were the regular lights on at the time, as well?

5 A. The regular lights were on, but then I noticed they went off  
6 and seconds later the emergency lights kicked in, that's when I  
7 knew the generators were off completely.

8 Q. At the same time, I mean --

9 A. Well, generator, I'm sorry, we had one generator on, I'm  
10 sorry, one generator.

11 Q. After that happened, did the ship get really quiet or could  
12 you hear other engines running?

13 A. I didn't really pay attention to all that, probably because  
14 we had like so many tugboats around, I may not have really paid  
15 much attention to the actual noise around us.

16 Q. Okay. And any problems closing the valves?

17 A. No problems at all, no.

18 BY MR. KARR:

19 Q. And in relationship to when you closed the valves and the  
20 lights and the emergency lights came on, was it valves closed and  
21 then the emergency lights came on?

22 A. No. The emergency lights came on and then after that  
23 happened, then I closed the valves.

24 Q. And how soon -- you know, just -- like --

25 A. Yes. I actually had the T-bar in my hand and I was asking

1 Ryan, I was like, you know, do you want me to close the valves and  
2 he was like, no, not yet and I said okay. And then, like I said,  
3 once I noticed that the interior lights had gone out and the  
4 emergency lights came on, that's when it was time to go ahead and  
5 shut that fuel supply off.

6 MR. FLAHERTY: Which you did with the captain's permission,  
7 right?

8 MR. PERRY: Yes.

9 BY LT [REDACTED]

10 Q. I'm sorry, I think I missed it. What prompted you to grab a  
11 T-bar for the fuel shutoff?

12 A. Usually, we are trained that if, you know, if a fire or  
13 something happens in the engine room, one of the first things we  
14 do will be to -- you know, once the captain gives us the okay, to  
15 cut the emergency fuel off. So I went and grabbed the T-bar from  
16 our location where we have it stored at and I had it at the ready  
17 so whenever he did, if he did, and when he did say turn it off, we  
18 were there, we wouldn't have to scramble to go get it.

19 Q. Okay. And you grabbed that after the captain mentioned over  
20 the radio that he was getting alarms, is that right?

21 A. Yes. When I went back downstairs to the first deck.

22 Q. Got you.

23 A. I just grabbed it just in case and I said this -- you know,  
24 we may have to cut the fuel off, so that's -- I just grabbed it  
25 and kept it nearby the fuel shutoffs.

1 BY MR. FLAHERTY:

2 Q. So you had done the round at 11:30.

3 A. Yes.

4 Q. And that was the first round after you got under way.

5 A. Correct.

6 Q. Can you walk us through, you're just about to enter the hatch  
7 to do the round, kind of walk us through which way you went  
8 around, what you looked at and then coming out of the hatch?

9 A. You know, we go into the hatch, gather to the board because  
10 that's where we have -- we place our numbers at. We looked at the  
11 port generator, water temperature, fuel pressure, oil pressure,  
12 then we look at the generator board behind it, which has the hertz  
13 and the amps, the frequencies. Then we stepped over and we looked  
14 at the port main, the coolant level in the day tank -- I'm drawing  
15 a blank, just give me a moment. Throttle speed, RPMs, what else  
16 is up there? Water temperature, also oil pressure.

17 Q. Um-hum.

18 A. And then we walked over and we checked the starboard engine,  
19 as well, for those same parameters. We looked at the air  
20 compressor to see what pressure that was on and we also looked at  
21 our hydraulic levels, the hydraulic gauge, as well.

22 Q. What's the hydraulic gauge for?

23 A. The hydraulics for -- you know, usually when they do the  
24 rudders, you need to get -- so we do have hydraulic pressure to --  
25 you know, to -- you know, just to verify, as well.

1 Q. And where's the hydraulic pumps and stuff for the rudder?

2 A. When you step into the engine room, it would probably be --  
3 the port generator would probably be approximately five or six  
4 feet to your right and in a little alcove just before that, next  
5 to the fuel tank would be the hydraulic pressure gauge.

6 Q. And is the pressure gauge with the other hydraulic equipment?

7 A. Yes.

8 Q. Okay. And outside of the hydraulic gauge is there anything  
9 else you checked for -- when you're doing the round is there  
10 anything else you look at on the *Spirit*?

11 A. Oh, yes. We also look at -- we just check the sea chest to  
12 make sure there are no leaks, you know, in the R-pipes (ph.)  
13 coming around the sea chest. Also, we also check the AC pumps, as  
14 well.

15 Q. Okay. And when you were between the port engine, because you  
16 went around the port engine between the port engine and the hull,  
17 right, as you're proceeding around that area, did you notice  
18 anything that was, you know, that now would be like oh, that was  
19 kind of unusual but I didn't think about it then?

20 A. No. I did know, because we had prior issues with that  
21 particular engine, I just know, when I went down there, just to  
22 look a little more scrutinizing just in case there was anything  
23 like leaking such as oil or antifreeze, you know, that's just  
24 something that I started looking at myself, just -- just because,  
25 and I did not notice anything else out of the ordinary that would,

1 you know, say oh, something is not right, that would raise a red  
2 flag. Nothing, like I said, everything down there appeared to  
3 come across as running within normal parameters.

4 Q. No unusual sounds?

5 A. No. It's really hard to hear down there, as well, because  
6 you got the engines running and we also have ear protection to put  
7 on, as well, so it was, you know, kind of difficult to hear  
8 anything out of the ordinary over the run of the generators and  
9 the engines.

10 Q. Any unusual vibrations, like when you're walking on the deck  
11 or anything, you just -- just a feeling in the engine room?

12 A. Nothing that I would like, you know, say hey, you know,  
13 somebody take a look at this or somebody check this out, nothing  
14 out of the ordinary that I picked up on.

15 Q. How about unusual smells? Or smells not previously  
16 encountered.

17 A. No, there was a slight antifreeze smell, a coolant smell, but  
18 that had been there since they had replaced the components on the  
19 engine prior. There was a slight coolant smell.

20 MR. FLAHERTY: Okay, thank you.

21 BY LT [REDACTED]

22 Q. One of the things I like to do is just make sure I have  
23 everyone's movements on the vessel.

24 A. Correct.

25 Q. After you were on the third deck with George and you left the



1 third deck following notification from the captain on the radio --

2 A. Yes.

3 Q. -- can you just real quick walk me from here, then here, then  
4 here?

5 A. Okay. I went down to the second deck using the main  
6 stairwell and I stopped to direct, continue to direct people up  
7 the stairs because at the time, everybody was coming up the stairs  
8 and I didn't want to be, you know, parting the Red Sea, so to  
9 speak, going down the stairs at the same time.

10 Q. Yeah.

11 A. So I waited until everybody came up and then I went down the  
12 stairs, I went into our man overboard room to grab the T-bar just  
13 in case we needed it for the fuel shutoff. And that's when I went  
14 back to the fuel shutoff area to wait for Ryan's instructions as  
15 far as whether or not to cut the fuel off.

16 Once we did, you know, once I did end up doing that, I went  
17 to the forward part of the boat where Bryan was to check on him  
18 and make sure he was okay out there with what he was doing with  
19 the tugboat, and then I stepped back inside and started grabbing  
20 life vests from the first deck cabinets that were just beyond the  
21 bow, just by the bow door. After that, I went to the mid-ship  
22 area to help give out life vests and I think I made maybe three  
23 trips to get like child life vests, as well, between the mid-ship  
24 and the cabinet area.

25 Q. Okay.

1 A. After that, because everyone was still standing in the main  
2 stairwell, I went out the stern door and went up the stern stairs  
3 and back onto the second deck from the back door to make sure that  
4 the passengers up there were getting themselves together properly,  
5 as well. And then once we got everybody off the -- you know,  
6 downstairs and into the *Victory Rover*, I did a sweep of the second  
7 deck heads to make sure no one else was in there and then after  
8 that, I went back downstairs to mid-ship and waited for the rest  
9 of my crew mates to make their way to mid-ship, as well.

10 Q. And at that point, you departed the vessel?

11 A. Yes, then we departed the vessel.

12 LT [REDACTED] Perfect, thank you.

13 BY MR. KARR:

14 Q. Have you ever been assigned any tasks or worked in the engine  
15 room? Other than doing your rounds.

16 A. Yeah. Yeah, we've done oil changes on the generators before,  
17 done sewage, switching over from shore power to generator power.  
18 Yeah, that's pretty much the gist of it, yes.

19 MR. KARR: Okay, thanks. I have no more questions.

20 MR. FLAHERTY: No, nothing further.

21 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: I do.

22 MR. PERRY: Okay.

23 BY UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER:

24 Q. So you mentioned that you were spending quite a bit of time  
25 attending to the guests, making sure that they had their

1 lifejackets on. Are you aware of or did you see anybody that was  
2 injured at all during this?

3 A. I did not notice anybody injured or anything like that. I  
4 did hear a few people were, you know, a little caught up by the  
5 smoke or whatnot, but that was all that I heard as far as  
6 passengers. And also our staff, as well.

7 Q. Okay.

8 A. You know, there was some coughing, a little bit of coughing  
9 because of some smoke, but nothing other than that. From my  
10 understanding.

11 Q. Yeah. Were you hurt at all?

12 A. I was not, no.

13 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: Okay, thank you.

14 MR. PERRY: You're welcome.

15 BY MR. KARR:

16 Q. Were you ever affected by the smoke where you started to  
17 cough?

18 A. No, I was not affected.

19 LT [REDACTED] Greg, if you're still on line, do you have any  
20 questions?

21 MR. BURTS: Thanks, no questions.

22 LT [REDACTED] All right. All right, sir, that concludes our  
23 interview. Do you have any questions for us or anything to  
24 provide us that may -- that we didn't ask that may be important?

25 MR. PERRY: I've pretty much given you everything I can give

1 you as far as, you know, a rundown from my perspective --

2 LT [REDACTED] Okay. All right.

3 MR. PERRY: -- that I can really think of.

4 LT [REDACTED] All right. Well, we thank you for your  
5 cooperation. Here's my card.

6 MR. PERRY: Okay.

7 LT [REDACTED] Should you think of anything, please give me a  
8 call --

9 MR. PERRY: Okay.

10 LT [REDACTED] -- and (indiscernible), okay?

11 MR. PERRY: Sounds good.

12 MR. KARR: All right, it's 12:54.

13 (Whereupon, at 12:54 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 Jeremiah Perry

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.



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Karen D. Martini  
Transcriber